

Friends and neighbours posed for book illustrations

exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and mum Cheryl, who was an art teacher for 28 years, now works as a portrait artist but has taken on a variety of commissions in recent years including two landscape paintings for The William Harvey Hospital's Arundel Unit and a series of illustrations for two books.

She has five book signings this year for the latest book, a true story, *Equiano – the slave with the loud voice*, that ties in with the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade and is to be included in the history curriculum of a local primary school. 'For this I also had a little help from my friends,' says Cheryl. 'I devised my own way of doing the illustrations that involved getting people I know to pose as characters in the story. I would photograph them in my studio or in the garden and then draw in the costumes and the background later. Flicking through the pages of *Equiano* there are several recognizable local faces including eight year-old Alex Richardson as a cabin boy and his dad, John. Trevor Brown and Mick Hopkins make an appearance and Steve Walls makes 'a dashing sea captain,' laughs Cheryl. There's a lot of research involved – getting the costumes and the settings just right. For one scene I used the Captain's cabin from a Hogarth painting I remem-



Cheryl's portrait of neighbours Jan and Richard Armishaw's granddaughter Katy, in pastel. Top, Chris and Cheryl at their ruby celebrations

bered from my art history classes, as reference. And a lot of the work is done on the computer. It may not be a very orthodox method but the publishers seem happy with the results.'

For the past eight years Cheryl's painting and illustrating has had to somehow fit around all the work she and Chris do voluntarily as organizers of the Rethink carers' support group for the Canterbury and coastal area. The mission of national charity Rethink (formerly the National Schizophrenia Fellowship) is 'to help everyone affected by severe mental illness to recover a better quality of life'. The Ives' first got involved with the charity 18 years ago and have been campaigning on its behalf ever since.

They have also been heavily involved with the Hilltop Community Association and have organized annual Harvest Suppers and twice-yearly Wine and Wisdom nights with friend Chris Silk at St Faith's hall for more years than they care to remember. 'I feel now I have to cut back some of the extra work that I do,' admits Cheryl. 'I've reached a stage where I want to please myself a little bit, occasionally. This includes splashing out on a special piece of jewellery. 'I can rarely find a ring that fits me,' sighs Cheryl, 'so I don't wear them. But to celebrate being married for 40 years we're having one made – with a ruby and a diamond, because diamonds are forever.' She adds: 'I think I deserve a long service award!' And for all that she and Chris have done to raise awareness of mental health issues over the years, I think they both do.

Fiona Roche

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