

# from her doorstep

A Quidi Vidi artist allows us to  
"time travel" to her childhood village

*Story and photos by Kim Ploughman*

*Not many* can lay claim to having been born and raised in one of the most famous and quaint villages in Newfoundland – Quidi Vidi, located in the heart of historic St. John's. Kathleen Bragg Murphy, a visual artist of over 20 years, is one of the few with such bragging rights.





Kathleen and some of her gallery selections at the Quidi Vidi Plantation in St. John's

From her doorstep inside "The Gut" (as the inlet is often called), young Kathleen had glimpses into a world that was rather unique: a fishing village in the middle of the capital city. Here, she keenly observed her surroundings; and down the road of time, it would spark a creative surge – like the tempestuous Atlantic Ocean that lay outside this secluded cove – leading to a public art showing appropriately titled "From My Doorstep."

The fall 2020 exhibit captured a comparative series of both coloured and black-and-white acrylic images of Quidi Vidi – what it looked like over a century ago and present day. This artist not only time travelled to the past during this creative process, but also uncovered, to her delight, a family treasure with a connection to a famous Canadian painter.

### Discovering "Home"

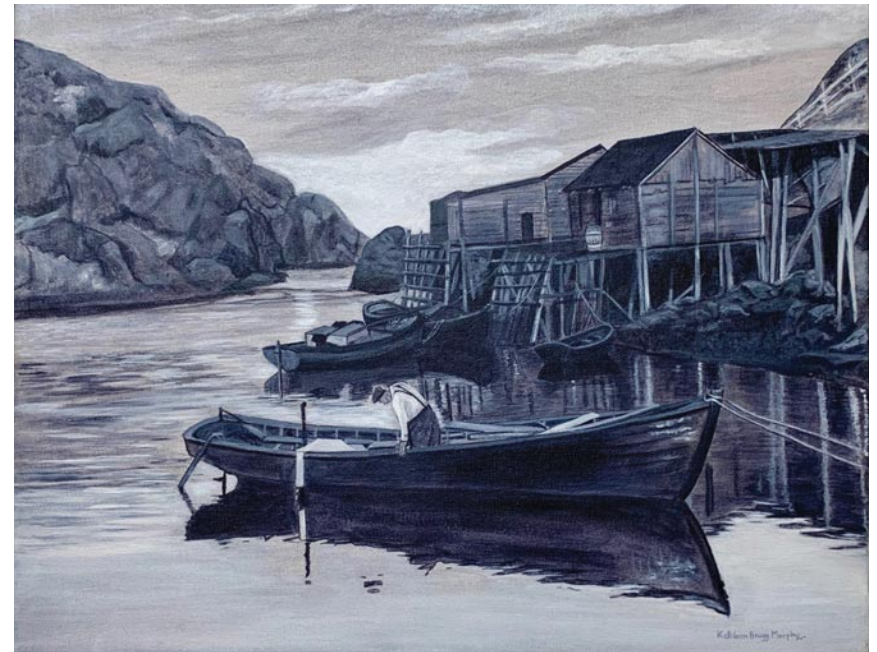
At her Craft Council of NL Gallery exhibit in November, Kathleen shares the journey of her 12 paintings from their inspiration (which began with research in July 2019) to their final execution as an exhibit, which included a weathered doorstep and a white door painted with the words "From My Doorstep."

Pointing to the grey steps, Kathleen explains, "This is where it all happened – sitting on the steps as a child with my parents, Frank and Eileen, watching fishermen coming home on a light summer evening."

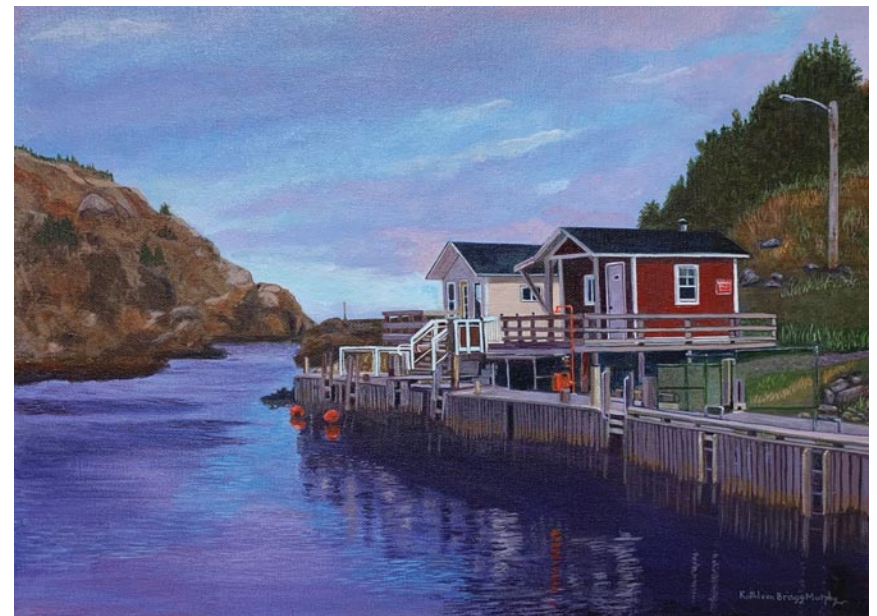
Fishermen have been coming and going since the early 1600s from Quidi Vidi, where they established fishing rooms and stages. In fact, one of Kathleen's black-and-white pieces – "Cottage Near the Corner" – is her rendition of a Memorial University archival photograph featuring multiple stages and fish flakes in the sheltered cove.

One of Kathleen's favourites is the photograph and her matching black-and-white painting titled "Day's End," in which a fisherman is bending over in a skiff. "This one is so

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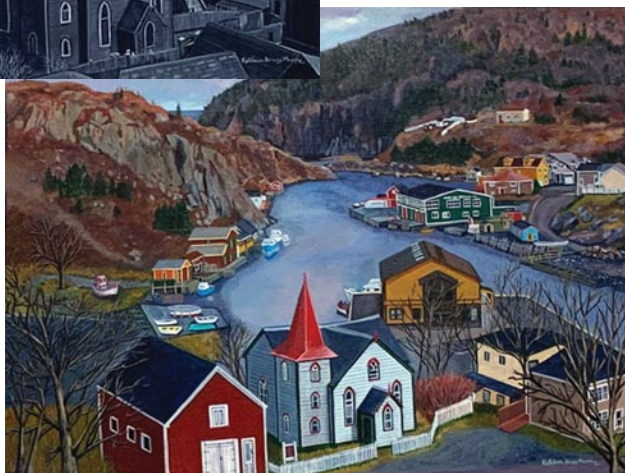


Above: One of Kathleen's favourite pieces is this iconic Newfoundland scene, entitled "Day's End." Below: Kathleen's depiction of the same location in Quidi Vidi village as it appears today.





A landmark in the village, Christ Church, has been converted into a private residence. Kathleen's work shows how it, and the view around the former chapel, has changed.



reflective of our fish culture, including the stages and the village itself."

During her research, Kathleen uncovered an old photograph of the house she grew up in, which gladdened her jaunt back in time. "The house was exactly how I remembered it; and I knew then it would form a significant piece in my series."

### National & Provincial Sites

Kathleen's family, the Braggs, owned land in Quidi Vidi going back over a century, with her grandfather, uncles and cousin all living "on the hill" above the protected waters. As Kathleen, who now lives in the centre of the city, moves through her exhibit, she points to two significant places in her paintings – Mallard Cottage and Christ Church.

These two buildings are examples of what inspired her to launch this series – the irreversible changes wrought by time. Mallard Cottage, now a popular eating establishment, once had a peaked roof instead of a slanted one; and the entrance to the building has changed. Once a private residence, the Mallard family lived in this home for more than 100 years. Kathleen recalls Agnes and John Mallard living there in the 1950s and 1960s.

Christ Church, on the other hand, has been transformed from an active chapel into a private residence. This Gothic revival wooden structure is representative of the architecture of an early 19th-century outpost place of worship, but that, too, has an altered look. The two buildings are

provincial Registered Heritage Structures now. Kathleen also points out that, "Both of these are National Historic Sites, which is incredible for two such national sites to be located in such close proximity."

### Famous Painter

An intriguing story layers behind one of Kathleen's paintings, and she smiles as she alludes to this at the start of her tour. When we come upon it, she's especially animated.

She explains that her father, Frank, a seasonal fisherman, worked in the off-season at Government House. One Christmas, in 1967, Lieutenant Governor Fabian O'Dea presented the staff with an official greeting card. Frank exclaimed to O'Dea that the painted house depicted on the card was the Bragg homestead overlooking the inlet. Kathleen lived in this house from March 1953 to November 1973. She vividly recalls seeing, as a child, the prized Christmas card her father brought home, but it has since been lost.

But the card is significant for another reason – it was painted by one of the famous "Group of Seven" artists, Lawren Stewart Harris, who spent time in Newfoundland and Labrador over the years, drawn to the iconic buildings and rugged landscape.

While working on her exhibit, "I was determined to find a copy of this card, which meant so much to Dad and our family," she says. She eventually obtained a copy of the card from the O'Dea family, and she learned that the original 13" x 10"

painting by Harris is held in a private collection in the province.

### Labour of Love

Quidi Vidi clearly shaped Kathleen as a child, and her memories of this magical place has influenced her as an individual and a self-taught artist. Kathleen reflects on her childhood – recalling how she laid fish to dry on the flakes and helped her father mend his nets. Now a grandmother, Kathleen remains very connected to this place of her family heritage and her culture as a Newfoundlander, and she still has close relatives and friends who reside in Quidi Vidi.



"While the community has changed, it was a privilege to work on a series that transported me back to my roots," she says. "This truly has been a labour of love for me, from beginning to end."

From her doorstep in the quaint fishing hamlet of Quidi Vidi decades ago, Kathleen would never imagine her simple moments there would so enrich her entire life, while leaving a legacy for her children and grandchildren, and, indeed, engraving a tribute to this remarkable inlet. 📖