



God used my artwork to spread the gospel

Eira Goldsworthy has had a 35-year career as a Christian illustrator and artist. Now she'd like others to take up the baton

HER illustrated books and paintings have gone around the world – now Eira Goldsworthy wants to encourage the next generation of Christian artists.

Eira has a whole bookcase in her house of children's books she has illustrated and written. Some have been translated into more than 30 different languages.

She has also painted many watercolours to help worshippers to reflect on Bible stories and understand the Jewish roots of Christianity. Now Eira wants to inspire others to pick up their paintbrushes and consider the power of Christian art.

The 75-year-old, from St Paul's Church, Newport, Isle of Wight, has stepped down from her work as artist, illustrator and author. However, her artwork will go on display at her church this October.

"My heart's desire was to tell children about Jesus," she said.

"The Lord had given me the words 'go into all the world with the good news' back in 1981. I couldn't see how I was going to do that but God had a plan!

"I was commissioned to write and illustrate a series of books including one that can lead a child to know Jesus. Since publication in 1988, this book entitled 'Would you like to know Jesus' has been printed in its thousands and has been distributed in 30 different countries. So in fact, the Lord has accomplished the vision he first gave me to go into all the world."

Eira was born and brought up in Fishbourne on the Isle of Wight. She attended Portsmouth Art College in the 1960s and specialised in fine art and sculpture. She wanted to make



a career out of art and started her own graphic design business in Worthing where she then lived. In 1980, Eira went through a tough time. Her father died; she was divorced; and her business was struggling. However things were about to change.

In June 1981 a work colleague took her out for a meal, explained the gospel to her and invited her to church. "When I was given the gospel, I knew I had to ask Jesus into my life and repented of turning my back on him for years," she said. "From that time onwards, Jesus opened up a totally new journey with him – and I was born again!"

God inspired Eira with twin passions – to spread the gospel

to all nations, and to go to Israel. The International Christian Embassy had just opened in Jerusalem and in 1983 Eira volunteered for the washing up team during the annual Feast of Tabernacles. The Embassy asked her to join the art team so she never had to do any washing up.

Just as Eira was wondering how she could afford to go, she was commissioned to illustrate a book. This was the start of a pattern, where she continually witnessed God providing for her in this way.

During the week of the Feast of Tabernacles, she was surrounded by between 4,000 and 6,000 Christians from across the globe. She returned each year until 1994 with a team of artists from around the world to design banners, graphics and even the stage setting for the festival.

"Israel was my Bible College, in that as a new Christian, I read the word and saw the land for myself visually," she said. "I am a visual learner and this made a massive difference to my understanding of the Bible and its Jewish roots."

It was in Israel that she was inspired to write and illustrate children's books to help spread the gospel. Before his death, her father had given her a small box of watercolours, and that was the beginning of her journey as an illustrator and Christian artist.

She was commissioned, as Eira Reeves, to illustrate educational books published by Hodder and Stoughton. Then there was a commission for a series of children's books by Scripture Union and Angus Hudson (now Lion Publishing), which included the 'Thank you God for...' series.

"My illustrations are quite stylised, so people recognise that they are mine," she said. "I've found that I need to be alone with the Lord



Just some of the children's books illustrated by Eira

to receive his anointed creativity. That has meant spending long hours on the drawing board.

"People have asked how the ideas came about. With me, it begins in the spirit – I can see the Holy Spirit painting a picture in my mind's eye. I would wait until the idea was formed and then go to the drawing board, where it would be completed – always in an explosion of colour!

"When working on a children's book or a painting, I felt I had to become the person I was drawing. For instance, an illustration of Martha and Mary meant I had to feel for Martha as she rushed around and tried to please Jesus with her cooking. Every painting and illustration is inspired and soaked in prayer."

Eira also worked with evangelist Bruce Oliver. He commissioned her to illustrate simple booklets explaining the gospel, which have also been translated into many languages for people in Africa, India, Pakistan and elsewhere.

She has also led workshops in Uganda for those looking to create new children's books, as Idi Amin's regime had destroyed them all. Her watercolours connecting the Bible with Israel and its Jewish roots have been exhibited in London, Brighton, Bournemouth, Eastbourne and Worthing, with prints selling in the UK and in Jerusalem.

Recently Eira was commissioned by film producer Hugh Kitson to

work on paintings for his award-winning film, 'Blessing: Curse or Coincidence'. Her 300 detailed paintings used for animation showing the Abrahamic Covenant, the book of Esther and Jesus's crucifixion took several months to complete. It was a very intense time but so rewarding.

"I'm driven passionately to help reach the lost through art because I knew nothing of the gospel until I was 40," she said. "And I do give the glory back to God for everything I paint."

Eira retired when she fell in love with Rex, a friend who she had known for 40 years. They became engaged in May 2016, but that September, Rex was diagnosed with cancer. They knew he didn't have long to live, so they very quickly planned a wedding. In January 2017 they got married in the hospital chapel in Worthing. Sadly Rex died that May.

"That experience has actually deepened my faith, as I know that Rex is with the Lord in heaven," she said. "You have to allow yourself to grieve, and I'm just beginning to come out of that time and now looking forward to the next step of my journey with the Lord. It has made me very aware of the urgency of proclaiming the gospel through my art."

From October 11-14, copies of Eira's paintings will be on display as part of 'The Bible Comes to Life' exhibition at St Paul's Church. For details visit www.eiragoldsworthy.com or www.eirareeves.com.