

Wayland grad records life's journey on walls of church

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PLAINVIEW—When Wendi Vanlandingham received her degree from [Wayland Baptist University](#) at spring commencement, it marked the end of a 12-year journey filled with twists, turns and detours.

In a sort of lasting testament to that road, Vanlandingham recently completed a large mural in the children's department at [College Heights Baptist Church](#).

Wendi Vanlandingham stands in the hallway of the children's department at College Heights Baptist Church, where she completed a mural. (Wayland Photo)

Estimating at least 500 hours of work involved in the project—she admits she really didn't keep close count—the mural is not only a gift to the church and its children, but also a statement of her belief in the role of faith along life's often-bumpy road.

At the beginning of her mural, which depicts a cartoon-like city, a road sign bears a Bible verse, Psalm 119:35 from the Message translation: "Guide me down the road of your commandments; I love traveling this freeway!"

Vanlandingham acknowledges her life has included on- and off-ramps, detours and traffic jams. Some of those moments and personal touches show up in the mural, while others are hidden in her heart. Still, she wouldn't trade a minute of it.

Opportunities to grow, listen

“God touched me and changed our lives every time,” she said. “Each step in life is such an opportunity to grow and learn.”

A native of Childress, Vanlandingham attended McMurry University on scholarship, even though her high school sweetheart, Jeff, was heading to Wayland.

After only a semester and many visits to Plainview, she transferred to Wayland and continued her education, majoring in art. In November 1998, the pair married, and they continued their education until January 2000, when they were expecting their first child, Lani Belle.

“We didn’t think we could live on part-time salaries, make it through school and support a child,” she said. “We know now that God can do amazing things.”

Her husband took a job as a youth minister in Crowell, later serving churches in Vernon and Childress.

She served as the first director of Pregnancy Outreach Center of the Rolling Plains, a newly formed crisis pregnancy ministry. She also had two more daughters along the way—Joey and Lily.

In 2005, the Vanlandinghams decided to come back to Plainview. Jeff Vanlandingham wanted to continue his education at Wayland and cut out the regular commute he was making from Childress. He pursued a degree in education and graduated in August 2007.

While he went back to school, his wife worked full-time in Wayland’s financial aid office, where she still is employed, and took a few classes each term toward her own degree in art, only 30-plus hours from completion. She sees her art as ministry.

Use art to make a place "welcoming"

“Anybody else can teach or preach and I can’t do those things. But if I can use my art to make a place more welcoming for others, that’s what I can do,” she said.

The mural at College Heights bears testimony to both her talent and her calling, but it’s not the only place she’s left her mark. She painted a mural at Second Baptist Church in Vernon, as well as at the pregnancy center in Childress.

But she has vowed not to paint a mural in the family’s home in Plainview.

“Every time I painted a mural in our house for our girls, we’d end up moving two weeks later,” she said. And the Vanlandingshams are not ready to move yet.

“Wayland is home to us,” she said. “It’s our family.”

In a way, the mural project parallels Vanlandingham’s journey to the degree. She wasn’t always happy with her progress on the walls, adding the stairwell artwork and a puppet stage in the main gathering room. It was a long time coming, but wrapping it all up has been another rewarding stop on the road. And she admits, she’s pretty proud of the finished project and what it means to the children.

“We want the kids to know they are the future of this church, and God has something great for them they would never imagine,” she said. “If they just follow his guidance, it’ll be a great ride.”