

Quid pro quo

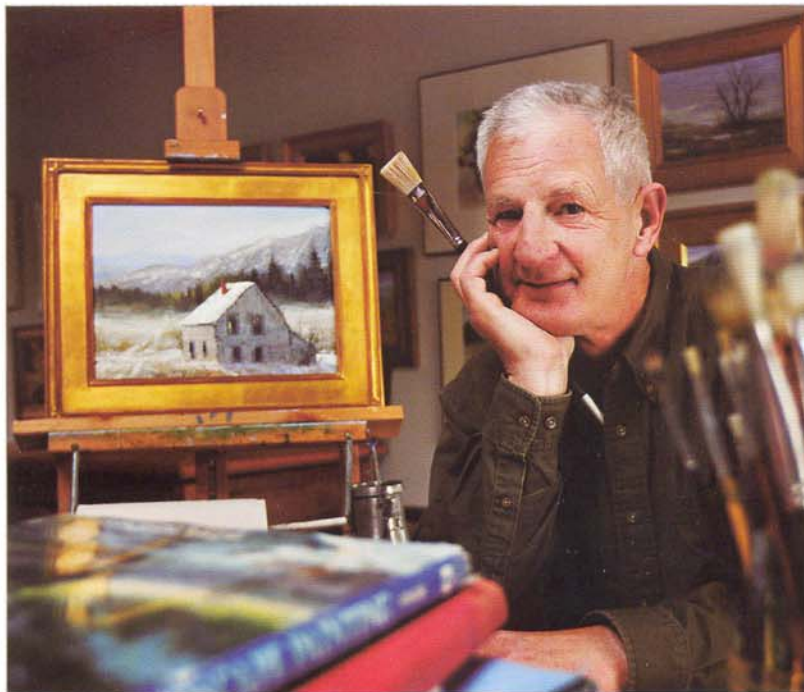
Retired judge leaves law for art, motorcycles and to support fellow cancer survivors

BY CIARA O'ROURKE

Former Whatcom County Superior Court Judge David A. Nichols did something most lawyers don't — he retired.

After moving to Bellingham in '71, Nichols worked for 13 years as a general practice lawyer. During 20 years on the Superior Court, the Delaware native oversaw the only Whatcom County resident sentenced to death in modern courts in 1995, and in 2001 issued an order that had statewide impact to improve the foster care system. But Nichols was ready to leave the bench.

A Harley-Davidson enthusiast and



Dave Nichols, now a retired judge, spends his time painting at his lakeside studio by Mark Malijan

"I loved every minute of being a judge"

father of three, he was "one of those fortunate people who retired with something to do."

"We're all defined by our job," the University of Washington School of Law graduate says. "It's easy to feel you are what you do; the novelty of not going to work fades fast."

Now he spends time in an art studio adjunct to his home on Lake Whatcom. After dabbling in painting in college, he attempted his first oil, a rainy New England night, in 1962. After galleries refused his recent watercolors, he took on oils again — a "trial and error" endeavor, he says, that proved a success: Nichols exhibits at Bellingham's Blue Horse Gallery among others.

He toured Tuscany, Italy, in May to hone his painting, but his pursuit to "turn something real into art" transcends technique. After Nichols was diagnosed with lymphoma in the final year of his court

tenure, he documented his experience, from chemotherapy to remission, in "Notes From the Laz-y-Boy."

Always independent, he wasn't too proud to ask for help — after taking the wrong pills twice, his wife regulated his medication.

"There's a tendency for self-reliant people to say, 'I can handle it,'" Nichols says. And he did. With the support of friends and family, Nichols was in remission six months into chemotherapy, and back on the lake water skiing in the morning still.

He uses his slim, spiral-bound memoir when he volunteers at the St. Joseph Hospital Cancer Center to connect with patients.

"I'll ask someone right off the bat, 'How does it look for you?'" Nichols says. "You need people to reach out to you."



Dave Nichols calls his work with oils a "trial and error" endeavor. Photo by Mark Malijan

Ciara O'Rourke is a Bellingham freelance writer.