



Travelling Companions Create Art

Reflections on a Journey Through the Artist's Way

by Nicola Burnell



In July of this year, I was honored to co-curate an exhibit at the Guyer Barn validating my conviction that **The Artist's Way**, by Julia Cameron, is a book that changes lives. This exhibit illustrated the process experienced by several students who recently completed a twelve-week course with me.

The artwork on display explored the various aspects of this dynamic program designed to help the students discover and recover their Creative Selves. Samples of their artwork, photography, poetry and other musings captured the essence of this liberating journey.

"Why did I join the Artist's Way group?" asks artist and innkeeper, Diane Johnson. "I felt stuck in one place with my art. Then I realized I was stuck in life, not filled with my usual enthusiasm and motivation. When I would wake in the morning I felt a dark cloud hanging over me and to get through it I would get right out of bed and into the morning routine. Did the Artist's Way help me? YES!!! It was amazing. I am so thankful I made the commitment."



Artists Barbara Hersey and Diane Johnson
with Nicola in front of Diane's white line block prints.

Seeing their artwork on the walls, while understanding what it took for each student to create it, was one of the most satisfying experiences of my career as a teacher. My sentiments were echoed by many who attended the opening reception.

Artist [Suzanne M. Packer](#) shared this on our **Facebook page**: "I have never seen the Guyer Barn looking so good. The show was awesome and definitely not your typical Cape Cod painting show. What creativity has come from these women."

The Journey begins with curiosity and courage.



Photograph by Joan Johnston Stone

One major misconception about **The Artist's Way** is that it's a program for artists – it's not! It is a process that can liberate anyone who feels stuck or in need of change in their life. It teaches the "art of creative living" by nudging students to examine what drives and inspires them.

"When I signed up to take the workshop, last spring, I really had no idea what it was," reflects Debbie Hagen. "Was I surprised to find that my hidden and blocked creativity would blossom and grow in just twelve weeks."

There is a sense of growth and movement experienced by many students who consciously open up to their own potential as creative beings. They show faith in their creativity and take creative risks, which in turn lead to creative empowerment.

Like all of the students who take this journey, Debbie embraced the non-negotiable "Basic Tools": the daily Morning Pages, weekly Artist's Date and Tasks that are listed at the end of each chapter. The exhibit showcased the students' responses to these tools, while also highlighting their resistance and epiphanies.

The Morning Pages are three pages of stream-of-consciousness writing, everyday, no matter how grumpy, distracted or tired one feels. This process taught the students how to silence their internal critic, or "censor," that often crushes creativity before it has a chance to grow. Through this dialogue with their creative self, they slowly discovered what drains and what drives them.



A collage of the Morning Pages, by Michelle Olem, shows the cumulative power of this block-busting tool with the words "let go, reach out, commit, move on, find joy."

As one student explains, "Morning pages, 3 every day, revealed issues to me that, once I recognized them, I could tackle. The thought process that I experienced was so creative. No one told me what to do. I was guided to figure things out for myself. I feel so much better; my energy has returned and I feel motivated and creative. It's a big commitment but it's worth it."



Debbie found herself confronting her censor in the Morning Pages. Her depiction of her "creative monster" was a child-like drawing of a big-mouthed octopus creature with long tentacles. Once she knew "who" she was dealing with, her work to silence her critic and heal her inner "artist child" began in earnest.

"I discovered a dimension of myself that had been stunted at an early age," she explains, "but with nurturing and freedom to express itself, began to grow and flourish. I learned that "art" and "creativity" are present in all of us, but in varying and unique ways. Each of us has the capacity to be creative in our own way, and learning to accept this creative state for my own self, rather than any external influence, was the gift of the workshop for me. I came to learn so much about myself through the process, and that the process of learning is truly what makes each of us an artist."

Many students began the process believing they didn't have much creativity in them, yet they still felt drawn to the program. I watched them walk through a doorway that led towards self-knowledge and motivation, where they discovered the wealth of creativity they were born with. The Artist's Date is as a tool to help students acquaint themselves with the more spontaneous, fun side of their nature. Several of the pieces in the show were borne from such playful excursions.



**Artist Date inspired art:
Bumps River, Pastel, by Barabra Hersey
The Magic's in Me, Wand, by Diane McDonough
Spring Dance, Vitreous Flux, by Nicola Burnell**

Diane McDonough was initially reluctant to believe that she could tap into her creativity. When, in Week Two, she gleefully produced a handmade 'wand' called "The Magic's in Me", adorned with purple and green tulle, and strings of tiny pearls, I knew she was ready to let go of her fears and blossom.



Her piece "Breaking the Habit" illustrates how Diane discarded the internal "censor" that had held her creativity hostage for decades. "Because of the encouragement in the Artist's Way workshop sessions my 'inner child' feels free, not inhibited, not self-conscious, which is something new to me," says the poet and emerging artist.

Diane became so free, in fact, that she produced copious examples of art over the 12 weeks as she worked through the

Tasks.

Lighting up like a Christmas tree, her eyes shone with the confidence growing within her as she explained the inspiration behind a collage plate, a bookmark made from a photograph she'd redesigned in the Picasso photo software program, and an altered book. At our opening reception, Diane read several of her poems, including the emotional *To Brigit of the Healing Places*.



Collect 5 Leaves, Bookmark, by Diane McDonough
Inspired by a Task in Week 6

While some Tasks feel like homework, others take you to the beach, the woods or a new gallery. They are designed to build resolve to complete the course, while gradually challenging the student to set goals and make changes. The combination of reading the chapters each week, writing the Morning Pages, taking the Artist's Dates and doing the Tasks gradually pushes the student toward inner and outer transformation.



I could see this transformation hanging on the walls of the Guyer Barn. It was wonderful to observe my students discussing their art with family, friends and strangers at the reception.

[Discover The Artist's Way](#) has always been one of my favorite classes to teach, but the works these students produced confirmed my belief that we are ALL artists, in one way or another. We just need a little encouragement to come out of the shadows of our insecurities and fears.

When Johanne Kieffer began the Artist's Way she was looking for clarity and direction, trying to answer 'What now, what's next?' "The twelve weeks unfolded by doing the work, it kept me moving forward. The people drawn into this class seemed to organically come together and support each other in their creativity...There's no doubt that The Artist's Way pushed me forward, ready to launch into the next chapter of my life."



I Am Willing to Create, by Diane McDonough
Photographs by Johanne Kieffer and Karen Corcoran

The Journey Through the Artist's Way exhibit showed the potential of what we are all capable of when our creativity is

nurtured. "It was a feeling of joy and accomplishment, individually and collectively," reflects Johanne. "Our creative fires were lit and our journey had just begun."

Debbie cannot contain her enthusiasm. "The insightful view I have today is wonderful. I want to shout it out to everyone in the world. Today I am an artist and for the first time, ever, I feel the creativity within."

To see more photographs and comments from this exhibit [click here](#)

To learn more about the Artist's Way classes taught by Nicola Burnell please visit our [CWO classes page](#).

Photographs courtesy of Katie O'Sullivan, Diane McDonough, Johanne Kieffer and Nicola Burnell

Nicola Burnell is the Publisher and a contributing writer for this magazine. In addition to writing her own novel, she teaches novel writing classes through Nauset Community Education. As part of the Cape Women in the Community initiative, she also teaches a series of creativity development classes, including the Artist's Way, and several writing classes at Danton Studio and the Hyannis Arts Center at Guyer Barn. For details about these classes visit this [CWO Classes link](#).

Nicola has been a Reiki practitioner and Personal Empowerment workshop leader for over fifteen years. She is a member in Letters of the [National League of American Pen Women](#) and is Historian of the Cape Cod Branch.

Nicola is now offering a variety of FUN Events and Writing Retreats on Cape Cod. She will be offering Writing and Artist Retreats at [Casa della Quercia](#), an historic villa in Northern Tuscany, in the Spring of 2013.

For details about any of her Classes or Events email Nicola@CapeWomenOnline.com.

You can also follow her blog "[Nic's Novel Project](#)" and on [Twitter](#).

Nicola lives in Harwich with her two sons and several pets.