

Women Who Say Yes to the Spark

A Story Series by Angie Thompson

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Amy Jenkins: The Happy Surprise of Creativity

A Fine Art graduate discovers that creativity, courage, and faith can shape a lifetime.

Amy Jenkins stood inside the Lyon Gallery surrounded by paintings that had once existed only as ideas in her mind.

The long room was lined with her watercolor paintings, grouped in themes: travel, landscapes, people, Oklahoma, Texas, Maine, and international scenes. Small gallery lights shone down from the ceiling, illuminating the transparent layers of color. Sixty-five paintings filled the space.

“It was the first time I had seen my paintings all in one space,” Amy said.

Guests moved slowly through the room, leaning in to study the brushwork and the way the light moved through the watercolor layers. When someone decided to purchase a painting, they would walk up and pull the tag from the wall beside the piece. Amy watched as tags slowly disappeared

throughout the evening.

Her granddaughter ran excitedly through the gallery while visitors studied the paintings and asked questions. More than once she heard someone ask, “How did she do that?”

But the story of how she arrived at that gallery began decades earlier in a junior high classroom in Florida.

Amy remembers the classroom clearly. It was an open classroom with about twenty early teenagers working on projects. The room smelled like art paper and paint. It was loud at times, but friendly, full of conversation and movement.

“It didn’t matter what the project was, it was like a light switch turned on.”



Amy Jenkins

One assignment involved carving an image into a block of linoleum to create a print. Amy carved a dragon and a set of flames.

When she printed the blocks onto the paper, one for the dragon’s body and one for its wings, the two images came together just as she had imagined. Separate pieces became a single image.

That was the moment that captured her.

“It didn’t matter what the project was, it was like a light switch turned on,” she said.

“I remember thinking, this is so cool. It was a happy surprise.”

Her teacher noticed her work and encouraged her to consider studying art more seriously. That simple encouragement stayed with her.

Even now, decades later, Amy can still remember the moment the spark appeared.

Amy went on to study art and later worked as a commercial artist and elementary art teacher in Bartlesville, where she encouraged creativity in children and watched the same moment of discovery appear in her students.

Today she teaches watercolor classes at the Bartlesville Art Association, where she now sees that same discovery happen with adults.

Many arrive unsure of their ability, but something changes as they begin to paint.

“I see it in their eyes,” she said. “They realize they can do it.”

One student in her eighties told her, “You opened up a new world for me. Instead of being bored and sitting at home, you’ve given me something that keeps me going.”

Helping others discover creativity has become one of the most meaningful parts of her work.

Discovering Watercolor

After retiring from teaching in 2014, Amy began exploring watercolor more seriously after

attending a class with her sister in North Carolina. She arrived with the wrong supplies, she remembers, but immediately became fascinated with the medium.

“I remember the medium felt so fresh and transparent.”

“The way the brush strokes move on the paper felt natural.”

Watercolor requires planning and patience because once the paint is placed on the paper, it cannot easily be changed. The challenge intrigued her.

“I just wanted to see how good I could get with watercolor,” she said.

“I just wanted to see how good I could get with watercolor.”

One of Amy’s early watercolor paintings came from a trip to Israel. During a visit to the Sea of Galilee, she woke early one morning and stepped onto the balcony of her hotel room. A warm breeze moved across the water, and she could hear distant early city sounds below. The smell of breakfast drifted up from the hotel kitchen.

As the sun rose, she began taking photographs every minute to capture the changing light across the water.

Later, back home, she used those photographs to create a watercolor painting of the scene. The painting later received an award in a regional exhibition, and years later it appeared again in her Lyon Gallery exhibition.

One visitor stood in front of the painting with tears in her eyes. Others told Amy the painting gave them a sense of peace.

Courage to Exhibit

Despite years of painting, Amy hesitated to organize a solo exhibition.

“I’m afraid of everything,” she said with a laugh.

The turning point came after she was accepted into the prestigious Watercolor USA exhibition. When she told her mentor, artist Monte Toon, he congratulated her and then said something that changed her direction.

“The next step is to have a solo show.”

The idea felt both exciting and intimidating. It took Amy six months to gather the courage to approach the Lyon Gallery in Bartlesville. When she finally met with the curator, the curator asked what she would like to call the show.

Without hesitation, Amy answered, “Bartlesville and Beyond.”

In that moment, the exhibition became real.

Preparing for the exhibition

required discipline, a large body of work, and a clear presentation plan.

When the exhibition opened, visitors responded enthusiastically. Amy sold eleven paintings along with prints and cards. More importantly, the exhibition changed how people viewed her work and her commitment to painting.

“When people saw the show and the number of paintings I had created, they realized I had serious goals,” she said.

Not long after the exhibition, she was invited to show her work as a guest artist at a cooperative gallery in Oklahoma City. She had applied there previously without success. This time, after they saw a video of her Lyon Gallery exhibition, she was invited to participate.

The solo show that once felt

“They say they feel peace when they look at my paintings.”

intimidating had opened new doors.

Today Amy continues to paint, teach, and exhibit her work. One comment she hears often from people who view her paintings is that they feel peace.

“That has become very meaningful to me,” she said. “Now that I know that, it’s my prayer that people experience that peace when they see my work and know that God loves them.”

For Amy, art carries a deeper purpose. She believes creativity reflects the character of the Creator and that artistic ability is a gift that should be practiced, developed, and shared.

Back at the Lyon Gallery that evening, visitors continued

moving from painting to painting, studying the colors, the reflections, and the transparent layers of watercolor. Some paused longer than others. A few again asked, “How did she do that?”

Amy watched them studying the work she had spent years learning to create. Moments like that remind her why she continues to paint.

Sometimes a single painting can open a door.

And sometimes, a single moment of creativity can change a life.

For Amy Jenkins, that moment came as a happy surprise.

And now she helps others discover it too.



About the Artist – Amy Jenkins

Amy Jenkins is a Bartlesville-based watercolor artist and former elementary art teacher. She studied Fine Art at Evangel University and commercial art at the Art Institute of Houston. Her work has been juried into regional and national exhibitions including Watercolor USA and the Southwestern Watercolor Society Annual Exhibition. She is a past president of the Bartlesville Art Association and continues to paint, exhibit, and teach watercolor. See Amy’s art at AmyJenkinsArt.com.

About the Writer and Permissions

Angie Thompson is a fundraising strategist and storyteller who helps nonprofits, organizations, and purpose-driven leaders communicate with intention and heart. Through Angie Thompson Consulting LLC and her Pivot Pulse™ storytelling framework, she supports people doing good work—and helps them get noticed for it.

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This story is based on a personal interview and reflections shared by Amy Jenkins and is published with permission. It is part of the *Women Who Say Yes to the Spark* series, created to celebrate leadership, creativity, and meaningful work.

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