

## **Deaf girl abandoned as a baby proving a hit in the art world**

A TEENAGE deaf girl with cerebral palsy, who started life as a baby abandoned on a hospital doorstep, is proving a hit in the art world.

Paintings by Tjili (pronounced Chilli) Grant Wetherill are selling for thousands of pounds, and two have been selected by the Royal Watercolour Society for a major London exhibition.

Born in Cambodia, Tjili, 15, now lives in [Lyndhurst](#) after she was adopted by James and Vik Grant Wetherill, when she was just eight weeks old.

Chartered accountant James, 48, explained: “Tjili was born in 2001, weighing just 1kg, and was the only survivor of triplets abandoned on the doorstep of a hospital in Phnom Penh.

“After a month of intensive care she was transferred to an orphanage by the Mekong River,” he said.

Tjili was subsequently diagnosed as profoundly deaf and having athetoid cerebral palsy caused by an early brain trauma.

“Specialists said her challenges may prevent her from sitting, standing, walking, and even managing everyday activities such as feeding herself,” said James.

Tjili lived with the couple in Singapore until October 2016, when the family relocated to Emery Down.

Event organiser Vik, 45, said: “Over the past 15 years, Tjili has been happy and determined to embrace physio, sit-ups, yoga and swimming. And lots of love and encouragement!”

“We built a bamboo framework in the garden to help her stand and learn to walk,” she added.

Tjili took her first unaided steps at 5 years old, and is now able to run, cycle, swim and ride horses.

“Hundreds of hours of occupational therapy have greatly helped her core strength, stability and motor skills”, said Vik.

“This was particularly important when learning to hold and control a pencil or paintbrush.

“Coupled with a cochlear implant and speech-language therapy, Tjili now communicates through a combination of sign language, gesturing and writing”, explained Vik.

But it's her talent for drawing and painting which has caught the eye of art experts.

Two of her colourful works, 'Bird Humming.' and 'Technicolour Dreambird' have just been selected by the Royal Watercolour Society to feature in their 'Contemporary Watercolour Exhibition', which has just opened, and will run until 15th March, at the renowned Bankside Gallery, London.

Vice President of the RWS Jill Leman was on the judging panel.

"Tjili's two pieces were selected from over 2000 entries purely on their artistic merit and original style," she said .

"They represent the sort of innovation and experimentation that the RWS likes to encourage, especially in young people.

"We're amazed to learn of Tjili's story and wish her every success in the future," she added.

Tjili's parents are clearly delighted.

"It's amazing news, especially when you consider the judges had no idea of Tjili's age, or the fact she has cerebral palsy," said James.

Only 154 paintings have been selected for the exhibition. And Tjili is one of only 28 artists to have two works on show.

James said Tjili's self-taught art-style has evolved to compensate for her physical issues.

"Her cerebral palsy means Tjili has a shaky torso and head, and much-reduced control over her fingers," he explained.

"But somehow, she manages to grip a pencil and hold watercolour pastels and paint brushes in the palm of her hand, while steadying the paper with her other arm.

"It looks very awkward, but the results are these vibrant paintings which are proving very popular.

"Every stroke that Tjili puts to paper is testament to her creativity, determination, and the great effort she makes to overcome her challenges", he said.

Meanwhile, James and Vic have just launched a website for Tjili, and her artworks have already begun selling for up to £3,500 each.

Examples of her work are also on display at the exclusive Lime Wood hotel in the [New Forest](#), where Jamie Cullen and Sophie Dahl married in 2010.

“Guests have been asking if they can buy them!”, said James.

The response has clearly amazed and delighted her family.

“To start with, we were just happy that Tjili had found a hobby she enjoyed”, said Vik.

“To see people’s reaction to her art, and have the bonus that her works are not only selling, but being exhibited at a top hotel and recognized by the Royal Watercolour Society, is truly overwhelming,” she said.

And appreciation of the youngster’s talent hasn’t stopped with the UK.

A long-time fan of the Spider-Man movies, Tjili was invited to attend a private VIP reception for the cast of ‘The Amazing Spider-Man 2’, back in 2014, and presented lead actor Andrew Garfield with a portrait she’d completed, depicting him as half-Spidey, half-Andrew. He was clearly delighted, remembers James.

“He and co-star Emma Stone were genuinely interested and amazed when they heard about Tjili’s life story and saw her work”, he said.

“They both wrote encouraging messages on another Spider-Man drawing Tjili created on the spot.”

Andrew Garfield wrote: “Amazing to meet you. All my love, Andrew”, while Oscar-winner Emma put: “Tjili – You are amazing! Love Emma.”

Outside of art, Tjili’s other pursuits include swimming, yoga, origami and making paper planes.

She also has an astonishing ability to create patterns and solve a wide array of puzzle cubes.

“Tjili can solve a scrambled Rubik’s Cube in just five minutes, and even manages to tackle 10 by 10 block cubes,” said Vik.

“James and I struggle to solve the Rubik’s Cube at all!”.