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# High Art

Gillian Panigot  
*Andrews University*

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# High Art

By Debbie Michel and Gillian Panigot

## Artist Greg Constantine

**F**resh off his exhibition at the much-publicized Grand Rapids ArtPrize, artist Greg Constantine is sitting in his art-filled studio at Andrews University, polishing up a series of comic strips slated to run in the International Camporee newspaper next August.

These comic sketches, loosely based on the story of David and Goliath, revolve around two central characters, Davey and Big G, where Davey meets a visiting team from Philly (hint to Philistines) for a pickup game of basketball. Davey is not the greatest basketball player; in fact, he can't shoot or rebound. But he has one special skill — the slingshot hook (get the hint?).

So why, after retiring a dozen years ago from teaching art for 43 years at Andrews University, is the Canadian-born artist still faithfully showing up at the office each day and immersing himself into new projects? "I think like a kid," he quips. "I'm not saying I didn't grow up — although my wife would disagree." In all seriousness, he says, he has a strong desire to make a crucial contribution to help young people in their teens and twenties relate more closely to biblical teachings.

Drawings and words always have seemed to flow naturally for the 80-year-old; to date, he has illustrated and written seven books — his last, *Jesus of New York*, which imagines Jesus as a 19-year-old Jewish lad in New York City.

Another creative outlet he enjoys is producing license plates with some famous and perhaps not-so famous quotes. His ArtPrize exhibition in October featured "Saint Liberty," an 85" x 48" painting of the Statue of Liberty, which he created using a ready-made "machine" (the mouths of paint tubes) to apply the colors in gestures directly onto the canvas, referencing July 4th fireworks celebrations.

Written out in a collection of license plates at the base of the painting is the statement, "Give me your tired,

your poor huddled masses yearning 2 breathe free. I was a stranger and u took me in." Constantine hand-crafted the license plates from vacuum-formed plastic, then meticulously painted and distressed the plates, applying actual rust.

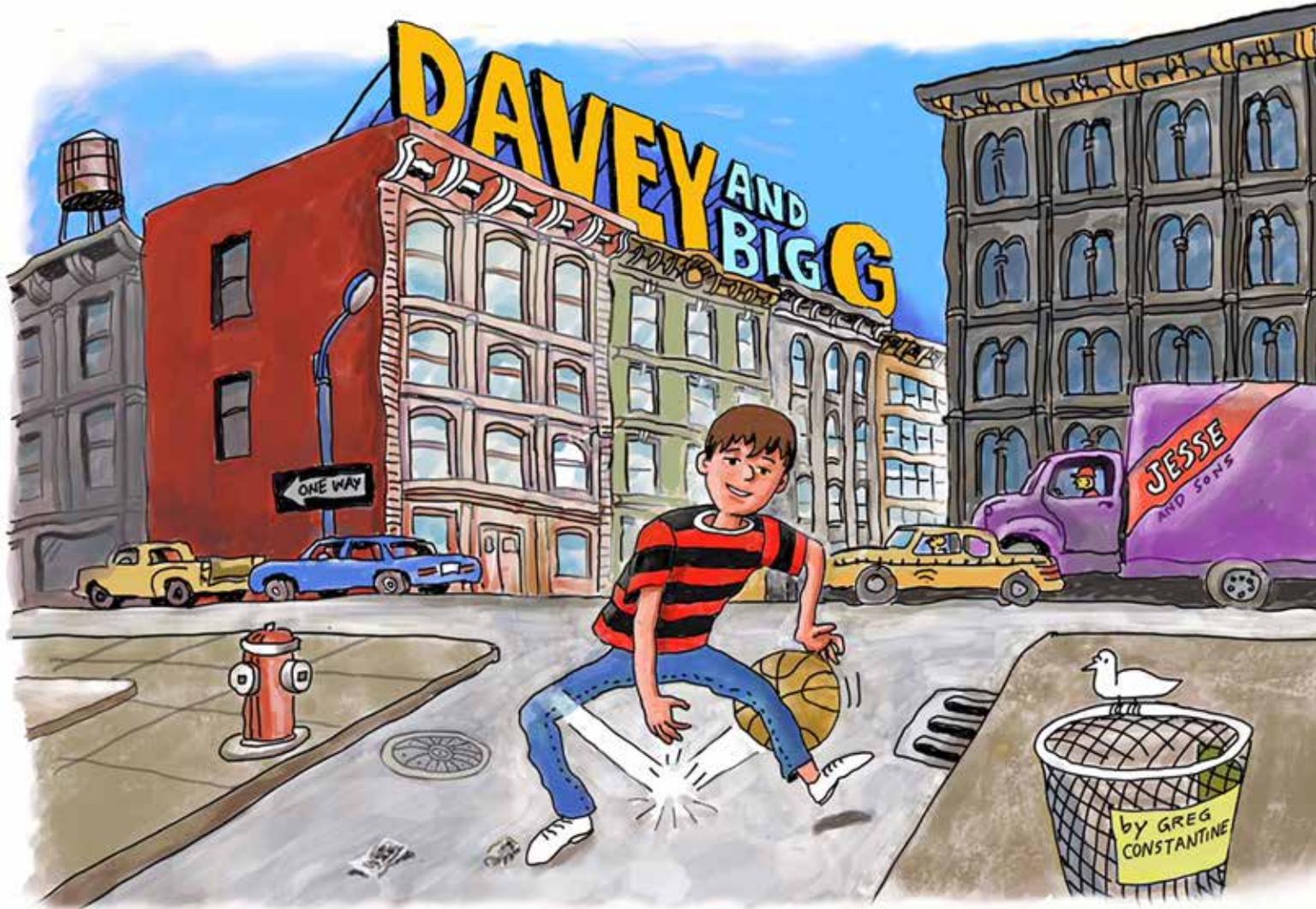
"The 'Statue of Liberty' in New York harbor is as much a logo for America as the 'Stars and Stripes' flag and the 'Star Spangled Banner' national anthem are," Constantine says. "She is the only one of the three that pleads for the relief of the suffering and downtrodden. She personifies freedom and liberty, therefore worthy to be called a saint."

In the late 1970s, Constantine worked on a series of paintings on the subject of American landmarks, including the St. Louis Gateway Arch, the White House and Niagara Falls. "Saint Liberty" was created in 1978 as part of this collection and was selected to be exhibited in the American Ambassador's residence in Athens, Greece, during the 2004 Olympics. It also was selected for a New York exhibit celebrating the centennial of the Statue of Liberty in 1986.

Constantine says, "This is my seventh year in ArtPrize, and most years I have utilized my unique license plate format for my entries. This year, I realized I should combine this painting with a partial quote from the plaque on the base of the statue. Then I added the Matthew [25:35] quote which I considered to be very appropriate today. I hope that the quotes respond to people's feelings about caring for others." ■

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*Debbie Michel, Lake Union Conference associate Communication director, and Gillian Panigot, Andrews University Media Communication manager.*



Jean-Irès Michel