



## **Andover painter places fourth in Christian art competition**

by Elyse Kaner

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ANDOVER — Portrait artist Brandon Kidder has found his niche: Religious art.

The 26-year-old entrepreneur, who opened a business—In His Name Design—out of his family’s home less than two years ago, already has his works for sale in 22 Christian retail stores throughout Minnesota, including Northwestern Book Stores.

Last month, Brandon Kidder celebrated two milestones when he learned he had finished fourth in the 2007 National Christian Art Competition (this year entrants were international) for his pastel portrait of Jesus, titled “Persistent Prayer.”

“I always wanted to be an artist,” he said. “I’ve always had a passion for art and for creating.”

His other accomplishment is the release of a book he illustrated, “Come Unto Me,” a devotional by Tania Frankie of Minneapolis. This is his first time illustrating.

But Brandon Kidder sketches more than religious figures. He also draws animals, and anniversary and memorial portraits, to name a few. Last year he was commissioned to sketch his former church, Redeemer Lutheran, in Fridley for its 90th anniversary.

At the same time, writer Tania Frankie had been praying to find a religious artist to illustrate her book. She came across Brandon’s name at church.

They partnered and nine months later, the book, “Come Unto Me: Resting in the Favor of the Lord” was published.

“I believe that when you look at his art, you can tell it’s from the Lord,” Frankie said. “It’s not just another picture that someone has created.”

The book’s front cover was a vision of Frankie’s. While praying for an idea, she pictured a lamb wearing a crown and resting on a throne, with a stream of water below. The vision came to her repeatedly.

But she couldn’t figure out what it meant. Meanwhile, Brandon Kidder was having problems connecting to her idea. So he turned to the Bible for answers. Serendipitously, it randomly fell open to Revelations 22:1, a verse referring to a lamb wearing a crown and sitting on a throne. The verse brought him clarity for his illustration.

### **More artwork**

Recently, Brandon Kidder has added religious magnets and prints to his artistic line. Next year, he plans to release a calendar.

With religion close to his heart, Brandon Kidder turned his work from secular to, now, mostly sacred. In researching, he found few contemporary Christian artists in his line of work.

“It’s almost like a lost art form,” he said.

His favorite part of the profession is capturing the essence of people in portraits. The finished piece gives him a sense of accomplishment, a feeling of connecting with people.

But, the life of a portrait artist is not easy. Before starting a sketch, he meets with the subject to read his/her personality. Then he tries to capture their essence in his sketches.

“It’s very challenging,” he said.

Brandon first studies a photo of his subject. He starts by sketching basic shapes, which evolve into realistic shapes. He uses a layering process of pastels, giving his portraits a 3-D effect. A small portrait can take three to four days to create.

"Art is revealing of the soul," Brandon Kidder said. "It can open so many doors of communication. It's a vehicle to express your thoughts, your feelings in a non-threatening way."

His days are never alike. One day he was displaying at an area bookstore and television talk-show host Dr. Phil McGraw walked in. He was there to visit his wife Robin, who was holding a book signing.

Within a few hours, Brandon had sketched a picture of the famous and appreciative pair. He gave it to them for a gift.

But this rising star did not make his creative journey alone. He was aided by his parents. His mother, Judy Kidder, reading teacher at Sandburg Middle School in Anoka, is his manager.

She recalls when Brandon was small. She noticed a good sense of color and keen observation skills by the time he was seven.

"He was always creating and drawing and sketching," Judy Kidder said. "He didn't just play with toys. He'd take them apart and re-do them."

And his father, Bill Kidder, director of purchasing at Bethel University, is a stalwart of support.

"They're amazing," Bill Kidder said about his son's artwork. "God has given him talent and he is using it for the kingdom."

### **His beginnings**

Years ago, Judy Kidder had hung a poster of cartoon characters in their home that Brandon had sketched as a sixth-grader. Neighbor Connie Cruse, a professional artist, had stopped by and noticed it.

"He's amazing," Judy Kidder tells the story. "Can he work with me?"

Brandon studied under Cruse for about a year. He went on to study with another local professional artist LeAnne Petersen while he was in seventh and eighth grade.

"I did sketches for hours when I was younger," Brandon Kidder, who estimates he has sketched well over 1,000 drawings by now, said.

He then studied art at Anoka High School where he won The Scholastic Gold Key Art Award from Minneapolis College of Art and Design for a self-portrait he sketched. He graduated from Bethel University in St. Paul with a bachelor's of fine arts degree.

Brandon Kidder admires the works of Picasso and portrait artists Stephen Sawyer, Myron Solberg and local artist Kim Norlien.

He senses a new demand for Christian art work. But his work, he says, is not in the traditional 1950s style. Rather, he strives for a more vibrant, modern feel to his subjects.

When not sketching, Brandon likes to read, devotionals in particular, and he likes to write.

He volunteers at Feed My Starving Children in Brooklyn Park, an international organization with a vision to reduce hunger throughout the world. He donates a portion of his art sales to the organization. He also helps teens at his church, Cross of Hope in Ramsey.

Lately, his days are filled with appearances at art stores and sketching in his home studio.

Brandon Kidder's artwork ranges from \$5 for a magnet to \$50 for an 11-by-14 inch print and on up for other pieces. He hopes to take his business worldwide, to share the love of God through his artwork, he says.

"It's a never-ending process," Brandon said. "I'm always thinking about new ideas and how to come up with new pieces that touch people's hearts."

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