

## He painted Haystack Rock every day in 2002

•Challenged with a goal, nothing kept Richard Gorsuch from the rock

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One day at a time.

Many philosophies are based on the belief that anything — taken one day at a time — can be accomplished.

For Richard Gorsuch, not only was his self-imposed challenge accomplished one day at a time, it was done some 60 square inches at a time — over the course of a full year.

Richard, a Cannon Beach artist, set out Jan. 1, 2002 with the goal of painting Haystack Rock every day for a full year. When the sun set on the year 2002, Richard had achieved his goal. Through every kind of weather, good and bad health, degrees of darkness and light, he set up shop at the end of West Jackson Street and painted Haystack Rock.

Every day, all 365 days of the year 2002.

He had no “lofty life-changing purpose” as to why he would tackle the project, which came about as the result of a church-wide challenge by Pastor David Robinson to set goals for 2002.

“Other than seeing if I could actually dare to at least try to maintain the daily discipline of starting and completing one original plein air painting from direct observation from the same exact site each day,” said Richard, 69.

He painted with oil, on untempered Masonite artboards that were 9 inches wide, 6.75 inches high. Over the course of the year, that added up to 23,000 square inches.

“But I painted one inch at a time,” said Richard. “I could be faithful to a six by nine, and still be thorough and not overwhelmed by a larger canvas. Painting one inch at a time, I always knew pretty soon I’d be done.”

Getting out there wasn’t always easy. Richard is an early riser — he’s up every day at 4 a.m. — but there were days when heading out to the beach wasn’t a thought to be relished.

“At times, poor health such as the flu and fever, bronchitis and accompanying hacking cough, painful problems in one leg plus nerve pains in my left hip made the brief journey to the beach a case of pure endurance,” said Richard. “Some days it was just dismal, cold and disinteresting.



Richard Gorsuch with some of his 365 paintings.

But life is like that. It's not all bells and whistles."

As bad as it was those days to go to the beach, Richard said he would have felt worse to stay home.

"I wouldn't let myself be derailed," he explained. "And once down the street, life was full of happy prospects. Never once, when I got to the beach, did I feel like I didn't want to be out there."

Scheduling was the key, said Richard. He would block out a two-hour time frame for going to the rock. Painting was a priority, but didn't dictate his life for the year.

"If I did my scheduling carefully — how will I live my life today — I could get a lot in," said Richard. "And I did."

Blocking out was equally as important as blocking time in. There were many times when Richard had to block out things, good things — and people — that could serve as distractions. He said he may have inadvertently offended people wanting to talk while he painted, but that wasn't always possible.

"You can't lose your focus," said Richard. "You have to focus on your day, focus on your plan, and push the rest aside."

That meant not attending his 50th high school reunion, and not taking other family and business trips over the course of the year.

"Being single minded and adamant about avoiding and overcoming any and all forms of distractions were a key decision to enable me to discover how to stay on course," said Richard. "In doing this, I was aware of the peace of God, that passes all understanding, surround me and help me know the invigoration of his grace. I see now just how important this life-application principle can be."

His artistic goal was to make a representation of what he saw each day, then to chronicle that through the paintings and journal entries. And while the subject and primary angle remained essentially the same, it never was. Nor was the challenge of capturing what he saw each day.

"When you look at it, it's like a box of Sees Candies," said Richard. "It's still the same rock, beach, ocean and sky. But the light, and cloud formations ... it's like when light comes through a prism in the kitchen window and you get a rainbow. It's the handiwork of God creating. And it was different each and every day."

Over the course of the year, Richard painted the rock at every 15-minute interval of a 24-hour day. He painted three full-moon cycles during the summer and fall, which offered its own challenges.

"It's difficult to paint by flashlight," noted Richard, who did some "fixing" of those particular paintings back in the studio.

During the summer, he painted two full months at dawn, when the raw light of morning offered a more potent and rich view.

Richard came to develop a relationship with the rock and the beach.

"By osmosis, by being there, looking at it, feeling it, being immersed in the atmosphere, you vicariously have a relationship with your subject matter," said Richard. "When you're painting, you're really asking 'what's going on down here? How can I capture the spirit of how this is

looking?”

It was that ability to “capture the spirit” of what he sees that years ago enabled him to sketch a photo of a bank robber, whom Richard shared eye contact with moments before the man robbed the bank. When asked by the FBI if Richard could describe the man, he answered, “better yet, I can sketch him for you.”

The man was apprehended by the end of the day.

“You fix on the most dominant feature, and work from there,” Richard explained, making it sound easy.

Painting the rock — every day for a year — wasn’t much different.

“What you look for are spots of color in the practical sense, then how quickly can I reproduce them and get them on canvas,” said Richard, “then manipulate and blend them to come into values, shapes and hues.”

The final day of 2002, and Richard’s year in the dunes, brought 10-foot tides and a beach that “was like Burma Shave out there ... all suds.” Richard described it as a nice climax to the project. A neighbor described it “as a standing ovation from the surf.”

“Now there’s a relationship!,” he quipped.

Richard figures he spent about \$5,000 over the course of the year, and an average of 90 minutes per painting. Prep time and clean-up was additional, making the total time commitment upwards of 1,150 hours. Would he do it again? An enthusiastic yes.

“It was definitely one of the highlights of my life,” he said.

Richard intentionally didn’t go to the beach on Jan. 1, 2003, the first day he wasn’t “required” to go.

“It was a relief not to have it on my agenda,” said Richard. “At the same time, I had a restlessness that I was being unfaithful to myself.”

Richard will continue to paint the rock, and an upcoming project will focus on the rock as protection — for marine and bird life — and protection of the rock. He’s not sure how, when or if the 2002 paintings will ever be displayed. But that wasn’t the point of the project. Richard has been nominated for the Guinness Book of World Record, and been interviewed by a Eugene television station because of the project. But being an artist looking for free press isn’t why he undertook the project in the first place.

“Mother Teresa described herself as a little pencil in the hand of God,” Richard explained. “I can resonate with her thinking when I have a tiny brush in my hand. How gorgeous the world is and how small we are, yet privileged to be there, paying homage to it.”

He likened his personal journey of the last year to a phrase he learned in high school Latin class: Veni. Vidi. Vici. “I came. I saw. I conquered.”

“I’m just one guy on the planet on my journey,” said Richard. “And I keep moving.”