

Penn State Cancer Institute

Arts in Health

VITAL ARTS



Creating a Community of Self Care



PennState Health

Center Stage

Arts in Health

Address and location

Penn State College of Medicine
Department of Humanities
MC: H134
Room: C1747
500 University Drive
P. O. Box 850
Hershey, PA 17033

Phone

(717)531-6421

Meet the staff

Claire de Boer

Director of Center Stage and
The Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine
cdeboer@pennstatehealth.psu.edu

Betsy Blyler

Coordinator for Artistic Enhancement
eblyler@pennstatehealth.psu.edu

Keeley McCue

Penn State Cancer Institute Events Coordinator
kmccue@pennstatehealth.psu.edu

Kerry Royer

Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine
and Center Stage Assistant
kroyer@pennstatehealth.psu.edu

Lorna Davis

Center Stage Assistant
ldavis@pennstatehealth.psu.edu

Center Stage Hershey Arts in Health offers free art workshops to Penn State Cancer Institute patients and their caregivers each week. These workshops are designed for all levels and abilities. This series of workshops offers the opportunity to Penn State Cancer Institute patients and caregivers to relax, pleasantly distract themselves and build community with each other, using the arts as a vehicle. The workshops are not taught by therapists nor are they offered as therapy; we deliberately choose accomplished artists who are excellent teachers and lead engaging projects in order to keep the workshops non-clinical and fresh. The series is based on the belief that thoughtfully-chosen artistic engagement is an integral part of health and well-being.





Creative Writing with Melissa Greene

Write from the Heart

These uplifting, be-who-you-are workshops awaken the creative spirit, gently, without intimidation. Taught in an atmosphere of warmth, whimsy, and trust, they are a safe haven for experienced and first-timers, alike, especially those who long to write more freely, by overcoming perfectionism and self-doubt. There are no grades, grammar, or competition; no punctuation, spelling, or red pen. For writing, without fear, has the power to console, illuminate, and heal.

Melissa Greene



Melissa Greene is a full-time fiction writer, poet, and writing coach, devoted to bringing out the best in creative people. Fascinated with writing as a therapeutic tool, she created Write From The Heart Creative Writing Workshops, in 2001, to share her belief that the act of writing—made simple—promotes joy, mindfulness, and calm. She teaches adults, children and teens, collaborates with schools and therapists; and leads workshops for cancer patients and caregivers, at the Milton S. Hershey Penn State Cancer Institute and the Lancaster General Health Ann B. Barshinger Cancer Institute, Pennsylvania.

www.writefromtheheart.us



Jenny Wren, My Mermaid Friend

By Kerri Carpenter

Long before texting, we wrote notes to each other, all day every day, passing them in the hallways between classes, in study halls, and at lunch. We were in middle school, a time of angst and possibility and hormones gone wild. In our notes, Jenny and I talked of boys and homework and football games and dances and sleepovers and shopping and music. We shared our deepest secrets, made each other laugh and, sometimes, made each other cry. We had nicknames for all of our friends, but our nicknames for each other were my favorites. I was “Ker Bear,” and she was “Jenny Wren.”

I met Jenny at Brownie camp in 1970, when we were 9 years old. We were in different troops, from different towns, but we bonded instantly and were inseparable during that week at Camp Cornwall. We went for hikes and made “sit-upons” out of wallpaper remnants and sang silly songs in rounds and made s’mores and banana boats. I felt like I had known Jenny forever. We were kindred spirits.

On the last day of camp, we exchanged phone numbers and promised to call one another to make plans to meet at the community pool. I was the talker, Jenny was much more introverted. Our phone conversations mostly consisted of me talking and Jenny listening, but we called each other constantly that summer.

When we met at the pool for the first time, we hugged and giggled and talked about the fun things we had done since camp. We were mermaids that summer, spending countless hours underwater pretending that was where we lived, as we were, after all, mermaids. We ate French fries from white paper cones and hung around the jukebox where the cool high-school kids played (fantastic) 70’s music.

That summer of 1970 was the beginning of a lifelong friendship for Jenny and me. To me, Jenny was perfect. She was tall, blue-eyed and willowy, with a quiet sense of grace about her. When she smiled, her clear blue eyes danced. Her shyness was sometimes mistaken for aloofness, but the truth was that she was funny and self-deprecating and insecure like the rest of us. Jenny and I did everything together and even dressed alike in middle school, shopping together for identical outfits at places like the Lemon Frog, Feel Fine, and Ormond’s.

Weekends were spent at Jenny's house or mine, and we spent many hours listening to Neil Sedaka, Frankie Valli, and Olivia Newton-John. We loved playing Clue and eating sawdust sundaes and Roma pizza on the square. We loved the mall and Twin Kiss and Thrift Drug, where we bought sky blue nail polish, Sea & Ski (spearmint!) lip balm, and Dr. Scholl's (wooden!) sandals.

In Mr. Firestone's 8th grade social studies class, in 1975, we had to memorize the U.S. Presidents in pairs, and recite them aloud in front of the class while being timed. Jenny and I won the prize for saying the Presidents faster than any other pair in our class. We weren't really surprised when we won, as we were so in-step, in-sync, sometimes it felt like we were the same person, the way that only best girlfriends can feel. And we also thought it helped that we dressed identically that day, in tan corduroy bell-bottoms and what we called our "people shirts," because we thought the abstract design looked like little people.

I have a dog-eared photo of us at our Freedom Fair in 1976, a bi-centennial themed carnival we planned with our 9th grade team. We're wearing tube tops, gauze shirts, and painter pants, our uniform that year. We're laughing in the photo, working at the donut stand, heads thrown back, sun in our hair. That was one of so many magical days.

In High School, Jenny and I slowly drifted apart as teenage girls do. We each gravitated toward those who shared our new and ever-shifting passions. We were still friends, but our circles had expanded to allow others in. We still have many shared memories of those years, parades and football games and bonfires, homecoming and prom and all of the associated drama. The time the boy she was dating broke up with her to go out with me and told her to just take off his class ring and give it to me (she threw it at me). Ditching school for Party Pond and hoping our mothers wouldn't ask us why our hair was wet when we got home. We share memories of graduation and senior week in Wildwood, New Jersey, college, and our first real jobs. We seemed to always reconnect at least once every summer for a day at HersheyPark and I have many strips of blurry, black and white pictures from the photo booths to prove it.

Over 45 years, Jenny and I have shared all manner of joys and sorrows in life...childhood, adolescence, dating, girlfriend drama, careers, college, marriage, babies, divorce, and new relationships. We've come together and grown apart. We each had 2 daughters. We exchanged Christmas cards. Life got busy, and we lost touch.

I hadn't spoken with Jenny in several years when, this April, I was going through some old photos and found one of Jenny and me with a few high school friends having lunch at the former Dimitri's Restaurant in Hershey in 1990. I posted it to Facebook and commented, "Look at our big 90's hair!" It garnered lots of "likes" and comments.

Shortly after posting the photo, I received a private Facebook message from our friend Betsy. She had set up a "group" in Facebook Messenger and included 9 of us...Deb, Laurelyn, Cyndi, Babs, Debbie, Stacie, Jodie, Missy, and me, lifelong friends now living all over the country. She asked whether anyone had spoken with Jenny lately. No one had. Betsy, with so much intuition and grace, felt compelled to call her. Her next message to the group was heartbreaking.

"Jenny has cancer," it read.

It was inflammatory breast cancer (IBC), a rare and aggressive form of the disease. She was diagnosed the day before her 54th birthday.

As we worried together on Facebook, and inundated our friend Missy, an Oncology Nurse, with questions about IBC, we knew that we needed and wanted to do something special for Jenny, but struggled with how to approach it.

Jenny has always been very private, preferring not to share much about the many difficult times she has endured through the years. She was never big on hugging or crying or heart-to-heart talks, preferring to keep her relationships casual, happy, and easy. We wanted to acknowledge her illness in a supportive and loving way while honoring her privacy. Betsy decided to just call her, and asked Jenny whether she could share her address with some old friends who wanted to send cards. She said yes. And thank you.

A plan quickly formed...we would flood Jenny with love and comfort from all over the country. Every week, 2 of us would send her something special...flowers; whoopie pies; jewelry with messages of strength and hope; "F Cancer" t-shirts; chocolate-covered strawberries; books; bubble bath...with cards, letters, and text messages with healing thoughts and prayers. We became mama bears, ferociously surrounding our Jenny and making sure she knew she was loved, cared for, and never, ever alone.

We decided we needed a group name. We had lots of ideas. And then it came to me. Jen's Wrens, I said. That's our group name. Jenny would remember it and it would remind her of easier times. Times when everything seemed possible, when we felt invincible, when all that stretched before us were lifetimes of possibility.

So every card, every gift, every message was from Jen's Wrens...not one of us, but all of us, forever friends now scattered throughout the country with one common thread - our love for one of our own.

In May, my friend Deb and I met Jenny for dinner. She looked beautiful in a long blue skirt and cardigan. She looked exactly the same to me. A bit older, of course, but we are all older. And a little bit worried, but who wouldn't be? She showed her chemo port to Deb and me that night, but quickly steered the conversation to our lives rather than hers. Driving home that night, I realized we'd barely spoken of the cancer. There were just too many better things to talk about.

In July, I hosted a picnic for all of the Wrens. For many, it was the first time seeing Jenny in years. It was as though time and distance evaporated. We didn't miss a beat, talking, laughing, and taking lots of pictures. Jenny's daughters came, now 21 and 23, and every bit as pretty and sweet as their mama. Our friend Laurelyn played her guitar and sang for us. It was a wonderful day that I've locked in my heart forever.

We created a GoFundMe account and raised money to help relieve some of the financial burden for Jenny's family.

In October, Jen's Wrens went to Annapolis where our friend Cyndi has a house on the Chesapeake Bay. Jenny's love, Joe, drove her all the way to Annapolis to make sure she got there safely. It was a rainy, windy weekend which mostly kept us inside, but we didn't mind. The view of the water was an antidote to the collective fear and worry that was always present, just beneath the surface. We laughed, ate way too much good food, drank great wine, played games, and talked and talked and talked. Jenny had lost her hair to chemo by then, but it was easy to overlook. She was still beautiful and radiant. She brought a cake that said, "Friends don't let friends face cancer alone." It had a picture of what was supposed to be a small blue wren but turned out to be a huge red cardinal. We laughed about that. She brought us all gift bags with a bottle of wine and a wine glass in each, as thanks for our support. The irony was not lost on us...the one among us who was sick and scared and in pain came bearing gifts. And joy.

Jenny spent most of December in the hospital due to side effects from chemotherapy. She was unable to eat and lost 15 pounds. Our dear friend Deb, a busy restaurant manager who worked most evenings, steadfastly made the trek to spend mornings at Jenny's bedside. Some days, privately and out of Jenny's line of sight, she would comfort Jenny's parents and sister, letting them cry the tears they didn't want Jenny to see.

When Jenny told Deb the week before Christmas that she had been unable to do any shopping for her family, Deb sprang into action. She put the word out to all of the Wrens, from Pennsylvania to New Jersey to Idaho, asking us to buy as many gift cards as we could afford and to send them to her pronto. Within days, with over \$1,000 worth of gift cards, Deb and I assembled a gift card tree for Jenny and her family. We delivered it the day after she was discharged from the hospital.

Jenny was both surprised and speechless. She kept saying, "You guys," shaking her head and smiling from ear to ear. After weeks in the hospital, she was very thin and looked so tiny to me. But her blue eyes were shining with joy, and she had taken care to put on a pretty red sweater that matched her plaid flannel pajama pants, and her hair was growing back. Lovely as ever.

Jenny and her family were just getting ready to decorate their Christmas tree, which they had postponed until Jenny was home to help. We stayed just long enough to give Jenny our gift and chat briefly, so as not to tire her out. She showed us the blue afghan that our friend Jodie crocheted and sent from Idaho, telling us how she loves to wrap herself up in it for naps.

The pictures we took that night show Jenny with her arms wrapped tightly around Deb and me, despite being so fragile. When we said goodbye, we hugged...long, hard hugs. I think it was the first time in our 45 years of friendship that I ever hugged Jenny and was the first to let go.

Jenny is very sick. She has sought a second opinion and inquired about clinical trials. She remains hopeful and positive, while knowing she is fighting for her life. Her focus is on trying to keep her daughters, parents, sister, and Joe from worrying too much. Her strength is, at the same time, remarkable and typical.

I don't know what is next for Jenny. I know that I can't imagine a world without her in it. From Brownie camp to disco, from reciting the presidents to our big 90's hair, our friendship has been one of the anchors of my life. My best memories of childhood and adolescence include her. So, I will love her. I will pray for her. I will join with Jen's Wrens to shower her with love, gratitude, comfort, peace. Life is uncertain, at once beautiful and terrifying. Still, in a world where there are no guarantees, of this one thing I am certain - I am grateful beyond all measure for having known and loved Jenny Wren, my mermaid friend.

Postscript:

Jenny passed from this life into the next in July of 2016, just 15 months after her diagnosis. She faced death as she faced life: with grace, courage, and, impossibly, optimism. She lives on in my heart, my mind and, best of all, in my dreams where it's always summer, we're always laughing, and anything is possible for a couple of mermaids like us.



For Jared By Kerri Carpenter

There are people who come into your life and become wonderful friends, and then there are people who become friends who become family. Their lives and yours become inextricably woven together...through youth, adolescence, marriages, pregnancies, promotions, divorces, parenthood, heart-break, empty nests, bad luck, good luck, holidays, and simple days. Your lives are so entwined that sometimes you take their presence for granted. You're busy, they're busy. Busy, busy.

Then tragedy strikes and one of your own is gone. Not your child by birth, but by heart. By proxy. By knowing and loving them since before they were born and every day thereafter. By watching them grow, celebrating their successes, encouraging them, giving them their space. Laughing and crying with their parents as you all try to navigate this thing called parenthood, which is at once scary, joyous, unpredictable, and sometimes just really, really hard.

Toasting Christmas morning with our growing extended family, spending lazy summer days on Raystown Lake or Bob's Lake, fishing, boating, tubing. Ringing in the New Year at a little cabin in the woods by toasting marshmallows over a bonfire. Rodeo night, hiking, scary movies...basketball and volleyball and swimming and swinging. Fighting. And then making up. Keeping the neighborhood safe during Friday night crime watch, every Friday, for years and years...growing older, growing wiser, growing together.

Not my child by birth, but my child as the part of my family that began with friends. Jared, you were loved, you were precious, you were extraordinary. Sleep well, beautiful boy, and watch over us all. I love you. You are my family. For always.

The Veins of Life By Jay



When flesh is gone
the veins remain
a blueprint of
what might have been.
Osmosis days-
synthetic nights
and then it's Fall.
We start again.

The Sound of the Blades By Jay

For many people, smell may evoke the most powerful memories. I confess there are a few smells which trigger flashbacks, but for me the most impact comes from the distinctive sound of a Huey helicopter. The venerable UH1-D.
Not helicopters in general-Life Lion is a passing curiosity, catching my attention like any shiny object might. State Police helicopters I notice, then dismiss. I live in the flight path for many of Indiantown Gap's training sorties of Chinooks and various other military craft.
But the distinctive sound of the Huey stops me in my tracks-in a few seconds I am back in the jungle of Vietnam, in the heat and the wet. You've no doubt heard that in a moment of peril a person's life can flash before their eyes? Well for me it's a whole series of memories which flash through my consciousness. Air assault, extraction, food, water, mail, fire support all tumble in my head.
We relied on the Huey for our lives nearly every day I spent in combat. The sound of the UH1D still takes me back to Vietnam, even 50+ years later.
Yes, the smell of a swamp or an open air Asian market or the perfume of my first love can bring back strong memories but they are singular-one place-one person but not a whole year. That's what the sound of a Huey does to me. It opens the scenes from a whole production; from Act 1 scene 1 to the next to last curtain call.
Some day I'll write the whole script but for now the memories stirred up by the blades will have to do.

Soul Stretching By Julie Moffitt

The milky-white froth of a wave splashed gently up onto the beach, bringing with it an array of items; bits of shell, chunks of stone that had been eroded smooth from years of tide-tumbles.
The beach is lonely, sometimes even when filled with people. The blue-green water and the stones and shell-bits speak of ancient lives and earth rhythms much longer than the ephemeral lives of the humans frolicking in the waves.
Lonely, but majestic. Standing on the beach you feel a part of something much larger than your own daily fears and trials. It is a place to stretch out your soul and at the same time come to rest within.

Mr. Jello By Julie Moffitt

Wiggle, wiggle, dance in bold red,
or transparent orange, golden yellow
Every vibration moves you –
you, the clear sensitive one
Sometimes you wait in the cold
no one around quite like you –
surrounded by a forest of feasts:
succulent tomatoes, leafy lettuce, tender beef
You wait for the people to come
You, whose soul is fed
by ruminants' hooves
Knowing the dessert hour is your destiny



Sometimes There's Nothing You Can Do

By Julie Moffitt

Recently my husband and I were at a gathering at his parents' house, and my mother-in-law took me upstairs to show me some watches. As my in-laws are elderly, and facing a move to a simpler place, they have begun to weed through some of their belongings and give away some of the things they know they won't need.

My mother-in-law had about ten watches – way more than she needed – and suggested I pick one. I did not currently own a watch, so I picked one out that I thought was pretty, and thanked her. Then she opened a trunk and said, "I want you to see something."

It was a quilt she had made many years ago, and she told me its story: "It was when I was pregnant with Eric [my husband]. Of course, it was my first baby. I got very sick, and had to spend a lot of time sitting down. I didn't have much to do, so I made this quilt, thinking that I would save it, and many years later give it to his first-born."

I was struck simultaneously by the beauty and the tragedy of her revelation. "And then," I said, "we didn't have any kids."

"No," she said quietly.

I couldn't tell what she was feeling, and I didn't quite know what to say, but I felt I had to say something. "That's beautiful. Could you give it to one of the grandkids? They're gonna have babies pretty soon."

"I guess so," she said noncommittally.

I couldn't feel guilty. I had never wanted children. But I wondered what it must have been like for her, keeping that precious treasure for so many years, only to find that the recipient she had chosen for it would never be.



Cancer

By Julie Moffitt

The word "cancer" sounds scary. It evokes memories of people who have suffered, whether they be friends, family, or favorite celebrities. It triggers anticipated pains, indignities, disruption of life, and, at worst, of course, death.

But it feels like it shouldn't have to be that way. Life changing events are always opportunities. Kenny Werner, the jazz pianist, says "There are no wrong notes, only opportunities." He was speaking of improvisation, but it's an apt metaphor for life.

What doors did/does cancer open for me? Growth, heightened spirituality, a reinforced view of the majesty and shortcomings of mainstream medicine. A confirmation that mind-body therapies can help you get through. An overwhelming appreciation for how amazingly nice people can be, and how much they care, when you thought they wouldn't.

Believe it or not, it feels like a new world – a better world.



Mountain Contours

By Don Kerstetter

Prompt: Rumpled foil reminded me of mountain contours

Mountains - what wonderful relief from the boredom of fields, flatlands and deserts. Mountains rise up to expose the Earth's history with all the wonderful rocks, fossils, and rich earth derived from critters buried long ago which have come back to help life grow again. As the mountains get higher, there are exposed more incredible formations providing simple recreational challenges for men and women as well as providing important life-supporting functions. Most importantly is the channeling of water off the mountains and into creeks, rivers, and deltas on which man has built homes, towns, and cities. The young mountains are majestic and inspiring; they grow into old run-down mountains with serenity and a comfortable beauty – not unlike the human drama.

Certainty and Uncertainty By Don Kerstetter

Prompt: "What are you certain and uncertain about in your life?"

The older I get (71 now) and particularly as a cancer victim, I am less certain about everything and it makes life simpler and more enjoyable. As a trained physicist I have spent many years in studies and professional life dealing with questions of "why". These days, I don't care much about why and deal mainly with what is – now.

My take away from physics is that most conclusions or answers have accuracy or validity limitations in that they have probabilities of being or becoming true. This admits to the fallacy of certainties in my life. For example, if I have a dentist appointment in two weeks, I might say that I am 90% certain to make it to the chair; the remaining 10% allows for things like car trouble, sickness, weather, etc. Conversely, there may be a low probability of eating octopus (that I like!) in the next few weeks. My life is so much easier admitting to and accepting its uncertainties.

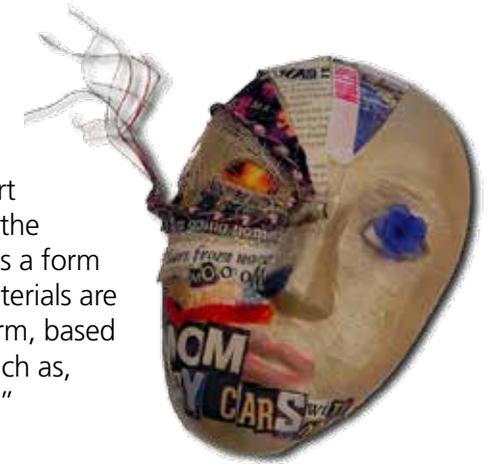
And besides, it takes too much time and energy to maintain beliefs and dogmas that rely on ancient and questionable history or conclusions of others. My limited time is much better and more enjoyably spent experiencing and engaged in my "now", the only place where life happens!

A great physicist, Faraday, said, "Proportion belief with evidence," and I would even add probabilities to any evidence I experience and therefore also to any resulting "belief".

Mask Making Workshop

with Mark B. Stephens, MD

This session focuses on identity exploration using the ancient cultural art of mask making. Participants are given the opportunity to create their own mask as a form of reflective expression. A variety of materials are provided to enhance a human mask form, based around a thought provoking prompt such as, "uncovered; the face behind the mask."



Mark B. Stephens, MD



Mark is a Professor of Family Medicine and Community Medicine at Penn State. He recently retired after a 23 year career serving as a family physician in the US Navy. He is working at the PSU Regional Campus in University Park. His professional interests include physician wellness, exercise medicine, information technology and identity formation in medical education.



Joyful Movement Workshop

with Judith Sachs

This series offers cancer patients and their caregivers the opportunity to move with others, as a way to enjoy the rediscovery of body and breath. Dancing in a chair, supported by holding the chair or standing free, they move to music from Doo Wap to Motown and from Classical to Folk. These workshops are designed to help improve breathing, enhance self-confidence and grace, and most of all foster joy.

JUDITH SACHS

Judith is a trained professional dancer, founder of Anyone Can Dance® Teacher of Dance for Parkinsons®. The daughter and granddaughter of physicians, she is delighted to share her joy of movement with dancers of all abilities and backgrounds.

Judith is a Lifetime Arts Teaching Artist.



Visual Art Workshop with Mary Fusco, artist/painter

Led by guest artist Mary Fusco, patients and their caregivers learn basic visual art principals, which they put into practice creating their own masterpieces. Step-by-step instruction guides them through the completion of a personalized painting by the workshop's end. The soothing art of painting complements the healing process nicely in this series, where there are no mistakes only opportunities to create.

Mary R. Fusco



Mary R. Fusco is a self-directed artist who works primarily with acrylics. Mary's fondest joy is to paint for treatment and healing spaces. As a volunteer for Center Stage at Penn State Hershey Medical Center, she paints soothing scenes and colorful abstracts on individual ceiling tiles for patient rooms and treatment areas. A resident of Mount Joy, Pa,

Mary works professionally as creative director for the Lancaster-based furniture store, INTERIORS HOME. She is an ordained deacon of St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church in Harrisburg, PA, where she also serves on the praise, arts, and ministry training teams. She is a founding member of 61 Arts, a Christian painting group based in Central Pennsylvania.



Yoga Workshop

with Stephanie Trump-Johnson, MS, MA, ERYT-500

This beginner level yoga class, focuses on relaxing one's body and mind. A series of simple breathing practices, movements, and stretches allow the muscles and joints to release tension and the mind to experience a deeper sense of calm and well-being. No yoga skills or experience is required and all abilities are accommodated, as modifications to the poses are encouraged based on range of mobility and comfort level. This workshop is a safe place for exploration and discovery, where learning and listening to one's body take the forefront.



Weaving and Mandala Workshops

with Judeth Pekala Hawkins

In this weaving workshop, students are encouraged to take artistic risks as they discover their personal style. Making art requires us to be totally present with process. Delving into the depths of the present moment and using that time and space to create, is a restorative process. Mats, bags, and bookmarks are all woven on personally handmade cardboard looms in a rhythmic fashion.



Mandalas are circular designs, with a center around which revolves an organized, repeating design. In Sanskrit, the word mandala means "circle". The circular design of the Mandala represents wholeness and symbolizes unity in the World and unity in our personal lives. Participants are introduced to Mandala design, learn its history and uses, and then create their own mandalas. The language of color and shape, the art principles of balance and emphasis, as well as new techniques with colored pencils are also gained as the Mandalas are created.

Judeth Pekala Hawkins

Judeth is a professional visual artist whose intensely personal work and unmistakable style has been recognized and awarded throughout the Mid Atlantic states. She balances the solitude of personal studio work with the excitement of creating alongside others as a teaching artist. She is rostered with the PA Council for the Arts and holds a certificate from the National Center for Creative Aging. www.judethpekalahawkins.com

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