



Friends House Letter

*Friends House
Seniors Association*

December 2025

Creativity Creating Creations... Residents share their amazing creativity with us.



Sun on Snow by Judith Roark

Creativity Is Not What We Do, It Is How We Live

by Judith and Roger Roark

Jane Wheelwright, a Jungian analyst, said,
“Life and creativity are synonymous.”

We have always found creative ways to manifest what we want in our lives in relationships, children, homes, employment, recreation, travel, etc. Early in our life together, we articulated our process as “what we were Called to do.” Later we discovered David Whyte’s poetry and prose. He says, *“No path leads all the way. When you come to a crossroads, choose the path with heart. And when you get to the horizon, you will be several miles off course. Chose the path with heart.”* We were also guided by a process that is described by the road sign leading from the Sandy Spring Meeting House: *“As Way Opens.”*

We just completed hanging an art show through ArtSpace at Friends House. We also gave a presentation about how our conscious commitment to creativity has produced the visual art in our lives. Roger is always looking for the “WOW” factor in photography and Judith paints what moves her about the landscape or creates images of memories that are important to her. In choosing to pursue painting and photography, we have expanded our capacity to see creation in all its beauty.

Creativity is often thought of as limited to the performing or visual arts. However, creativity also involves knowing what we want and manifesting that in our lives. This often requires that we “think outside the box” and discover new and different ways of reaching our goals which enrich our lives.

Our partnership in creativity has also expanded and deepened our relationship and connection with each other and our broader community.



*Where the Trees Wear Sox, Yellowstone
National Park by Roger Roark*



Libby Davis 1948

An Unintentional Outcome

by Libby Davis

When I was about ten years old, Miss Lipscomb arrived in our community and attached herself to our family.

I don't know how it happened, but my gregarious father was the pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Spartanburg, SC and we often had new people arriving to be part of our lives.

Miss Lipscomb had a flair, dressed in exotic clothes and laughed with gusto. She was an artist and photographer with strange cameras and attachments. She loved taking photos of my sister and me especially when we were unaware of her presence. In my adult years, my mother often said, "I wonder why I allowed all that picture taking without any hesitation!"

As time went on, parents of our young friends saw her work, especially her artwork and suggested that she have an art class for children. This was arranged to take place weekly at our church. It was a small group, and I may have been the most excited of all. I really wanted to learn to paint like Miss Lipscomb but when I got to the class I was frustrated with myself repeatedly because everything I did appeared to me to be a failure. Finally, Miss Lipscomb said with all good intention, I'm sure, "Well Elizabeth, (I was given the nickname Libby in high school) you have many gifts; maybe this is not one of them.

I was secretly crushed because I loved art and wanted to be able to paint, but after that declaration by this person I so admired, a wall went up and to this day when I walk into any setting where painting is the focus, I become uneasy, freeze up and can't think of anything

to paint. I have found other ways to fill artistic longings, but I've also known from experience, that people especially children, can experience life-changing hurts by the most unintentional remarks.

Math and Creativity

by Kevin Caughlan

In 1998, after 30 years of teaching math, my wife and daughter visited my algebra class with a cake to celebrate thirty years of bad jokes and a little math teaching. I realized almost from the first year of teaching math that many students didn't seem too interested in math and so I started to make math interesting. For example, when I introduced the three ways of proving triangles congruent, I started with "three ways of getting peanut butter off the roof of your mouth." When I introduced polygons, I showed an angle wrecked on the side of the chalk board as a wrecked angle. It was through this that I realized that I had their attention. It worked. I also told one class that they needed to take notes. One smart aleck asked, "your jokes too?" My comment was "Especially my jokes. Because they always are used to introduce important ideas." It works! This came to my attention at a 20-year reunion when one of my former students asked me about the joke I used to introduce the Pythagorean Theorem to her Geometry class because her daughter was having trouble in her geometry class. I told her the punch line: The squaw on the hippopotamus hide was equal to the sons of the squaw on the other two hides. (I apologize for the racist comment.). One time, when introducing the trapezoid, I told the class that it was named that because it was named after the little known rodent called a zoid. I even had the biology teacher describe its habitat. One student believed me and she was a very gullible student. One of the other students

jumped up and drew a picture of it (Pavita McIntyre, Nancy's son.). Later that week, she realized that it was a joke. I still do that when tutoring.

Late August Zinnias

by Jim Hersey



Our zinnias grow ragged now,
a petal gone,
green leaves now
spot white,
round brown-rimmed holes.
Late August, they have had a
run,
But still
enough.

Enough for bees,
the bumble kind.
Enough for hummers
slurping by.
Goldfinches perch,
pick stamen stems.



Enough
for silver spotted
skippers

And sweet
swallowtails,
the pipestem and



the black-striped yellow
tigers
fluttering past.

Enough for
monarchs
Fuelling to fly
further South.
Enough.



Enough for deer twins,
bud-browsing by at night.
Perhaps with lavender next year,
Enough to carry on.

Enough to refill
vintage vases
round the rooms
Enough.



Bright variegated colors
blaze
to dazzle in late morning
sun,
and warm the fading day.
Enough.

Enough to share
with you.
Enough.



Problem Solving

by Nancy Rea

I've always been a bit of a kook. I guess I have a different way of looking at things than most people. While I have an interest in various types of art, I didn't inherit my father's artistic ability. But I have always had a reputation for creative problem solving.

When I was young, I put odd things together to build something new. Whenever my mother found weird things hooked together, she knew I had been at work. I got blamed for anything that was broken, even when I hadn't touched it.

When I took geometry in High school, my teacher often questioned my solutions, but after I explained, he always admitted that it made sense and was correct, just not what he expected.

Shortly after my sister married, she and my cousin decided to make cupcakes in her new apartment. They had the cake batter mixed before she realized that she didn't have a cupcake pan or even cake pans. They sat and looked at each other and then one of them said, "What would Nancy do?" They thought about that and decided to make the cupcakes in teacups.

When my daughter was young, she had a habit of saying, "Mom, you need to fix..." whenever she didn't like what was going on at school. In fact, that habit led to my job in underage drinking prevention, when she complained about kids drinking at the high school parties she attended. When I worked in public health, I worked on topics that were emerging, including substance abuse prevention and emergency planning, and others depended on me to come up with creative ways to approach emerging needs.



Muppets I made for child therapists to use to make it easier to get children to talk about their issues

One project I worked on received an award from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government for the novel methods we used.

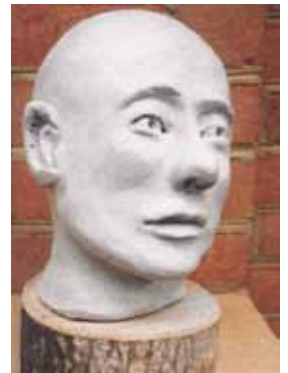
I still have people come to me for help in solving problems. One friend said she appreciates how, when I raise an issue, I usually also have a solution, rather than just a complaint.

Creativity at Friends House

by Hugh Corbin

In thinking about creativity for seniors I am astonished by what is happening and what has happened here at Friends House. There were many good things going on when we first came here. I was able to participate in group events like the FH Drummers, Wellspring Artists, Improvisation and the New Year's Amateur Shows.

On the individual level FH has also provided extraordinary support for individual achievement that has largely been unsung. As well as the remarkable exhibits of Wellspring Artists and Art Space I will always cherish the memory of the amazing sculptural head Jay Pease produced in a class with Judith Simmons. His was just one example of unexpected achievement that has been made by many residents in our community.



Along with his paintings, Ted Riley's plethora of political posters grew out of the weekly demonstration at 108 and Georgia Avenue. I'm sure the creation of MaryAnne Belle's jewelry, Julie Bates' woven headbands, Rich Liversidge's photography and Jackie Cohan's pottery were fostered and sustained by their being at FH.

It is easier to see individual accomplishment in visual art projects although creativity abounds in every corner of our community from woodworking and gardening to technology and caregiving. In fact it seems that FH is a place where recognition and fulfillment can be common place. We have built a community of sharing and appreciation at every level and for every person.

I cannot imagine that I could have had a retrospective exhibition of my paintings in any other place. My interest in writing and poetry certainly grew out of being here. Commonality, connection and open sharing are vital and even essential parts of life at FH. An environment that promotes the possibility for individual fulfillment and gratification in one's closing years.

Ode to a Bullfrog

by Clare Margiotta



Not just any bullfrog.
It is said you are common.
I say you are most uncommon.
You let me into your space.
Thank you for that.

You and your kin offered
Evening serenades,
Singing me to sleep.

You sat so still while I took photos of you.
So still.

I painted your portrait.
It's a nice likeness.

Here I am years later remembering
Our time together.
Some neighbors complained
About your chorus keeping them awake.
I found your basso profundo so soothing.

Just being there was a joy.
Why do I recall those moments
With you with such wonder?
Sharing space with another
Living creature.
Being present.

Per Wikipedia:
You are male.
Lower jaw yellow,
Tympana larger
Than the eye.
I see this watercolor and
Remember.

Time stood still.
Hard to find words.
There was the humpback whale
And the musk ox and the green
Heron and the little female
Cardinal.

But with you I have
This memory. A portrait.
Still.
Patient.

Stop, Look, & Listen

by Libby Schleichert

Nature offers us humans new perspectives on how to live creatively and joyfully.



For instance, the maple startles us with its brilliance, teaching us to look for beauty along the most drab and ordinary of paths.

The electric yellows of the American beech urge us to stand tall and shine even when the surrounding world can overwhelm us with its towering bleakness.



Sometimes, a stray zinnia stalk survives early frosts and sends up shoots topped by dazzling flowers well into November. “Try and stop me!” it seems to be saying to any and all adversity.



The dawn redwood (on the left in the photo), echoes the line from “Amazing Grace,” “I once was lost, but now I’m found.” Dawn redwoods thrived on earth 50 million years ago, but then were long considered extinct. That

is until scientists in the 1940s discovered some growing in south-central China. Today, the dawn redwood is a common landscaping tree in much of North America. Though related to our redwoods (Sequoia), it is not an evergreen. Its feathery, fern-like foliage turns red-bronze in the fall and drops to the ground.

The black locust dances: Its branches bend, twist down, then up, playfully rising toward the Light. It may be an old tree, missing several limbs, with its bark deeply grooved or wrinkled, but it refuses to act its age. Perhaps we should listen?



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<i>Convener:</i>	Kendall Anthony
<i>Editorial:</i>	Marty Hale, Barbara Brubeck
<i>Photography:</i>	Nancy Rea
<i>Design & Layout:</i>	Liane Luini

Comments on Creating and Creativity

by Ellen Atkinson

Today I accidentally came across several comments on creating and creativity by former resident Mary B. Birckhead from “A Painter’s Palette” 1988.

Why a Painter? people ask.

Because I have to be, I have to paint. It is for the same “reason” a musician makes music; creators work in their own special medium... It takes a lot of time. It is hard work.

Some call it a gift, a talent to develop. It is not magic... I have watched closely, listened intently, thought I’d found an explanation, and then I see only something more to be gotten onto canvas.

Mary died October 18, 1999 She was the author of *Adventures in the Wild at Friends House* (1987).

Dixiecats Jazz Band

by Wallace Watson

Talking on the phone with some family members recently, I mentioned that I once played bass fiddle in a jazz band.

“What?! Pop-Pop, you never told us that!”

Well, Cameron, here’s the story.

I grew up in a mostly musical family in South Carolina. My dad was a fine trombonist who played in an Army Reserve “Big Band” in the 1930s, which, along with three small children, seems to have kept him out of the WWII draft. He later toured the South with a civilian band, sang baritone in our Methodist choir, and anchored a barbershop quartet that rehearsed in our living room every Sunday



afternoon. Mother wasn’t especially musical, but she enjoyed it all from the kitchen, and both parents still found room in the budget for piano lessons and the big Schirmer Library of Classical Music.

My brother Tom abandoned the piano for trumpet and became a serious student of the greats: Harry James and Maynard Ferguson. I stayed with piano longer; my big moment was a Rachmaninoff recital piece at sixteen, with my sweetheart in the front row. But by sophomore year I quit lessons to join the football team. Dad wondered why but still came to every game.

My sister Mary outshone us all: perfect pitch, accompanist, piano teacher, accordionist, guitarist, and even leader of a ukulele band at her North Carolina summer place.

It was Tom who got me into my short-lived career as a bass fiddler. His teenage jazz band lost their bassist one summer while I was still in junior high. Tom volunteered me—though I had never touched a bass violin. Luckily, one of Dad’s quartet buddies lent me an old instrument and a few quick lessons. I taped my fingers against blisters, learned the easy bass lines, and was reassured often: “Close enough for jazz.”

We played Saturday-night dances at Elks Clubs and similar spots, where the dancers grew merrier, and fonder of our music, as the evening wore on.

Only near the end of my brief tenure did I learn our band had a name: The Dixiecats. I was pleased to be hanging out with guys who could so coolly and subtly mock the racist Dixiecrats who ran much of our state at the time. For a too-serious junior high schooler headed toward the ministry, it was a glimpse of a wider, livelier world—one I’m glad to have known, bass fiddle and all.



Do You Have Hidden Creativity?

by Nancy Rea

Since the new ArtSpace rooms opened last winter, some of us have been trying our hands (and minds) at new things. It is amazing to watch someone finding out that they have an artistic streak they were unaware of. Maybe they colored with their grandchildren but have now discovered they have a talent for creating art with pencils or watercolor paints, or papier mache'. Others are enjoying the physical sensations associated with exploring various media, without worrying about the need to create a finished work of art.

Whether you think you have a creative gene, or you just want to spend time distracted from the negatives impacting your life right now, ArtSpace is a great place to explore creativity and bring the benefits into your life. The rooms are comfortable, well lit, well supplied with materials, and have a large screen for watching how-to videos. Use the room on your own, participate in one of the activities listed on the calendar, or pull together a group of like-minded individuals and reserve the room. To reserve space contact Nancy Lark, Judith Farquhar or Nancy Rea.

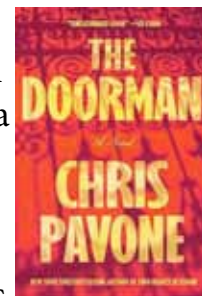
Several of us have noted that the people working on things are really concentrating. They are very focused on their projects and may even lose track of time. That is a good sign.

Come enjoy ArtSpace!

"The Doorman" by Chris Pavone

Book Review by Kerry Stoltzfus

"The Doorman" is a character driven thriller that takes place on one day and night at the Bohemia a famous apartment house on Central Park West. Chicky Diaz is the doorman at the center of the novel who treats the residents with respect and knows many of their secrets. He has his own challenges and we care for him as he struggles with medical debt after his wife's death.



Pavone write a story of class and privilege, race and inequality in contemporary New York City. Tension and even hatred builds between an ultra wealthy couple, Emily and Whit Longworth, and their secrets are eventually revealed. Chicky knows enough to be Emily's protector even to the point of bringing a gun to work for the first time. Outside the Bohemia up town a young black man has been killed by the police causing very different reactions from the working class staff and the wealthy residents.

We are also introduced to another resident Julian an art dealer dealing with personal issues and he makes a connection with Emily. It is revealed that Whit's business is actually arms dealing with certain foreign actors. Other characters, especially staff are portrayed with empathy as we learn about their lives working out of the basement of the building.

The Doorman like all good fiction allows us to explore a world unlike any we have experienced like living at the Bohemia and coming to know its ultra wealthy residents. Just as we come to know Chicky and his work that is most unlike any we have known.

The violence filled ending will send you back to reread the details and consider the resolution engineered by Chicky.