

# Portraits of

Story by Ms. Heike Hasenauer Photos by Mr. David Hawkinson

**"T**HE Goat Woman," as Ms. Kaziah Hancock is known throughout central Utah, has an uncanny love of the goats she calls "her girls." She raises some 110 of them on her 15-acre Manti, Utah, ranch, has immortalized many of them in paintings and signs all of her art works with her "Kaziah, the Goat Woman" trademark.

In 2002 Ms. Hancock started doing something else considered by many to be a bit eccentric — she began painting portraits of servicemembers who had been killed in operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom and sending them to their families — free of charge. As of August, she'd completed 351 portraits, averaging 10 to 12 per month.

Today four other artists participate in Project Compassion, a privately funded, nonprofit organization she founded in 2002 to provide gallery-quality, original oil portraits of American servicemembers who have been killed on active duty since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, to their families.

Together with Ms. Hancock's paintings, the artists have collectively completed and shipped more than 700 portraits to bereaved families, she said.

The artist and author of "Prisons of the Mind," a book about her polygamist upbringing, has reason enough to love goats: "I owe my life to them," she said, remembering the story her mother told her about the night she was born in a tent in the Arizona desert.

Her father had died several days before, and with little water to drink, Ms. Hancock's mother had been unable to provide milk

Ramone Villatoto



# the Fallen



In 2002 Ms. Kaziah Hancock began painting portraits of servicemembers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and sending the paintings to the families of those killed. She has so far completed 351 portraits.



Ms. Hancock is widely known as "The Goat Woman."

to nurse her baby. Ms. Hancock's 9-year-old brother milked a goat to feed his sister and keep her alive.

Unable to have children of her own, Ms. Hancock loves and appreciates servicemembers for the sacrifices they make every day, she said. When she speaks about the men and women in uniform who have died, her voice quivers and her tears well up.

Today, her goats provide a reprieve from the day-to-day seriousness of her work. "I don't think I could handle this much pain if I didn't have them to heal me," she said.

Her first portrait, completed in March 2004, was of the first Soldier from Utah killed in Iraq, Chief Warrant Officer 2 John Daren Smith. At the time of his enlistment he listed Salt Lake City as home.

The Black Hawk helicopter pilot died in Kuwait in February 2003, before OIF began. His helicopter crashed during a training mission.

When Ms. Hancock started Project Compassion fewer than 80 servicemembers had been killed, and she promised to complete a portrait of every one who died in the war, she said. "At the time, I had \$5,000 in my savings account.

"Everyone thought that we, with our modern technology, could get the war wrapped up quickly," she said. "I never thought the months would turn into years."

She completed 15 paintings that first year. When word about her paintings got out, and with casualties mounting, she

Dale A. Panchot



John D. Smith

had to dedicate more of her time to working on Project Compassion. That meant she began spending less time turning out the gallery art work that was her livelihood and which brought in between \$2,000 and \$10,000 a piece, she said.

Suddenly, families had to wait longer for Ms. Hancock's response to their requests for portraits.

On Nov. 17, 2003, Staff Sgt. Dale Aldon Panchot was killed south of Balad, Iraq, when a rocket-propelled grenade hit his Bradley fighting vehicle. Ms. Hancock completed his portrait and sent it to his family in Northome, Minn., in 2006.

"May you feel your son's love every day. Love, Kaziah," she wrote on a note that accompanied the framed portrait. "There's nothing I'll ever paint that's more appreciated," she told an ABC News crew that was at the Panchot house when the gift arrived.



“In the beginning, what I did was a simple act of kindness, inspired by appreciation for the Soldiers and their families — to honor them and tell their families: ‘I love you and appreciate the willingness of your child to face the enemy on my behalf,’” she said.

She read many last letters home that Soldiers sent their families before they were killed. And, through the photos sent to her from loved ones, she “looked into the faces of these kids, time after time, and got a sense of their personalities,” Ms. Hancock said.

“I reached a new level of maturity. The way I see it, when you look at the end of your life, you can’t take the awards, recognition or money with you. But you can take appreciation and love,” she said. “I believe that the Soldier who was killed stood for something. So I’m going to stand for something, too, to honor the honorable.”

In November 2006, Mr. Tom McDonough sent a letter from Minnesota to Ms. Hancock after he’d seen a local TV broadcast about her and her paintings.

“We never want one of your paintings,” Mr. McDonough wrote, as though penning the words would eliminate the possibility that his son, Bryan, could be killed.



Bryan T. McDonough

A few weeks later, on Dec. 2, 2006, Sgt. Bryan Thomas McDonough died in Fallujah, Iraq, when his Humvee hit an improvised explosive device. Mr. McDonough sent another letter to Ms. Hancock the day after Christmas: “I beg you to do the portrait we never wanted,” he wrote.

In the weeks that followed, the McDonough family moved and by Father’s Day still hadn’t heard anything about their request

— until Bryan’s younger brother asked that the family drive by their old home. The wrapped portrait was standing on the front porch. The day would have been Bryan’s 31st birthday.

To date, Ms. Hancock has spent about \$35,000 of her own money from the sale of her gallery art work to keep Project Compassion going, she said, and donations have covered about one-third the cost of materials and shipment of the portraits.

Support increased in June 2007, when the Depart-

For more information on Project Compassion go to [www.heropaintings.com](http://www.heropaintings.com).

For more information on America Supports You, go to [www.americasupportsyou.com](http://www.americasupportsyou.com)



Chassan Henry

ment of Defense approved Project Compassion as an official, nonprofit partner with America Supports You, qualifying the project for major corporate sponsorship, she said.

America Supports You was officially launched in November 2004 to recognize the support of individuals and groups for U.S. servicemembers, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. Through the program, thousands of people — from schoolchildren to employees of major corporations — host events and plan projects to show their support to America’s servicemembers.

Recently, too, FEDEX offered to pay all shipping costs for the project, about \$30,000 per year, Ms. Hancock said. And Packaging Corp. of America has agreed to supply all the boxes.

“I honestly believe that when I die I’ll lay in my coffin with a clear conscience,” she said. “I didn’t just love these Soldiers. I showed their families my love.”



Michael Monsoor