

Profile in Mercy: Sister Judy Ward

Sister Judy Ward overcomes challenges. She's dealt with injuries, back surgeries, and alcohol addiction, but she shines vibrantly. At the age of 85 she keeps busy with multiple art projects.

At the age of 18, she decided to enter the Sisters of Mercy in Watchung, New Jersey. She characteristically thought, "This looks good. I'll give it a shot." She simply says that after being taught by Sisters of Mercy in Red Bank, New Jersey, "Mercy looked like a good way to go." And indeed, it has been.

After teaching elementary school for five years, she taught art for a total of 25 years to high school students at Mount Saint Mary Academy in Watchung, St Mary High School in Perth Amboy, Holy Spirit High School in Absecon, and Notre Dame in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. "Enjoyed every minute of it," she says succinctly.

But she arrived at her current artful work by way of painful events and a pivotal moment. She decided to enter addiction treatment for seven months in 1985 at Emmaus House in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. "It was a difficult experience. At first, I wasn't allowed to create art. I begged them to let me draw," she says, "but I had to wait as part of my recovery."

Subsequently, she was on the staff as a substance abuse counselor for four rehabilitation centers. "It was painful to watch people recovering, but I wanted to give them the road back that I had," she says. She's proud of the fact that she has been sober for 39 years.

Next, she ministered in communications for the Sisters of Mercy in New Jersey drawing on her experience as a draftsman, a skill she learned as a teenager before she entered. She and another sister from New Jersey, Catherine Mroz, worked on the local newsletter *Connections*.

Her next venture was working on the website [Catherine's Legacy](#) producing prints, prayer cards and more than 250 note card designs.

Her current work began as she struggled with recovery from painful back surgery in 2016. Doing jigsaw puzzles as she healed, Judy realized that she could use that jigsaw table for something more rewarding—her art. She sketched her doctor, Dr. Gerardo Dumapit, in pen and ink and was surprised at her success. In 2017 Ron Kopec, one of her former students from Notre Dame, visited and assembled an art table. Her commitment to drawing faces began.

Who does she choose for the 1400 portraits she has done? “I do everybody everywhere I go. I draw the person in front of me. I start with eyes.” She takes photos and completes the drawing later using Photoshop and Publisher. “One photo I enjoyed was Jack Smith (Special Counsel for the US Department of Justice), who had an interesting face and gorgeous eyes. Recently, some drawings are more challenging. Some have soft features. Glasses are a delight.”

Her physical trials continued. She had arthritis, seven hip surgeries and uterine cancer in quick succession, but she draws spiritual sustenance from other Sisters of Mercy. She read 13 of theologian Sister Joan Chittister’s books while she recuperated and wrote Joan many letters. She’s thrilled that Joan answered four of the letters. She drew Sister Renee Yann, a sister from Merion who writes a [Lavish Mercy blog](#). “Renee has made a radical change in my life as I have read her writing. I tell her what I think. We have a dialogue. I’m amazed at her.”

What has changed for Judy? She no longer prints and sells cards. “That’s too much work. I’m busy playing. I’ve always had a good time. Being in treatment and recovery did a lot for my spirituality. It made me think more in depth more often. I’m not just racing through things. I’m much more deliberate in my life.”

The rhythm of her day follows her art and spirituality. She gets up at 6 a.m. and then posts drawings ready from the night before on her Facebook page. Meditation on Renee’s daily blog posts follows. Next, she attends mass presided by Monsignor Walter Nolan, with whom she worked at Notre Dame with 30 to 40 other people via Zoom.

Then the rest of the day, as she says, is hers. She draws, limiting her time to 20 minutes to preserve her eyesight. She moves from the drawing table to the computer and from one comfortable rocker to another.

“Be still and know that I am God” is her motto. Her mantra might be “I enjoyed every minute of it.”