

## Homeless artist still has faith

By Mark Curnutte • [mcurnutte@enquirer.com](mailto:mcurnutte@enquirer.com) • November 21, 2009  
Local news • [Cincinnati.Com](http://Cincinnati.Com)

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His passion for sports led to commissions from the NFL's Minnesota Vikings and the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves and is the source of one of his latest works, a detailed colored-pencil rendering of Colts quarterback Peyton Manning.

Calander's affection for children fueled many pieces, including "The Trickle Down Effect," a painting of a boy and a girl and their dog making ketchup sandwiches.

Listening to jazz musician Boney James provoked a recent drawing of a saxophonist with a guitarist and bassist leaning in.

Add homelessness to Calander's list of inspirations.

Just 45 years old, he suffered a massive stroke after refilling his U-Haul truck in April north of Lexington. Moving from Kansas to Maryland, he passed out in the parking lot.

The life squad drove him to St. Elizabeth Healthcare, Covington.

What he calls his "vagabond tour" took him from Northern Kentucky to University Hospital and Drake Center.

Then, it was to and from Chicago for more treatments. The tour also included a defibrillator implant to keep his congestive heart failure from killing him.

He's landed at the Center for Respite Care, a facility in Avondale for homeless people who have nowhere else to recuperate from surgery. The center allowed him to set up his drawing table in a room he shares with three other patients. He's not sure when he will be healthy enough to leave.

In his roommates and other indigent hospital patients, he sees the same expression that has haunted him for months.

"That look on people's faces who are destitute and don't know what they are going to do next, I know that look, it's on my face now," he said in his soft baritone.

"My grandmother told me about the faces of people in the Dust Bowl; they were worn."

Life never has been easy for Calander.

His challenges started early.

There is a history of strokes and heart disease on both sides of his family.

His health history includes four heart attacks and 13 stents, and a heart that works at about 20 percent efficiency.

When he is healthy enough to move again, Calander said, he might head to Atlanta. It's where his oldest daughter, Brandi Calander, 25, lives with her child.

They have to make up for lost time. That's because her mother kept Calander from his daughter for 19 years.

"My dad is my best friend," she said. "I love him for who he is now. I would love for my dad to come down here. He has a grandbaby he has never seen."

Daughter and father are in touch on the phone. She gently encourages him to move south.

" 'Daddy,' I say, 'just pray about it,'" she said.

Spirituality is a big part of Calander's art. "It's a faith-filled vocation for me," he said. "The Lord actually paints. I just push the brush."

With no formal art education but inspired by the late Ernie Barnes, whose work graced the Marvin Gaye "I Want You" album cover, Calander honed his craft by drawing portraits at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in St. Paul when he was a teenager. He made \$25 or \$50 a picture.

He draws with his eyes closed, first coming up with a rough sketch that he refines, often while listening to music. There was a pencil montage of R&B singer Phil Perry on black paper on his drawing table.

Earlier this week, Calander had to take a break from his art when center workers rushed him to University Hospital for an emergency procedure to drain about four liters of fluid from his lungs and around his heart.

"I felt like I was drowning," he said.

Still, ideas kept coming to him, even in the hospital bed.

"I have a View-Master in my brain," he said. "I can click from image to image in my mind. When I had the stroke I was afraid I would lose it."

Galleries in Washington, New York, Kansas, Oklahoma and Philadelphia have exhibited his pencils and oil paintings. He was moving East to get closer to most of his business.

The detour to Cincinnati, though, he believes, was no accident in his mind. He's not bitter.

"I'm thankful for the grace of God," Calander said. "The Lord puts lights in our lives through other people to show us the right path."

One of those people, he said, is Mary Beth Meyer, executive director of the Center for Respite Care.

"Daniel is a talented person with the opportunity to be employed again if he can get back on his feet," she said.

He's begun sketching the faces of the men, women and children he's seen in homeless shelters and hospitals in pencil in his notebook .

While walking in Chicago, he met two boys, about 10, doing back flips off a folded discarded mattress. He will turn those drawings into paintings.

Calander's worldview is that of an artist suffering for his art's sake and of a man trying to be faithful to God's plan for him.

"I can better understand vulnerability now," he said. "I'm trying to do one or two pieces a week, so I can get enough for a show.

"You control every situation, even the bad ones. What will you do with it?"