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**(About the WGOT Interactive Writing and Art Workshop reading on 8/23/14)**

## **Jeri Rowe: Visual art meets its match in creative writing**



**ERRY WOLFORD/News & Record**

Karen Dresser models her meditation robe that uses small bells and fabric from Bali, India, on Friday, Aug. 22, 2014, in Greensboro, N.C. Members of the Writers Group of the Triad write poems and prose to with inspiration from artwork by painters and artists at Greensboro's Creative Center.

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**Diana Engel**  
**Jessica Moore**  
**Martha Golensky**

I simply wanted to see where they would go.

So, I came Saturday to Greensboro's Creative Center. I sat near the back. I wanted to hear how local writers could take an image from the canvas of a local artist — or in one case, the colorful fabric and tiny bells of a prayer shawl — and turn it into a story or a poem.

I heard a deputy courtroom clerk talk about Sophie , a high school teacher from Jamestown talk about a corner, and a retired book editor turn the heat of the desert into an appreciation of circles.

An in-home caregiver from High Point talked about circles, too. Meanwhile, a semi-retired management consultant took a painting that included a cow, a bird's nest and a car and turned it into something about Frank Sinatra.

Or really, Sinatra's voice. This is straight from the poetry of Martha Golensky, the 10-word description of the world-famous baritone from a world-famous man: "liquid as warm butterscotch, the sensual soundtrack of my dream."

Man, that is candy for the brain.

But we can expect that kind of creative spark from the Writers Group of the Triad. It's a volunteer organization that sprang from Guilford College during the age of Eisenhower, the decade when a favorite son of Oxford, Miss., won a big-time award for the novels he wrote in longhand.

But that was a long time ago. Much has changed. The big things have not — the need to paint, sculpt, write and sing to understand who we are.

The organization known as WGOT tapped into that nearly 60 years ago. It's still going strong.

Since 2012, the group has brought local artists and local writers together once a year to plow the creative ground where art and words meet over two consecutive weekends. And on Saturday, in the first floor of a former Baptist church, they came together to see what they reaped.

Like Jessica Moore. She's 26, married and works as a deputy courtroom clerk in downtown Greensboro. She's working on an Master of Fine Arts degree at UNCG, her alma mater. A few months ago, she joined the WGOT. Last Saturday, she chose to write about a painting by Greensboro's Karen Dresser.

Dresser used flower petals and a photo from the Smithsonian magazine to anchor a painting. She called it "Sophie Sings To Her Flowers." Moore took it from there. She wrote about June bugs and a girl dressed in muslin singing flower petals to sleep.

It only got better.

Angela Aguigui-Walton chose an oil painting by Greensboro's Jack Stone. He called his "We Met At The Corner." She called her work the same thing and described what she saw as a crossroads: "It's the geometry of fate, the calculus in coincidence, the art of probability."

That kind of stuff is far from Room A230 at Jamestown's Ragsdale High, where she introduces students to rhythm couplets from a French poet and prose from an African writer describing the 19th century clash of British colonialism in his homeland of Nigeria.

And for Dave Williams, 65, the retired editor, his newfound love of poetry is just fun. He hasn't written poetry since his college days more than 40 years ago. In

his 35-year editing career, he dealt with trade journals and legal books. In his fledgling writing career, he looks at cadence, rhythm and tone.

He thinks of music. And he did that with “Desert Heat,” the painting by Greensboro’s Alice Bachman, in which he writes about “the secrets of far older times, now sunk beneath to scourge of desert skin.”

So it went. For two hours.

There was talk about the interpretation of painted lines, drawn circles and tiny bells tied to a shawl of many colors. From all that, magic happens.

Chip Bristol runs a local rehabilitation center. He mentioned he paints because, as he says, “my soul needs to breathe.” Dresser teaches art at the American Hebrew Academy. She writes, paints, sews and does mixed media.

When she creates, she feels the tremble of fear. She also feels that sense of freedom. “When ideas are flying around,” she says, “It becomes a conversation of possibilities.”

And of courage.

Diana Engel, an in-home caregiver and the married mother of a teenage daughter, wrote about Bristol’s painting, “Changing Weather.” She wrote a poem that she dedicated to her younger brother, Mike, an attorney in Tennessee. In Bristol’s painting, she saw more than water and clouds.

She saw her brother, one year her junior. He taught her how to skip stones and appreciate the ripples circling out from every kiss along the water. They spent their childhood summers along the South Carolina coast where water was a still mirror and fireflies lit the night.

She also wrote about the painful turns of her and her brother’s life — of her four miscarriages and her brother’s loss of twin boys at birth. They both learned to persevere with the help of blessings she saw as “bluebirds that soared through wind and rain to reach us.”

She ends her poem with this:

Meet me at the lake, Mike.  
Let's skip stones again.

As I listened Saturday, I thought of William Faulkner. Not his books. No, I thought of his speech in December 1950 when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Faulkner, a favorite son of Oxford, Miss., spoke about the things writers need to do.

"It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past," Faulkner said back then. "The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail."

And man, I heard that Saturday.

Yes, I did.

***Contact Jeri Rowe at (336) 373-7374 or find him @JeriRoweNR on Twitter or [www.facebook.com/jeriroweNR](http://www.facebook.com/jeriroweNR).***

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