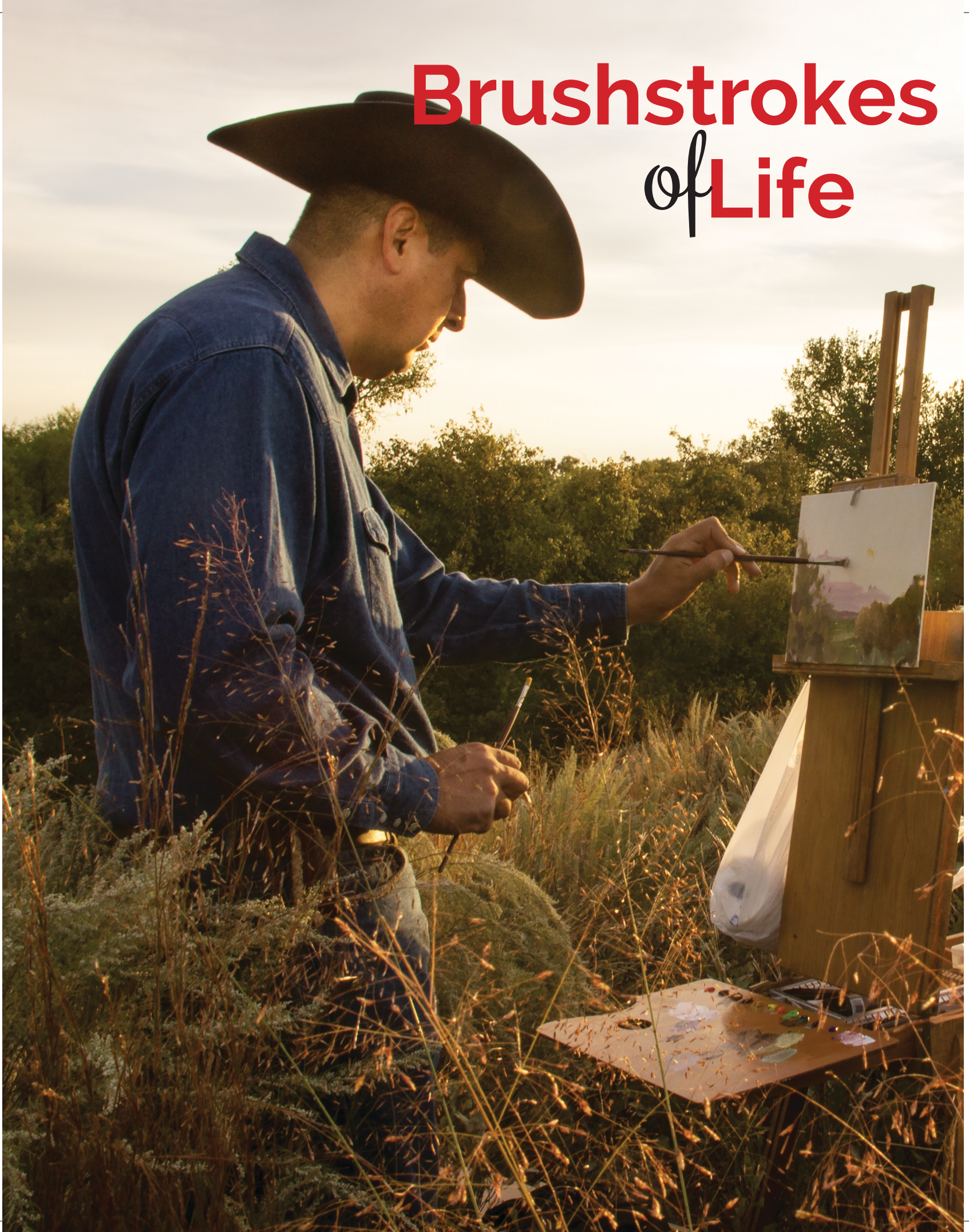


Brushstrokes of Life



As the cowboys move pure white Charolais cattle from their winter pasture to the spring pasture, Edgar Sotelo stands just far enough out of the way to wait. Soon Freddy Hunt, a local rancher from Wheeler, Texas, rides over the ridge on his horse, Chrome leading the cattle drive and his crew of cowboys.

Sotelo steadily holds a camera in his hands. Once he glimpses the first cowboy hat, he begins to shoot. Hunt and the herd of cattle storms down the small ridge. Sotelo described the noise from the herd sounded like “a roll of thunder” He can feel the ground tremble under his cowboy boots as cattle tramples down the ridge.

Capturing the images and the feelings of this moment are important to Sotelo because details matter when he creates his paintings.

“Every person and horse in my paintings has a name.” Sotelo said.

Sotelo’s interest in art and attention to detail began humbly as a child growing up in Juarez, Mexico. Sotelo would sit next to his dad as he sketched Vaqueros, a horse-mounted livestock herders, work the cattle. At that moment in time, he aspired to be like his father and become an artist.

One afternoon, Sotelo was sketching a horse from memory, just like his father did. When his mother came into the kitchen to check on him. She found Sotelo drawing in the back pages of one of her cookbooks. She ripped the book from underneath Sotelos’s pencil. Sotelo began to apologize profusely so he would not get in trouble from his father. His mother explained that his drawing of a horse was “magnificent” and he was not in trouble.

“If I had the chance of living my childhood again without changing a thing, I would do it in a heartbeat” Sotelo said. “The lack of means forced my family and I to be creative to reach our goals.”

Mexico offered very little opportunities for an artist or an education. An opportunity through his church to be part of a exchange program arose allowing Sotelo to move to the United States. After two years of American high school, he was admitted to Texas Tech University graduating with a degree in food science and technology in 1988.

After many years in the corporate world, Sotelo was looking for change that would also allow him to also pursue his interest in art. Change came when he and his wife Michelle made the decision to start their own business creating product packaging for companies.

“If we have survived and lived through what we lived through, we can get through this,” Sotelo said

Their risk along with hard work created a successful business with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce recognizing him in 2014 with the Hispanic Businessman of the Year, Trendsetter Award. Sotelo was also nominated for the DFW Minority Supplier Development Council.

With financial needs met, Sotelo was able to expand his personal passion of art. While Sotelo started his art career with rough pencil sketches, it was his wife Michelle who pushed him to try oil painting. After bugging him for about

four solid months trying to get him to leave his comfort zone of pencil sketches, she finally signed him up for an oil painting class.

Like his paintings, the brush strokes of his life represent achievements and difficulties experienced. From his childhood aspirations to the pressures of attending Texas Tech University to building a successful business, each moment represents a brush stroke in the background of his life painting. When Sotelo meets new friends, and experiences the beauty of nature, more color is added to his life painting.

“My life has been full of challenges and stumbling blocks,” Sotelo said.

With his western oil paintings, capturing the moment is just the starting point for Sotelo. From a

handful of the photographs spread out on the table, Sotelo develops the idea he will use to capture Hunt and the herd of cattle. It can take Sotelo months to develop the idea for the painting that is finally committed to canvas.

“You have to develop a concept,” Sotelo said. “It might relate to a song or you can be inspired by experiencing something or see something on the ranch.”

After creating the background, the final details are the subjects. Sotelo paints each with great care and detail from the shape of their cowboy hats down to the style of chaps and chinks.

“It is important to record that detail to tell the story the way it really is,” Sotelo said. “Who knows, maybe in 200 years they will be looking at that detail as the way it used to be but no longer exists.”

As much as he has been recognized in the business world, Sotelo has also been recognized in the art community for his oil paintings for almost a decade and has been featured in art shows and organizations across the country. Recently, Sotelo joined a group of artists who are trying to record the historical details of the western cowboy through their original works.

While success has found Sotelo, he tends to shine the light and encourages others to reach for their dream.

“I feel that your personal success is not complete until you give something back,” Sotelo said.

In October, the Department of Animal and Food Sciences presented Sotelo with the Graduate of Distinction Award and inducted him into the 2015 Hall of Fame. He became the first artist to be so recognized by the Department. From his humble beginning, Sotelo knows his success has come from the guidance and help of others.

“I couldn’t of reached the goals I wanted to reach...God has a big plan” Sotelo said. “He puts the right people in your life at the right time at the point that is unbelievable. All my accomplishments are not because of me but because of Him.” **T**

“If we have survived and lived through what we lived through, we can get through this,”



{ MEGHAN MURRAY }
WYLIE, TEXAS