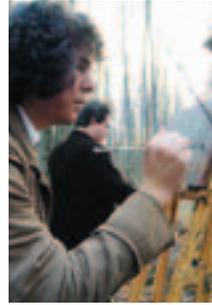


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Muskoka



An artistic legacy



A sweet tradition



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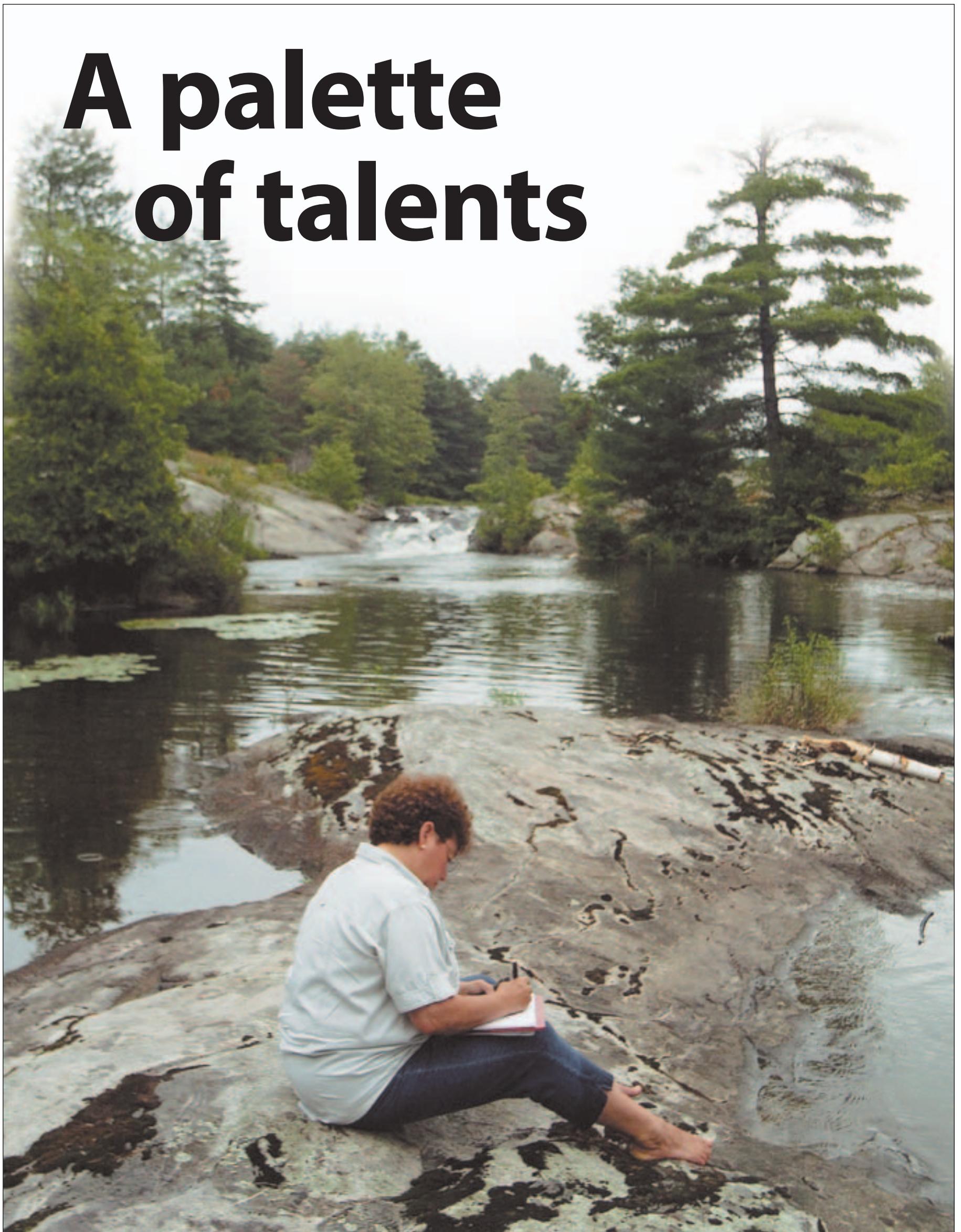
Green Muskokans take a stand for the future

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Artist with a palette of talents • Best seats in the house • The piano doctor

A palette of talents





Article by Maria Duncalf-Barber / Photographs by Darren Lum

Gail Dempsey spreads her wings in art and business

Opposite: Drawing inspiration from the natural beauty of Muskoka, Gayle Dempsey writes and paints.

Top: Dempsey is a versatile artist working with water colours, print-making and acrylics along with writing. She had her first solo exhibition this summer, titled "Turning East," and owns the Muskoka Place Gallery.

Gayle Dempsey is the quintessential artist with soul. She lives and breathes art with a passion. She loves to be creative as it's in her bones. She likes to share her talent with people of all ages.

As well as painting she has published articles, stories, books, papers and is a sought-after speaker. She has also been interviewed on radio.

Dempsey says: "I have learned so much about the arts in the past few years and about the healing qualities of art. In my first watercolour workshop, I learned about soul in painting and the technical quality of the drawing isn't as important as the soul in the piece.

"And that when you paint from within, your heart and soul shine out of your piece. I felt the relationship between art and spirituality."

Dempsey's journey towards her artistic essence of who she is today was helped by her reading of many books. Her favourite is *Learning By Heart - Teachings to Free the Creative Spirit* by Sister Corita Kent, and her's is a creed Dempsey also lives by:

"Creativity belongs to the artist in each of us. To create means to relate. The root meaning of the word art is to fit together and we all do this every day. There is an energy in the creative process that belongs in the league of those energies which can uplift, unify, and harmonize all of us. In a way, the artist gives us a small taste of that larger art - the new world we are trying to build - a world in which each person, each country, lives in harmonious relationship with each other person and country."

Dempsey is a fourth generation Muskokan and feels a deep connection to the spirit of the land, the lakes, the natural beauty and the peace that is Muskoka. She is passionate about preserving, protecting and promoting the beautiful rich culture and heritage.

Her family members were boat builders and steamboat captains, serving the tourists and summer residents and they had great respect and sensitivity for the land and the lakes.

Their pioneering spirit and sensitivity live with Dempsey who says, "My father was a boatbuilder, romantic, great philosopher and visionary. He taught me to walk gently, to live lightly and to seek truth.

"My mother is a very active 'older person' who loves dancing, painting, travelling, gardening and has a great passion for cooking and life in general. She taught me to seek joy, to share and to live fully."

Gary Froude is Dempsey's partner. She met him 11 years ago when he came to Port Carling from Costa Rica for a winter friendship festival; his background was in music management.



Dempsey holds up an example of artwork she created during an art exercise. The image of the carousel depicts a time in her life when she needed a cathartic release.

Froude too, cares deeply about the environment. Ten years ago the couple attended an international conference in Scotland with 150 speakers from around the world addressing such issues. As president of the Port Carling Memorial Community Hall Board during the building of the new facility, Dempsey learned strength is a matter of commitment, character, vision and the ability to work with others.

She was encouraged watching this community come together for a shared vision, building community. It gives her hope for the future of Muskoka and inspiration as an artist.

In 1996, Atis Bankas, director of the International School for Musical Arts and artistic director for the newly forming Muskoka Lakes Music Festival, asked Froude and Dempsey if they would be managing directors.

This year, they are celebrating the festival's 10th anniversary as it continues to evolve. Summer concerts are still the mainstay and they are achieving success with a budding 'Kaleidoscope' program that includes children's festivals, arts in education, music and arts summer camps and teachers' workshops. Teams of artists teach at Muskoka schools throughout spring, winter and fall.

Dempsey's children Amanda and Sean have both graduated from university and have inherited a work ethic gene from their mother. Sean did his degree in theatre arts and marketing at Queen's and now works in Toronto at Atlantis Creative Group.

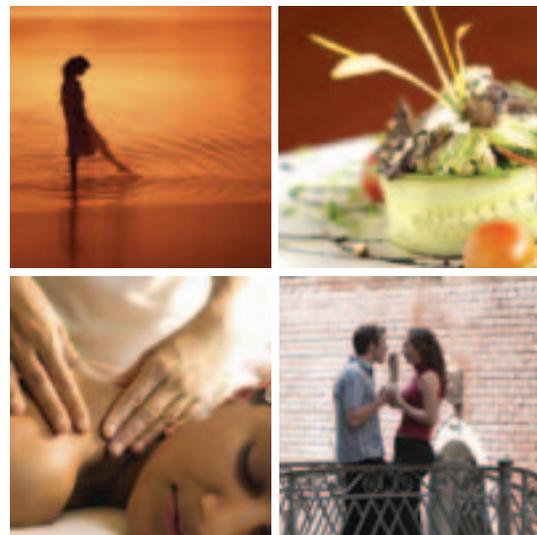
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Amanda has a degree from Guelph in hotel and food administration and has owned and operated her own business, Dempsey Fine Foods in Port Carling for five years. No doubt, the goodies at the food store help to fuel her mother's community involvement as the artist/mom says: "Since my family has grown and I don't have aged parents to care for, I have found that I have a lot of energy for and interest in community service.

"I have spent the past decade looking into the issues related to creating healthy, sustainable community and have been involved in a number of international service projects including building a small school in Trenchtown, Jamaica, and a resource centre at a children's village in the Bahamas."

About her own education and career path, Dempsey says, "I received most of my early formal education in Muskoka and attended the University of Waterloo in a general arts program. After the first year and my experience with fine arts, I realized that I was not in the appropriate institution and came to my first major life-choice in the spring of '71: to leave university and enroll in an art school or get a job.

"I chose the latter and a marriage proposal... went to work at a custom brokerage in Toronto... settling into married life."

When her daughter Amanda was born, the family decided the city was no place to raise a child. They moved back to Muskoka, bought a lot, cleared the land and built a house on Foreman Road.



Recently, the creative artist Dempsey has branched out to making functional chairs.

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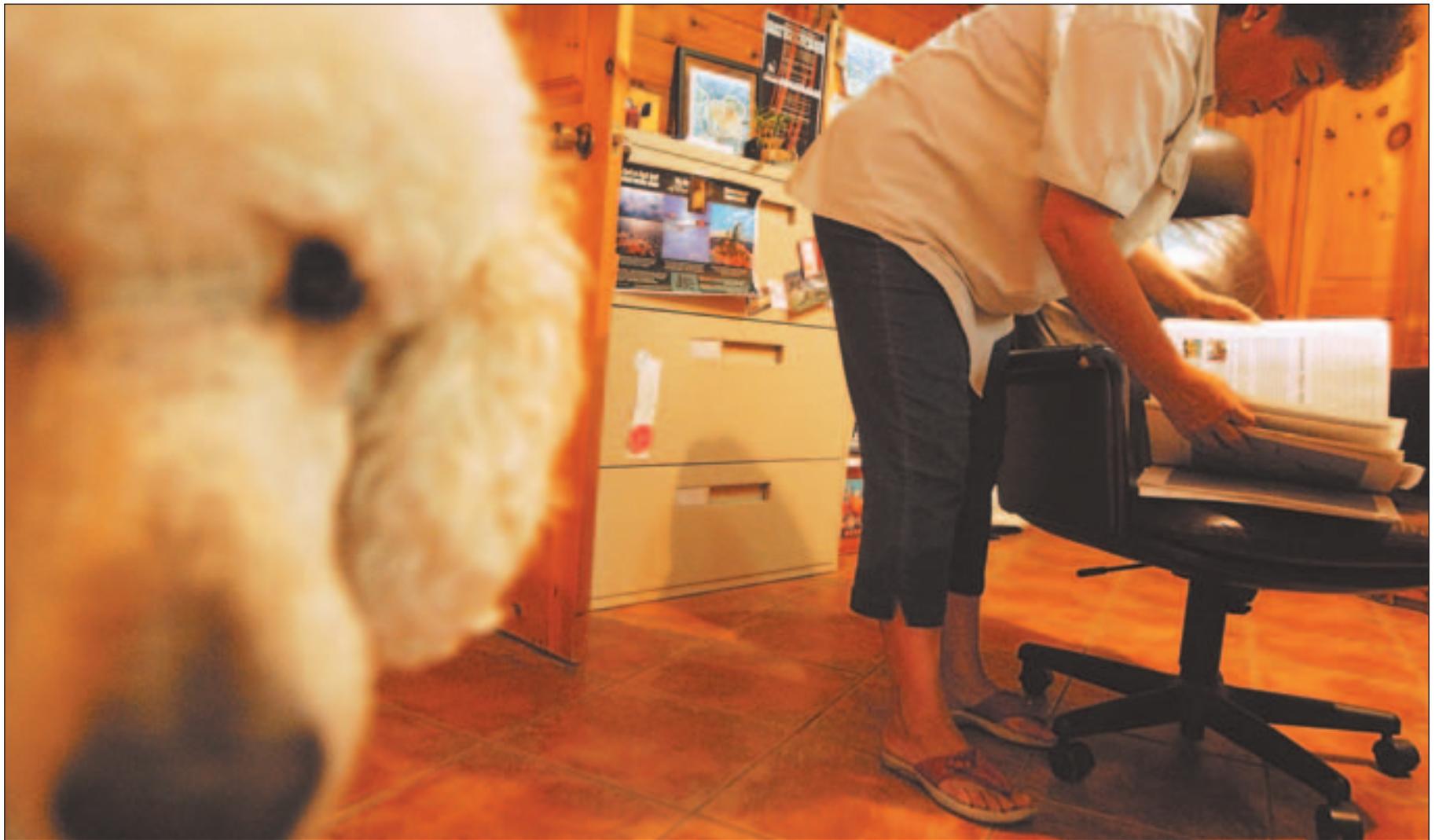
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Dempsey's dog, Duncan, is an ever-present companion and one of her biggest artistic fans along with her partner Gary Froude.

"I knew how to build a house because growing up we built a number of houses," says Dempsey. "I am grateful for the experience and that we always lived on the lake, mostly Lake Muskoka. So, with a baby on my back and pregnant with my son, I mixed mortar, hammered nails and by

the time Sean was born the house was livable."

She was office manager for the Muskoka Lakes Association and an advertising manager and business editor of its annual yearbook for more than two decades.

"I seem to have had a particular focus in each

decade of my life, education and computers in the '70s, sports in the '80s, playing sports competitively and recreationally, including precision skating, baseball, tennis, golf, badminton and rowing.

"Early in the '90s and at the turn of the new



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millennium, arts were important (and) several personal growth workshops and Julia Cameron's, *The Artist's Way* changed my life. I plunged into the arts. *The Artist's Way* had me writing every morning."

Dempsey laughs as she says, "There is a Zen statement, 'After ecstasy the laundry' which we might reverse to say, 'After much laundry comes a moment of ecstasy.' The smaller ecstasies (arts) keep us nourished so that we have the strength to continue working on the larger art."

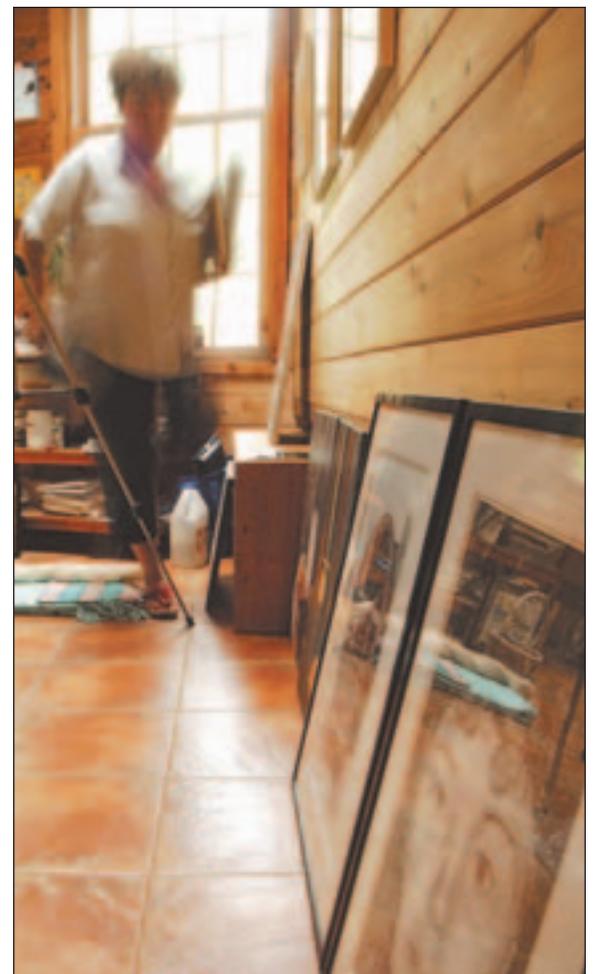
Dempsey says leaving her marriage after 22 years in 1996 was the hardest thing she has ever done and it led her to live for a while in a one-room apartment at the mouth of the Muskoka River in Bracebridge where she began to do her own art and connect with her new partner.

She says: "After I met Gary, we moved back to Port Carling to the house that I had previously built. Our home is often filled with artists, musicians, film people and other interesting travelers from around the world."

She also found a creative outlet at The Muskoka Place Gallery which opened in 2004 as a centre of arts and cultural activities.

It hosts many local and international artists, workshops, retreats, literary events, coffeehouses, house concerts. Dempsey believes arts and culture are very significant factors in quality of life, playing a key role in defining who we are as individuals, communities and as a society.

She is focusing more energy these days on the gallery with watercolour, print making and acrylic painting and writing, and she is studying with and representing the works of renowned painter Pat Fairhead.



Dempsey's self portrait lies in the foreground at her Muskoka Place Gallery.