



Finding life in brother's death

By DENNIS YUSKO Staff writer

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Mark Cellura, 52, expects to discover his brother's spirit tonight after a 40-year search. He was adopted after being abandoned at birth by his 18-year-old mother in a Buffalo hospital. But the New Jersey man had long held an unexplainable suspicion that he had a twin. In 2008, after decades of investigating family records, Cellura hired a genealogist who confirmed his hunch: He had an identical brother. The man's name, he was told, was Michael Weise, and he was an artist from a family in Galway. But just months later, Cellura was devastated to learn that Weise had died in 1987 in Albany of AIDS at the age of 29. Weise was a talented artist who left behind dozens of paintings and sketches. Over the past few years, Cellura, a retired Merrill Lynch vice president, went on a mission to track down the art pieces. At others' urging, he is showing the collection at 4 p.m. today in the Sorelle Art Gallery on Broadway.

"It's very emotional on a number of different levels," Cellura said. "If you understand art and artists, art is a part of them, so the idea of being able to reassemble some of his work and get it where it belongs has been extremely exciting." Weise and Cellura came into the world eight minutes apart — it's not certain who was first. Cellura was born healthy, but Weise suffered from Hirschsprung's disease, a bowel disorder that left him tiny and ill, said Doris Wieland of Galway. She adopted Weise as a 3-year-old in Jamestown, Chautauqua County, through state Social Services. Cellura had already gone to a family in Buffalo. "It's kind of sad they were separated," said Wieland, whose is married to Dick Wieland, a retired state trooper. Weise graduated from Saratoga Springs High School. Growing up, he showed a talent for drawing things he liked: horses, beaches, fish. He also had a preoccupation with actress Raquel Welch. One of his prized artworks was that of a bottle with her face painted inside, said Wieland. Weise waited on tables and did some odd jobs growing up before leaving for artist hubs around the country when he was about 21. He sang in bands and acted in small parts in music videos and commercials. Weise had a worryabout- things-tomorrow attitude, his mother said. "He wanted to hit the road, and that's what he did," she said. "He was going to get discovered."

Cellura, meanwhile, was on the fast track at Merrill Lynch, managing offices in New York, L.A., Texas and New Jersey. "We were kind of like the yin and the yang," Cellura said of his free-spirited brother. But the financial manager also liked drawing, and was familiar with the art scenes in the cities he worked. Weise had coincidentally stopped in many of the same places. "There was a lot of times we were a couple of miles away, even a couple of rooms," Cellura said. Weise called home to Wieland every so often from different states, and would visit for short periods only to take off again. Cellura, who is single, had never cared to meet his birth parents. But since age 11, he couldn't shake the "burning desire" to find siblings. "An adoptee will understand this," he said. By 1999, meeting biological brothers or sisters became a near-obsession. After multiple inquiries with the state Bureau of Vital Statistics turned up nothing, Cellura turned to Pam Slaton of New Jersey, who found his biological mother and twin. But Weise was long dead and buried in Galway Cemetery. Cellura turned to his brother's friends to learn about him. He found Weise's former girlfriend, whom he knows only by the nickname Peaches, in Richville near the Canadian border. The woman had held onto several of Weise's works, including pieces that hung in galleries, Cellura said. Peaches gave Cellura the artwork. "In the end, he was an artist with a lot of highs and lows in his life," Cellura said. "But he had a legacy that just needed some organization and work." Cellura said tonight's exhibit salvages his brother's legacy. He framed about 35 pieces for the show, and will include one of his own sketches so people can compare their styles.

The Oprah Winfrey Network intends to film the reunion at Sorelle for a documentary. Also planning to attend are the Wielands and Slaton. Sandy Pelletier owns Sorelle, which means sisters in Italian. "I just think it's wonderful that he'll be able to see all the artwork in one place after searching and finding all these pieces," Pelletier said. "To see them all hung in one location all at once will give him a true feeling of who his brother really was, as an artist and a person."