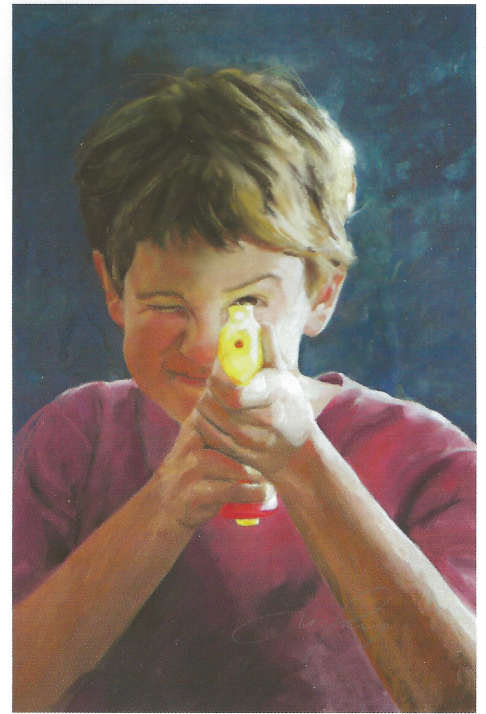






doing so was an integral part of the journey back to wellness and inner peace. This is the story of an award-winning, immensely talented painter and the event that nearly took that talent from her. But it is also a story of great courage, determination, and power. It is a terrible story, a wonderful story, and a story few will ever forget, because true artistic talent cannot be crushed by anyone or anything.



Hopeful and Grateful: *The Rebirth of an Artist*

by RONA MANN
Photos Jeffery Lilly

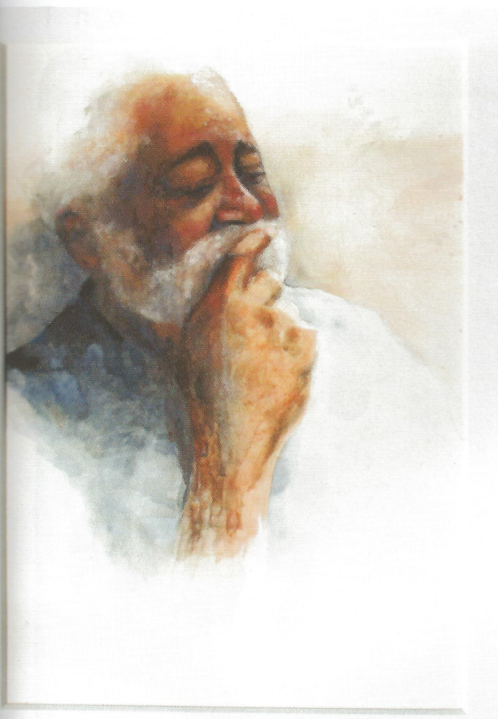
January 12, 2009 was a Monday, but the date had to be researched to confirm that fact. Judy Perry has all but forgotten the date that changed her life. She did it purposely because

"People call it an accident, but it wasn't an accident," says Judy Perry emphatically. "It was a collision caused by an individual who forever changed my life; and while she will always be in my life, I will not be her victim. I will not let her win."

It was January 2009, and Perry was the office manager at an Essex architecture firm. She was driving home after work. The weather was clear, the roads were dry, but the pediatric dental hygienist who slammed into her car was far from dry. All day long she had been drinking the sherry she kept stashed in her

locker as she worked on young children, and this was just another incident. There had been others. The police thought their equipment was faulty when she blew more than 4 times the legal limit on the Breathalyzer; however a





blood clot lodged in a severed artery, and with a deep brain concussion.

After a month at Yale, multiple surgeries performed by a dual team of orthopedic and neurological surgeons, Judy Perry came home to her old house and her new life. "I had lost my job, my savings, my retirement. I had a fused neck, spinal cord and nerve damage, and cognitive issues caused by the deep brain injury. I was terrified."

A physical therapist suggested she try to start painting again, but Judy wondered how this was possible when she couldn't even move her arms. Although she was born in Connecticut, Perry had spent most of her early life in California, studying fine arts and special education. She moved back and settled in Old Saybrook in 1995. Feeling dissatisfied with

second test confirmed the original finding. And Perry sat screaming for help in her car, temporarily paralyzed at impact from her broken neck down, her collarbone shattered, a



working in the corporate world, she turned to what had always fulfilled her...painting. Working with water colors and pastels and oil wash and pastels, she decided to try her luck at entering art shows. The Essex Art Association was her first attempt, and she won the top award for a portrait of her grandmother. Juried show after juried show followed as she boldly entered and won 1st place and Best in Show in New York competitions. "I belonged to Pen and Brush, the National Arts Club, and the famed Salmagundi Art Club."

Getting back to all that now seemed nearly impossible to someone who couldn't get out of the house, nor bathe and feed herself, but she somehow managed to fit a brush in her hand and get her head around color combinations. Although in tremendous pain, the artist made a first clumsy stroke on canvas. And then another. "I started by cutting up pieces of old paintings and making abstract art and little notecards. I called the collection All in Pieces, and I sent them to strangers who had read about me in the local newspaper and had sent letters of encouragement and checks. The art community and the wonderful community of Old Saybrook came together for me. I couldn't have made it without them. They held a benefit for me, and people from all over Connecticut, New York, and Massachusetts sent checks and letters. I was humbled by the experience. I learned that none of us are alone in this world. These people just embraced me and lifted me up."

At first Perry thought her career in portraiture was over. "I couldn't focus on the landscape of a face, so I started painting seascapes." Friends brought photos and magazines; and slowly and purposefully, the artist began to paint,









honing her skills all over again. The new collection of 5 x 7, 8 x 10 and 12 x 18 paintings and notecards were called "Healing Waters," and once again people began to take notice.

Locally her work is displayed at Total Design Source in Old Saybrook, although galleries in surrounding towns are now calling the artist. "I'm entering shows again and just won an award at a Clinton show," the artist said proudly. "My art is evolving. I'm recognizing colors better and how they go together, so my work is starting to come alive."



Although implausible to fathom, Judy Perry has no anger, no rage, no negativity toward the woman who did this to her. "I feel sorry for her; she spent 22 months in prison, and she has children." But Perry's thoughts and goals are strong and positive in nature. As part of the healing process, Perry boldly addressed the junior and senior classes of Old Saybrook High School just months after her ordeal. I told them, "You're all going to drink, of course you're going to drink. We all know that. So do so with a designated

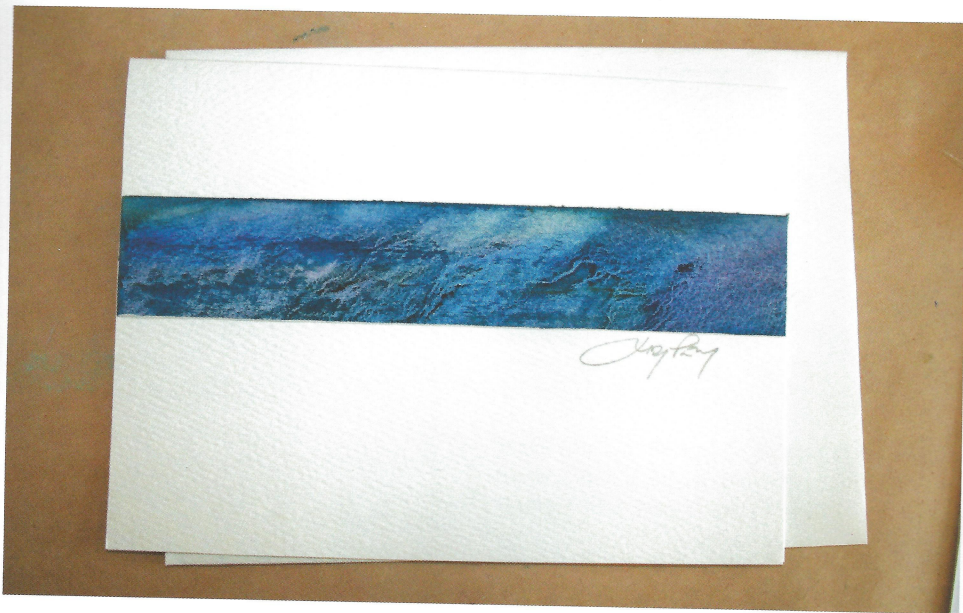


driver in your group. But remember that when you make a decision, there are always unintended consequences. I am an unintended consequence. That woman changed my life forever because she made a decision to work and drive drunk."

Judy Perry never looks back. She finds no point in dwelling in the past. Her goal right now is to keep painting and to share her talent with others by teaching her art to Alzheimer's patients. Her early education was in the special needs area, and more than ever she feels a strong pull to work in this arena once again. "I've taught painting to people with cognitive problems, and it's amazing how it often brings them out of that solitary place they're in and allows them to focus and communicate, if only for awhile. Art can do that."

Judy had previously taught Alzheimer's patients at her





home gallery; now she feels she would like to go to them and welcomes the opportunity to teach at group homes or assisted living facilities. "I studied special needs people and now I am one," she says, ruefully injecting a touch of gallows' humor. "I look forward to sharing my world of painting with them. Art can do amazing things for rehabilitation and recovery."

Perry sits back in her chair, her head unusually erect from the neck fusion. She looks around the small gallery in the home

she nearly lost. She gazes lovingly at her two "children," the cats she worried about the entire time she was hospitalized, who now make her smile every day just by their very presence.

"Things have changed radically; and who knows what additional challenges I'll face in the future, but for now I'm just trying to find my new normal. I miss the ability to work in my garden, miss being able to sleep for more than 2 hours at a time. I long for the 30 mile bike rides I took daily, and the clarity of

thought and pain-free ease of movement. I miss who I knew myself to be before. The re-birthing process is difficult, but things could be worse. I remain ever hopeful and grateful."

The collision may have smashed steel, broken bones, and caused permanent injury, but in truth it barely touched the artist. Judy Perry has grown into a strong, creative, beautiful human being.

You won, Judy. You won.

JUDY PERRY'S WORK MAY BE VIEWED AND PURCHASED AT TOTAL DESIGN SOURCE, MAIN STREET, OLD SAYBROOK, OR VISIT HER WEBSITE: www.judyperryart.com (860) 395-1695. She also accepts commissions for her outstanding award-winning portraiture.



