

Former Wilton nanny builds successful art studio business in Shelton

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Hannah Perry, owner and founder of The Giggling Pig art studios in Shelton and Bethel.

As a child growing up in Yorkshire, England, Hannah Perry wrote poems and sent them to her favorite poet Spike Milligan.

He wrote back to her and encouraged her to continue — and so, she did.

In her later years, Perry discovered her love for writing stories and illustrating continued to grow. This became evident when she was a nanny in Wilton during her early 20s, for a family with 5-year-

old twins whose mother was diagnosed with cancer.

To answer the children's questions and help ease their fears, she drew giggling pigs and wrote and illustrated her first children's book, "A New Hat For Mommy." The book follows a young girl whose mother has cancer and asks questions along the way to encourage children to talk about their feelings.

"That kind of brought out the artistic side of me, and I really wanted to explore that," said Perry, who now lives in Shelton. "And over the years I had."

In 2005, Perry founded her art studio business, The Giggling Pig, which led to two silver awards from the The Stevie Awards for Women in Business and the gold winner for Female Entrepreneur of the Year in 2017. The Giggling Pig offers art lessons, workshops, paint and sip sessions, and corporate team-building events, as well as a mobile "Giggles on the Go" van and art therapy for scouts, troops, and assisted living and special needs organizations.

Perry opened her first studio in 2011 in Shelton and another one in Bethel in 2015, naming her business after the giggling pigs she drew in Wilton and her second children's book, "Picnics & Puddles: The Adventures Of The Giggling Pig & Friends," which she wrote and illustrated.

Receiving The Stevie Gold Award this year was an honor for Perry, given the difficult circumstances she faced in the past year. In the summer, she did not let a fire get in the way of catering to her customers during her busiest season in the summer. After her studio in Bethel burned down, less than a year after it had opened, she relocated and opened the studio within 24 hours.

"If you're in the right mindset where you're not going to get down by a bad day or a bad week, you really can achieve anything," Perry said.

"I think one of the important things is to not wait for things to be perfect. Things are never going to be perfect," she added. "I started my business with \$0 in my bank. And so, to have grown the way I have grown with just determination and the love of what I do, anything is possible. You do not have to wait for life to be perfect to get started."

This kind of resilience is characteristic of both Perry's professional and personal endeavors.

At 19, she left England and moved to the U.S. in 1998 with just \$15 and a degree in childhood education and development. She landed her first job in Norwalk, working with children with special needs, and taught swimming lessons as a volunteer at the New Canaan YMCA, where she met the Wilton family she eventually became a nanny for.

What she expected to be a year's stay in the states ended up being a life with a husband, four children and a successful art studio.

When asked where her resilience and drive come from, Perry was quick to respond.

"Being a mother," she said, laughing. "I also absolutely know with all certainty that this is what I'm supposed to do with life. I felt such a responsibility to the kids and to the community. We had so many people looking forward to the next day of summer camp, and I just don't like to let people down. I take my job seriously."

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