

COMPILED BY WOODBINE HOUSE

A Room of

# GOLDEN SHELLS

100 WORKS BY ARTISTS AND WRITERS  
WITH DOWN SYNDROME

AN EXCERPT FROM:

***A Room of Golden Shells: 100 Works by Artists and Writers with Down Syndrome***

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Imagine stepping into a room full of golden shells. At first, your eyes might be dazzled by the brightness, so you might notice only that the shells are all the same color. On closer inspection, though, you would begin to notice differences. Some of the shells might be rosy or speckled or iridescent on the inside. Some might be slick to the touch; and others, knobby or corrugated. Some might be as heavy and solid as doorstops, while others might be as delicate and papery as a dragonfly's wings. And the riotous variety of shapes! Shells shaped like olives, needles, and fans; mittens, spirals, and doubloons; saucers, cones, and lions' paws. As you walked around the room, you would quickly realize that no two shells were really alike, despite sharing one salient feature.

So, what does a room of golden shells have to do with this collection of artwork and creative writing by teens and adults with Down syndrome?

Most obviously, the book is full of works that are dazzling in the best sense of the word as defined by Webster's New World dictionary—"arousing admiration by a brilliant display." Some of the works arouse our admiration because of the artist's or writer's creative pyrotechnics—their sheer mastery of their craft. Others captivate us because the creator's imagination has conjured up a whimsical or striking scene or a novel and thought-provoking turn of phrase. Still other works draw us in with their eye-catching use of colors or texture or their quiet revelations about how it feels to live with a disability.

The other reason this collection can be compared to a room of golden shells is this:

Although everyone who contributed to the book has one noteworthy attribute in common (Down syndrome), each contributor and his or her work is otherwise unique. Some of them, like fourteen-year-old Fiona Morris—who came up with the image of a room of golden shells—aspire to be professional writers or artists. Many pursue writing or art as a hobby while attending school, working, or volunteering. A few are award-winning artists who earn a living by selling their works. Their interests run the gamut from the artistic (theater, dance, music, photography) to the domestic (sewing, cooking, fashion, shopping); from the athletic (tennis, kayaking, swimming, horseback riding) to the sedentary (reading, watching TV and movies, playing video games); from the community-oriented (advocacy, public speaking, volunteering) to the outdoorsy (bird watching, collecting shells or leaves, gardening).

The contributors draw their inspiration from nature and from their travels; from popular culture and from artists and writers of the past; from friends and family and from their surroundings; from their faith and from their dreams. Their outlooks on life, as expressed through their art and writing, range from sunny to somber to everything in between. Clearly, their individual experiences, backgrounds, and personalities inform and color their writing and art. There is no such thing as "Down Syndrome Art" or "Down Syndrome Writing."

By publishing ***A Room of Golden Shells***, Woodbine House hopes to draw attention to these two truths—first, that people with Down syndrome can be immensely talented artists and writers, and second, that individuals with Down syndrome defy categorization.

Susan Stokes, editor  
Woodbine House



an excerpt from the **INTRODUCTION**

*Joyce Wallace Scott\**  
*with Dr. Gail Shafarman*

## THE POWER OF ART TO TRANSCEND DISABILITY

...In describing the works of [visual] art in this volume, it is hard to capture [the artists'] exuberance and joy, their originality of vision, and to convey the level of artistic excellence. Readers will be astonished by the brilliant use of colors, as well as the complex sense of pattern and design....

...All the artists in this collection have found an effective way to communicate their vision to the world. This underlines the importance of developing programs to enable artists with disabilities to express themselves by providing an arena in which artistic expression trumps disability. These individuals need a place where the limitations perceived in the outside world no longer dominate. This makes it possible for those with Down syndrome to function freely, with a heightened sense of self-esteem. Such programs provide a place where they are respected and recognized as talented, as gifted; where they are no longer defined by their disability, a place in which to express inherent talents undisturbed and with total focus....

## BREAKTHROUGHS IN CREATIVE WRITING

...This is a new generation of adults who are discovering their voices. This collection of poems, songs, and short stories is written in a way that borders on the revolutionary in terms of earlier conceptions of Down syndrome and language ability. It enters new territory of mind and spirit, and reveals a depth of feeling, insight, and self-awareness that forces us to reexamine our understanding of the abilities and potential of these writers....

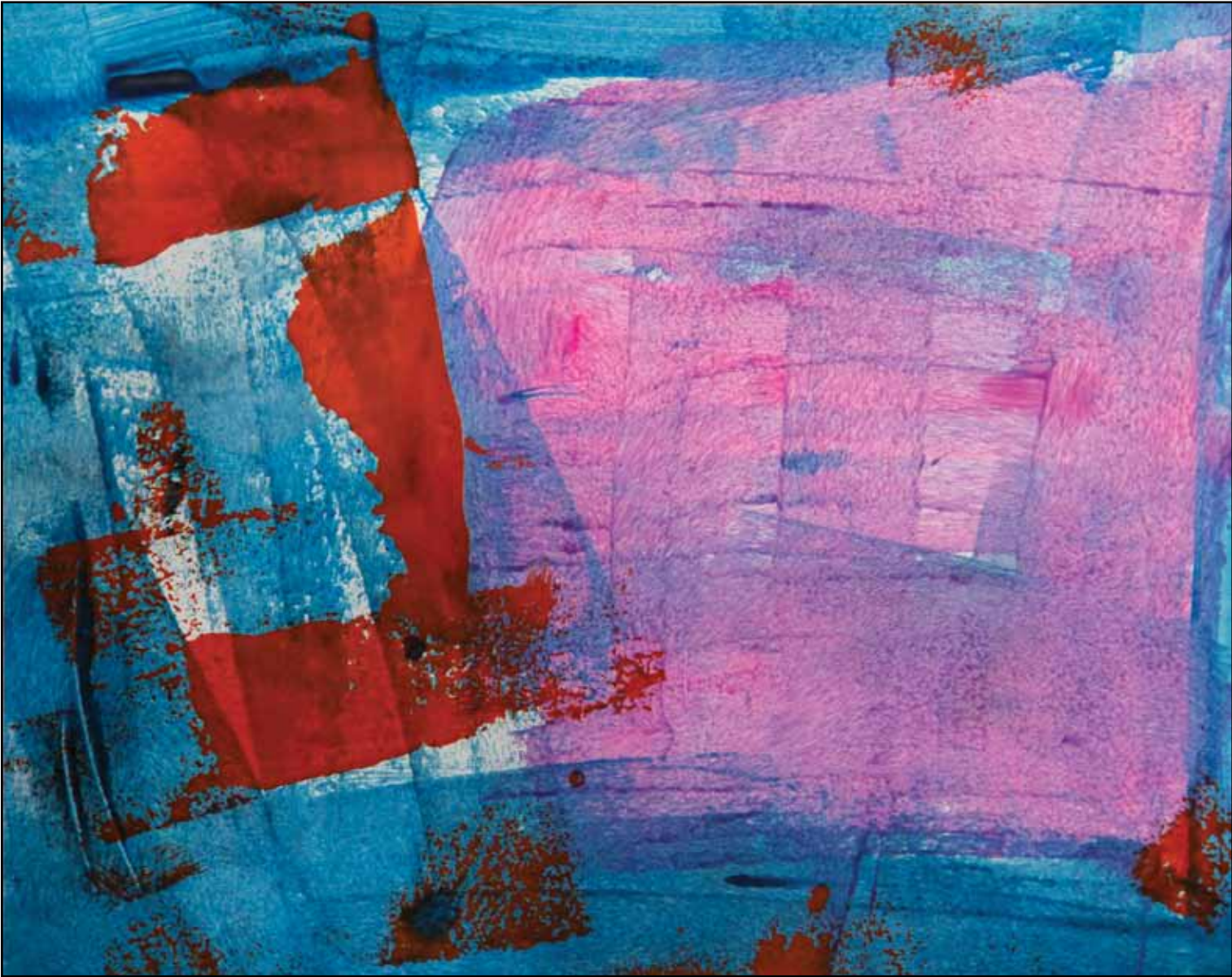
**Joyce Wallace Scott** is a published poet, writer, and clinical hypnotherapist. As an educator, RN, and developmental specialist, she has worked for many years with children with Down syndrome and other special needs. As an advocate for people with disabilities, she has appeared on television and in films, addressed conferences and clubs, and spoken at museum and gallery openings. Her twin sister Judith Scott, who had Down syndrome, was a famous fiber artist.



*Flag over the Farm* by Jackie Bouquio



**Jackie Bouquio** was born and raised in Staten Island, New York. She is 31 years old and has been working at the Staten Island Children’s Museum for ten years. As part of her job, she is in charge of “Paint Day.” She sometimes demonstrates different painting techniques (she likes to paint abstracts) and tries to inspire the children who visit the museum.



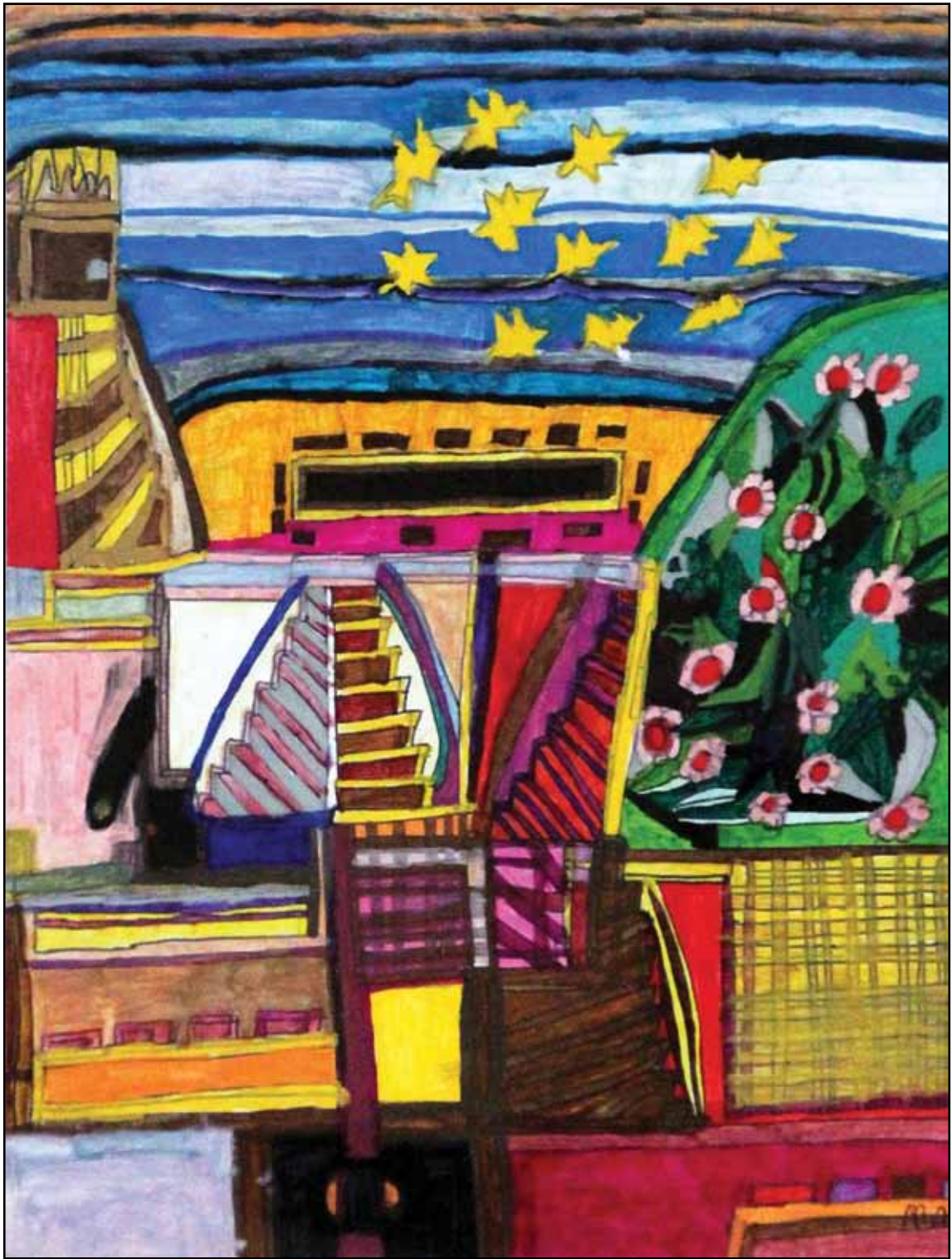
## *Summer into Fall* by Margie Smeller



**Margie Smeller**, 27, is a lifelong resident of Frederick County, Maryland. She started her art career at an early age in the usual fashion with crayons, sidewalk chalk, and finger paints. She has always had a keen eye for color, and that is reflected in many of her pieces of art. Most of Margie's work is done with mixed media on canvas.

As a student at Linganore High School, Margie's drive to do art attracted the attention of the art staff, who encouraged her to continue her art after high school. They entered her portfolio in a juried selection for the Art Honor Society, and Margie was admitted as a member. She currently shows art at the Artist's Gallery of Frederick and at Art Enables in the District of Columbia. Her works have been displayed in galleries from New York state to Portland, Oregon.







**Jillian Berube**, age 22, is presently pursuing her interest in fashion by working at TJMAXX as an associate. She also volunteers to work with children at the Extended Day Program at J.R. Biggs Elementary School and with young children at a Head Start program. She has been active in sports all her life, swimming, playing baseball and soccer, and competing in Special Olympics. In addition, she takes classes at Mount Wachusett Community College and has appeared in plays at her high school and at the Theater at the Mount.

Jillian is involved in a self-advocacy group and the North Central Citizen's Advisory Board for the Department of Developmental Services. She has also served as a self-advocate on a steering committee for Massachusetts Families Organize for Change and is a member of the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress (MDSC) Self Advocate Advisory Council.

In her free time, Jillian writes songs, goes to dances, kayaks, and enjoys sleepovers and Skyping with friends. She notes that her song "My Life" talks about the person she really is and the things she wants to do in her life. She believes she will accomplish her goals since she is a very hard worker and tries to succeed in everything she does.

# **My Life**

(Song)

*Jillian Berube*

My life can be special, it can be anything I want it to be  
I want to express who I am inside  
Everything is changing in front of me  
When I was younger in my life, I would have never known I would be where I am  
My life is a lot different than I thought it would be, I am changing  
When I was younger I made memories that I keep with me  
I am not as different as people thought I would be, yeah  
This is me  
Letting my past go is hard, I always carry it with me  
I sometimes feel like I am the only one with a disability  
I am the kind of person that I was meant to be  
My voice can be heard from my story  
I am who I am meant to be!

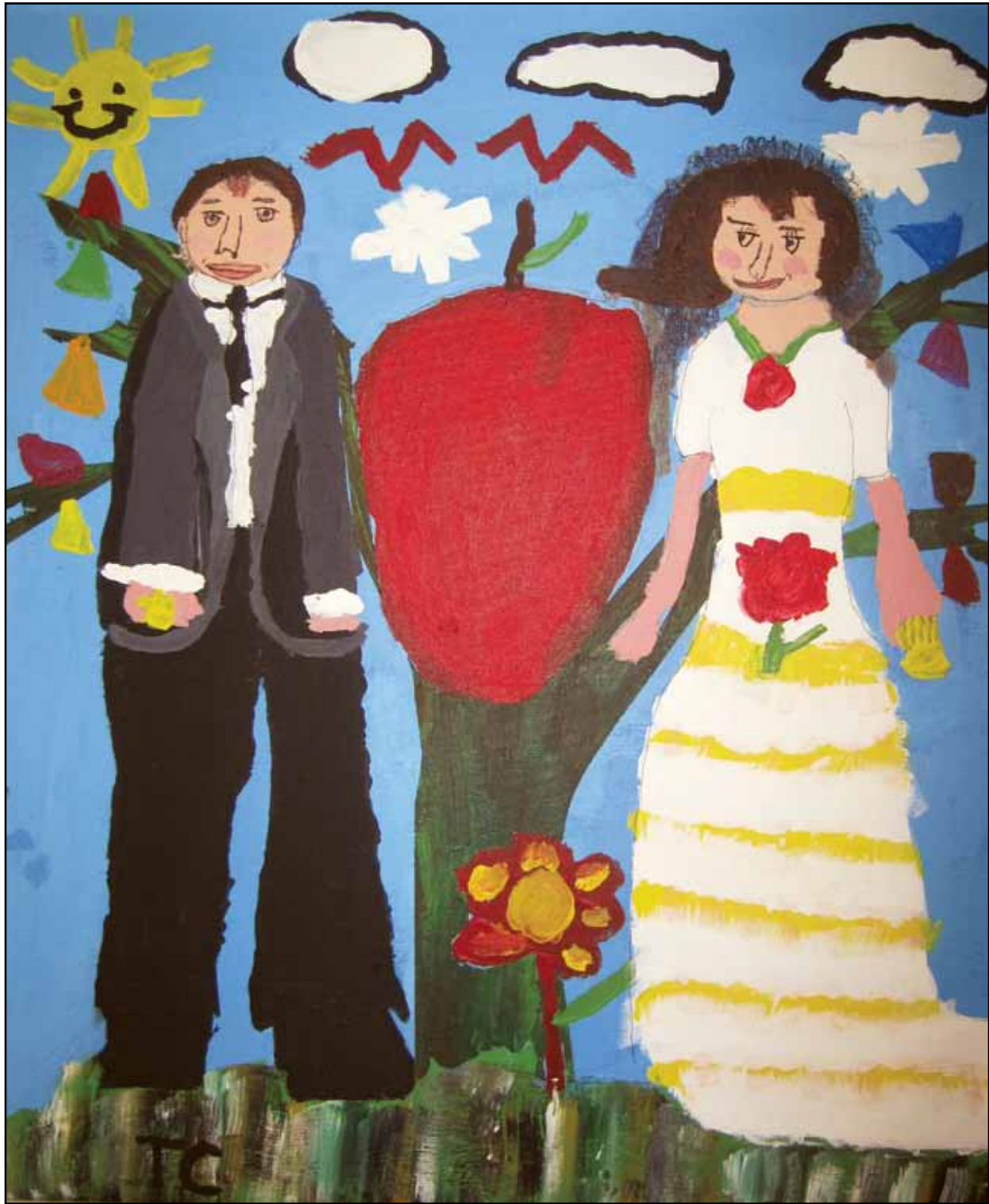
## *Sister's Wedding* by Tina Condic



**Tina Condic** is 27 years old and lives in Calgary, Alberta with her family. She has been painting for nine years and enjoys it a great deal. Tina joined an art program called Indefinite Arts when she was 18 years old, and it was there that she discovered her love of acrylic painting. Tina enjoys painting all things, especially flowers, people, abstracts, and sunsets. She paints on her own at home and has recently gone back to the art program where she started. Tina is working on her dream to have an art show so that everyone can see and buy her work.

Among Tina's other interests are music, singing, movies, and writing. Her favorite band is the Backstreet Boys, and she loves going to their concerts. To see more of Tina's artwork, visit [www.facebook.com/tinacondic](http://www.facebook.com/tinacondic).



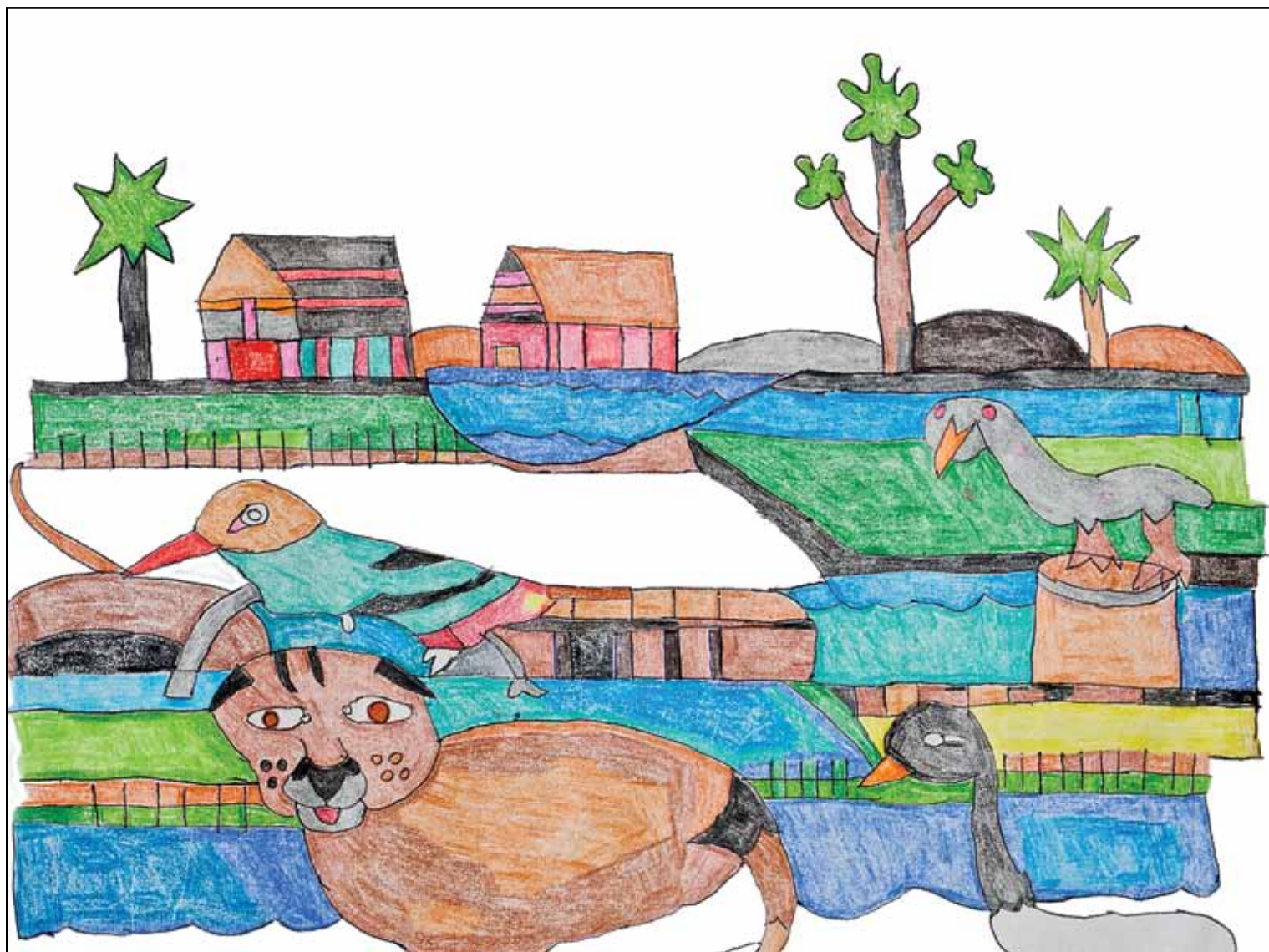


## *Animals at the Beach* by Samantha Downing



**Samantha Downing** is 42 years old. She lives independently in an apartment in Stamford, Connecticut, and receives support from ARI, an agency that provides services for people with developmental disabilities. She works twenty hours per week at General Electric, where she has been employed for the past twenty years since graduating from Westhill High School in Stamford.

Samantha has been a part of the ARI Artists' Initiative art class for nine years and has had her artwork shown in several shows in Fairfield County and in the annual ARI Art Calendar. She has also been active with Connecticut Special Olympics in tennis, skiing, and golfing. Her favorite pastimes are drawing, listening to music, and watching DVDs.





**Adrian Drower**, 23, works and volunteers seasonally at the Chicago Botanic Gardens. He spends a lot of his free time writing poetry, lyrics to songs, and stories. Besides writing, he enjoys reading, working out, musicals, plays, and hanging out with his friends. A self-professed oldies fan, he often listens to the Beatles, Buddy Holly, Bob Dylan, Frank Sinatra, and many, many more. In addition, he enjoys watching many different types of movies and playing video games, and he can swim like a fish.

Thanks to his grandfather, Adrian owns a car. He has had his license for about five years and loves driving. His favorite season is winter because he enjoys the white wonderland scene. He notes that he is always able to find the good in almost anything or anyone.



## **Brothers**

*Adrian Drower*

From fist – to - fist, or with voice,  
Brothers tease, taunt, fight, each other.  
Dull moments are a choice,  
In the life of any brother.

Being rude or calling names,  
Always get each other in trouble.  
With their smells they place blames.  
Parents punish by the double.

They always hang out,  
They might have highs and lows,  
Do they ever have doubt?  
Are they really foes?

They have a strong clear mind,  
And listen to the call of the dove.  
They are in fact very kind,  
Their hearts—full of love.

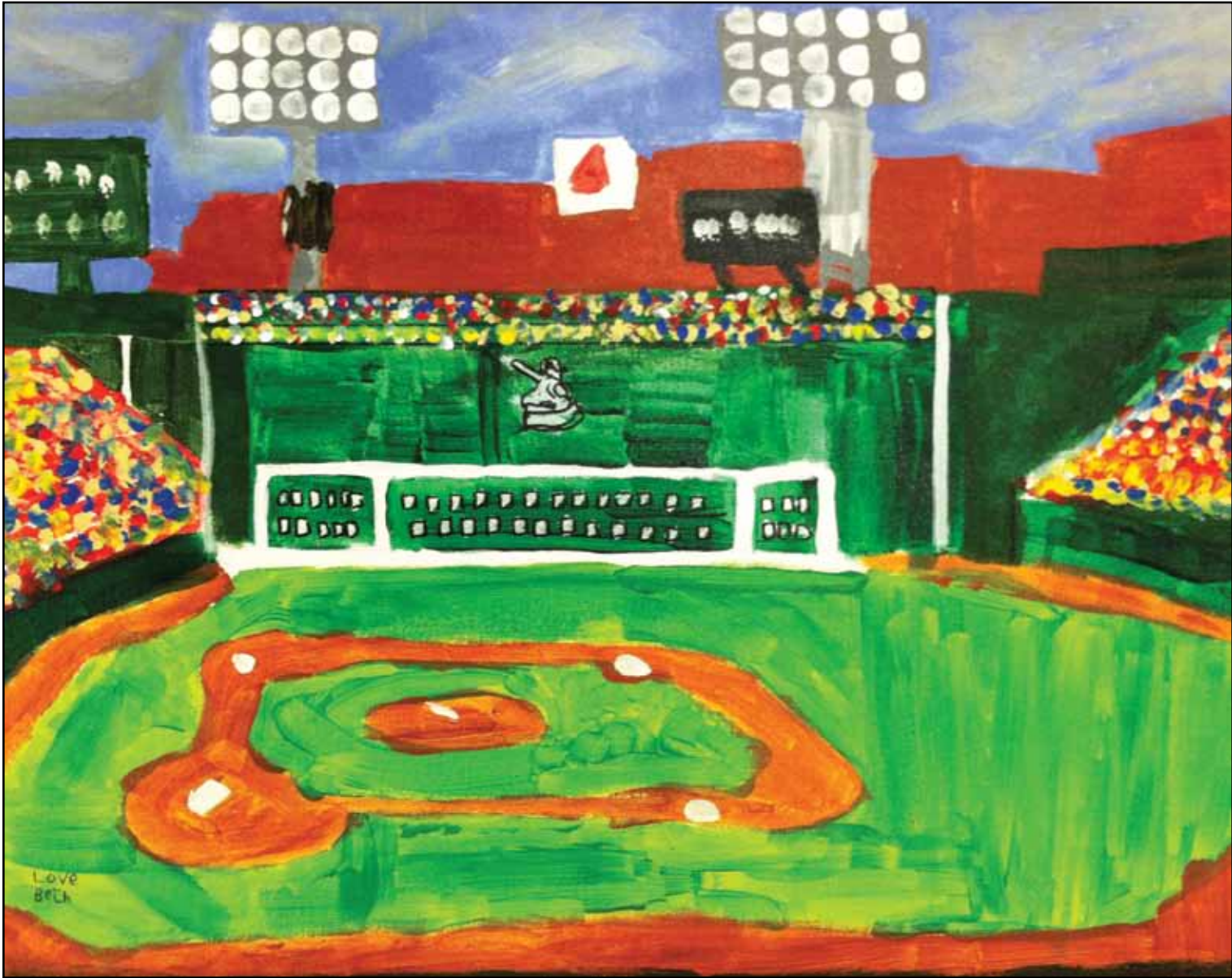
## Fenway Park by Elizabeth C. Knipstein



**Elizabeth** (Beth) **C. Knipstein**, 29, has always loved art. She took all the art classes she could in school, and used art to express what she knew, illustrating her book reports and history assignments. After high school, she attended the Center for Emerging Artists, where she painted the Fenway Park painting for her brother, Bob. She is one of the three artists featured in a documentary, *Three Paths*, produced by the Center for Emerging Artists, and has had newspaper articles written about her and her work.

Beth now attends Gateway Arts ([www.gatewayarts.org](http://www.gatewayarts.org)), a program for artists with disabilities, and had a piece on exhibit at Barney's New York for their Christmas display on Lady Gaga. At Gateway, she makes jewelry and pottery, weaves, paints, and draws in half-day studios five days a week.

Beth taught art to preschoolers one day a week at the Learning Discovery Center in Saugus, Massachusetts, until it closed in November, 2012. She hopes to get another teaching job soon. Art is her life!



LOVE  
BECK

## *Amsterdam: Windmills* by Dylan Kuehl



**Dylan Kuehl** (pronounced Keel) is a life-long resident of Olympia, Washington. He has used art to express himself since attending kindergarten at the Olympia Waldorf School. Able to speak only three words, he used beeswax crayons to express himself. Over the next 25 years, his language advanced, and so did his art.

In elementary school, Dylan enjoyed drawing pictures for posters. He especially liked dinosaurs at the time. In high school, Dylan took pencil drawing and watercolor painting. Since completing public school, Dylan has worked with several local artists. For five years, he took private art lessons from Dorisjean Colvin, a world-known pastel painter and instructor now in her eighties. She taught him the art of soft, hard, and oil pastel painting, along with what it means to be a “professional artist.”

Dylan is also a motivational keynote speaker and has traveled to Italy, Ireland, and Amsterdam. While there, he took hundreds of photographs, which he used as the basis of paintings.

2012 brought changes to Dylan’s artistic world. He has temporarily put down his paint brushes and picked up his drumsticks. A dream come true, he is now the lead drummer in a band that plays music by Michael Jackson. Since putting down his paints, Dylan has been learning the art of working with fused glass. Each piece of his fused glass is custom made with a touch of dichroic glass that shines. His jewelry and other fused glass products are for sale at the famous Seattle Pike Street Market. His artwork can be seen on his website: [www.dylankarts.com](http://www.dylankarts.com).





*Landscape 6-27-11* by Margaret Linnea Moore



**Margaret Linnea Moore**, age 33, was born in Japan but graduated from Springdale High School in Arkansas. She currently lives in her own apartment in the community, and hopes to get married in the future to someone special. In the meantime, she likes spending time with family.

Margaret enjoys drawing, sketching, and painting, in part because she loves the process of coming up with ideas and brainstorming. She is an expert gessoer (gesso is a liquid that is used to prime surfaces for painting). She also likes to collect leaves and other things from nature, so, not surprisingly, she is pleased that Margaret means pearl and Linnea means flower.





**Allison Stokes**, age 19, is a Maryland resident who is currently attending college at Penn State Mont Alto. The recipient of a Down Syndrome Footprint scholarship, as well as several scholarship awards from Penn State, she is majoring in Human Development and Family Studies. Allison aspires to work in a job where she can help people who are facing adversity.

Allison was an honor roll student in high school, where she enjoyed being a part of the drama club, the National Honor Society, and the Key Club. She graduated from Watkins Mill High School with a regular diploma in 2011. She has been on the Dean's List several times in college.

In her spare time, Allison enjoys playing badminton in her backyard, taking the family cat out for walks, watching science fiction shows such as *Star Trek*, *Quantum Leap*, and *Doctor Who*, and brainstorming story ideas for novels and television series. She also volunteers in her community, working with both children and retirees.

# Night Worries

*Allison Stokes*

As I look out  
my window in the night,  
I ask myself,  
“Why does life have to go by  
so fast?”  
It’s rather scary.  
No matter how hard  
I try to live in the present,  
I can’t  
help but wonder  
what the future  
has in store for me.  
Will I be able to overcome  
all the challenges that come my way?  
What if I can’t?  
What if I fail?  
Every night, before I fall asleep,  
these worries gnaw at me  
like a panther.  
They claw at my thoughts  
and  
bite through my soul.  
If only I had  
a gun to shoot them  
all away.



## *Earthquake* by Jessica Speaks



**Jessica Speaks**, 20, attends Valley View High School in Jonesboro, Arkansas. She credits her twin sister, Jennifer, with introducing her to art and encouraging her to give it a try. Jessica has taken three years of art class at Valley View and enjoys making abstract art the most.

A self-professed “girly girl,” Jessica loves to get her hair and nails done. She also loves school—especially the teachers and the dances there. Jessica is a Special Olympics swimmer and plays an active role in the annual Buddy Walk sponsored by the Down Syndrome Association of Northeast Arkansas, Inc. Her other interests include watching movies, bowling, computer games, and playing Wii games with friends.



A Room of

# Golden Shells

100 WORKS BY ARTISTS AND WRITERS WITH DOWN SYNDROME

On entering a room of golden shells, you might first notice how alike the shells are—their sameness of color, for instance—but soon you see the myriad variations in shape, texture, and size. Similarly, the artists represented in this volume share a common attribute—Down syndrome—yet their works of visual art and creative writing are as distinct as the individuals who made them.

Created by artists ages 14 to 51 from the United States and Canada, the 100 works were solicited via a contest and judged by Woodbine House staff. This dynamic collection of painting, ceramics, poetry, and prose, marks one of the rare occasions that the creative talents of teenagers and adults with Down syndrome have been showcased outside their own community. Inspired by nature, popular culture, travel, master artists, faith, and dreams, these pieces dazzle us with their exceptional craft, captivate us with a novel metaphor (such as the “golden shells” in 14-year-old Fiona Morris’s poem), and hint at how it feels to live with a disability.

Art / Down Syndrome



**Again and Again** (from page 205)  
*Julie Yeager*

Anything goes  
Just believe that anything can happen  
For a reason or nothing at all

Do not take advice  
Have a mind that will be in use of oneself

Unless the timing is right  
Don't think it is any night  
To do anything to regret  
Later in life

Hard to make a choice that will follow  
For the rest of life

Study again and again  
'Til someday, another dream can be clear

Maybe, just maybe  
Find what to look for  
In the search for happiness