

FREE  
ARTIST PAPER

Redefining Scrapbook & Heritage Art™

# Legacy

**Carol Wingert's**  
Letter to  
a Lost Cousin

**Sweet Baby  
Collages**  
by Janet Hofacker

Allison  
Strine's  
**Playful  
Denim Book**

Scrapbook  
Pages that  
**Tell It Like It Is**

**Inside: A heart-filled Valentine by Carolyn Congrove,  
vintage-style photo holders, and a new Virtual Gallery  
of digital layouts!**



FEB/MAR 2005 \$6.95 US • \$10.95 CAN





# Life's Work Mixed-Media Art Honors Ancestors' Labors

by William Grabowski

Perhaps nothing defines who we are more than what we do. Our life's work. We are fortunate if our chosen profession best addresses our talents and potentials. At times those talents might grow indirectly from the lives and livelihoods of our families and our ancestors. Surely each major life or career change contributes to our life's puzzle. Our ancestors had many on their road to this country. That being the case, each step should be acknowledged for its contribution. To better understand their lives and journey, we might also look to include the time before they sailed across oceans. Their first lives. Occasionally details appear to help us understand that process.

## The Miller's Tale

A ship's manifest contains many entrees that help round out the portraits of its passengers. As I researched my grandfather's journey in 1909 from Galicia to Ellis Island, a piece of surprising information surfaced. His occupation was listed on that document as "miller" — quite different from the house painters he and his sons were to be for the next 70 years in America. After wondering what his life might have been like in Poland during those times, I decided to acknowledge that period of his life's work with a piece of artwork, "The Miller's Tale." ✦

**The Miller's Tale**

14"x24"x14"

A local craft store held a remarkable assortment of grains – wheats of many kinds, barley, oats. Grains that might have been grist for the mill in which he worked. It seemed natural that these special shapes and textures be displayed in a vase, honoring his initial life's work. A mirrored ball of blue glass I came across by chance fit perfectly into the vase, implying the vast ocean he crossed. From the Ellis Island web site ([www.ellislandrecords.com](http://www.ellislandrecords.com)),

I discovered a photo of his steamer. A Lazertran transfer ([www.lazertran.com](http://www.lazertran.com)) of the S.S. President Grant was placed on that globe to mark his journey. I used a few of these transfer/decals on the piece because they wrap easily around curved surfaces. One held family members scattered against a map set alongside a section of the manifest. The front of this piece was to be an image of my grandfather, grandmother and my dad taken during the 1930s – a family standing strongly in tall fields. They gaze out at us, surrounded now by a bouquet of grains in recognition of a life they once led and left behind.

### A Portrait of Anna

Sewing is what my grandmother Anna did, from soldiers' uniforms at the Brooklyn Navy Yard during the war to cloth dolls for my sister. A vintage photo sparked an idea to begin a 3-dimensional portrait. Anna sits with her cousin, huddled together, as their horse-drawn cart races by. The cartwheel under which she sat prompted me to think of the circle of our lives. I sought out and found a similar wheel from that time period. I chose to place photos between the spokes appropriate to different times and events in her cycle of life: a baby photo, her wedding, her home, and especially for her later years, the grandmother I knew. A sheet of Lexan (unbreakable) acrylic was attached to the wheel and served as the backing that held the photo transparencies. I

was unsure how to mount or display such a piece until luck, or providence, intervened. On my way to work I noticed a family was discarding an old Singer sewing machine at the curb. I stopped to look and realized how much it resembled the one my grandmother (if not all of our grandmothers) had and used. That had to be the base for this art piece because it fittingly acknowledged an important part of her life. It anchored her life and, so too, it would anchor this piece in celebration of her life.

A special part was crafted for me by a welder that not only suspended the wheel but allowed it to turn. The wheel's movement helps the viewer to better see each photo in her circle of life – images that all contributed to "A Portrait of Anna."



### A Portrait of Anna

36"x66"x18"

### My Father's Hands

We often hear the words of our parents come from our own mouths. Gentle reminders of the ties that bind us. Often remembrances of family appear unexpectedly. As I painted a landscape awhile back, I took pause for a moment. I realized my hands, holding a brush, mixing paint, evoked a memory. The realization hit that my hands now looked much like the hands of my dad. I recalled years back when he, too, mixed paint – but in large wooden buckets because he was a house painter and paperhanger by trade. I sensed that moment might well be revisited sometime in the future in a work of art. It happened months later as I finished my morning jog. My next-door neighbor placed an old Underwood typewriter next to the trashcans for pick up. I waited until my next jog to look closely. Again I felt the need to reinvent a piece from the past to aid my artwork. Cleaned up with Armor All, the typewriter was to be the host for a poem that I was to write, "My Father's Hands." My dad also used his hands to create. He chose to whittle and carve from small chunks of wood – tiny birds, a violin, hats, a ball floating in a cube, even a grand piano. Why not populate the typewriter keys with some of these special pieces? His handiwork. The poem sits in the typewriter carriage.

## My Father's Hands

His hands, my Father's Hands  
did what they were told.  
Willingly, without words. No struggle

Buffed brown, sea and sun rubbed  
Bent as crabs poised to speak  
Life lines ferried around knotty bones,  
criss crossed and tied tight

By day broad brushings covered bricks and boards. Coats of  
white, whispers of tones.  
Colored papers placed just so on walls.  
Pin dotted patterns, seamlessly met.  
Roses raining from sky to floor. Fresh and bright.

Evening's tiny forms released from blocks still live.  
Scatched from woods hard and black.  
Birds and boxes and hats.  
Finger rubbed soft like stones. Rolled and rolled.

His hands, my Father's Hands  
did not speak then.  
They had no eyes.  
Yet still. With patience they waited.

But then,  
Then once today they Looked up at me with surprise.  
Without words they grasped my thin brush.  
Moved my hands.

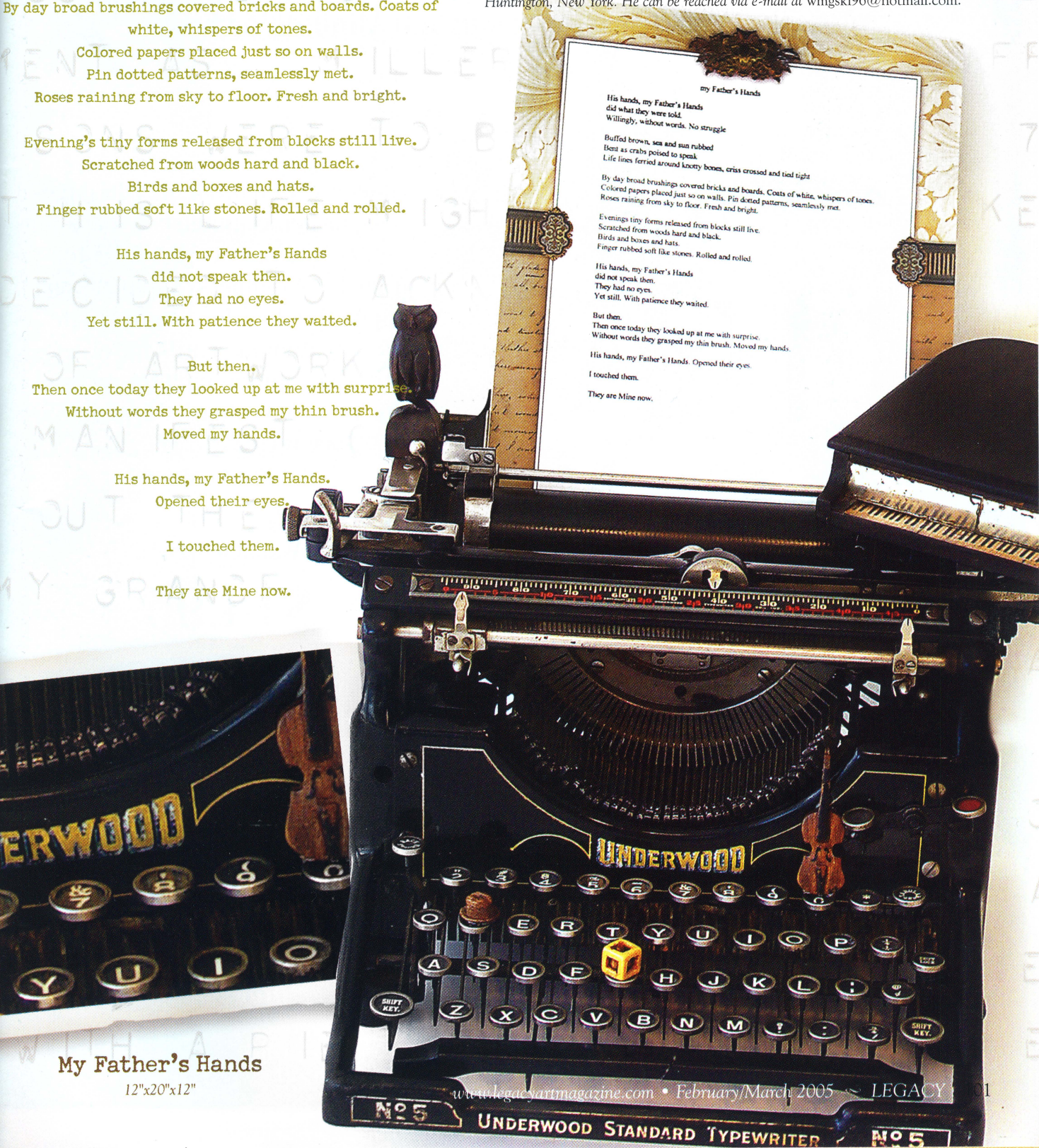
His hands, my Father's Hands.  
Opened their eyes.

I touched them.

They are Mine now.

I've decided to write a proposal to coordinate an exhibition of heritage-based artwork to be shown at Ellis Island – a long process, but surely a venue of special meaning. I visited Ellis Island a few weeks back, the first family member to return for 95 years. Returning was a beginning of sorts. The place where many journeys ended so new ones might begin. Our ancestors were ordinary people who made extraordinary choices. An acknowledgement of that seems right. I would be appreciative if I might use some of my work to mark their journey. And in so doing, greet them simply: "Welcome home". 🐼

William Grabowski is a mixed-media artist and an elementary school teacher from Huntington, New York. He can be reached via e-mail at [wmgski96@hotmail.com](mailto:wmgski96@hotmail.com).



My Father's Hands

12"x20"x12"