



Jo Myers-Walker

February 2015 newsletter

May the Spirit be present and active!

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Winter greetings to friends near and far! While the new year is still young, I gathered together some pictures and thoughts from 2014, many of which I haven't posted before.

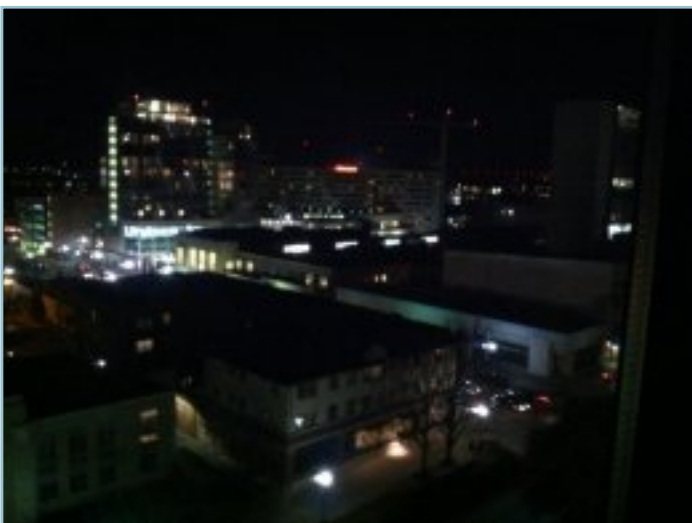
Looking back, it was an eventful year. I moved again – to a new floor this time, instead of a new city! I taught watercolor classes at the Senior Center, spiritual journal-making workshops at retreat centers and at a private home, and a workshop in making floorcloths at Hen & Chicks Studio. I enjoyed working with my neighbors to develop a community garden and painting with them in our building's art club. I painted a statue of Herky the Hawk for Iowa City's public art project, and spent time delving into the history of the Dubuque Franciscans, who got their start in the U.S. in Iowa City in 1875.

My longest journey of the year took me to Rouen, France, for a month in the fall. It was like going back in time with our 400-year-old apartment building, with a cobblestone courtyard and narrow street/passage of the same. I could just picture the horses from an earlier era and townspeople going about their daily chores. We were right next to Rouen Cathedral and could hear the bells daily.

(continued)



Old St. Mary's School, downtown Iowa City,
part of the Franciscans' history in Iowa



My bird's-eye view
of the city at night



Thank you, Herky, for helping me get to Rouen!
"Herky's Community" is painted with iconic scenes
and people who make up the landscape of
downtown Iowa City.

I wanted to be part of the culture, with relaxing meals and strolls with old friends, and new friends from Rouen. I could not always speak the language, however we could enjoy the moments together. We could communicate by pointing, me drawing pictures and through our art. I did learn a little French but they knew English much better.

My trusty black-covered watercolor journal gave me a place to sketch on-site and record my thoughts, adding local color with a little palette, helping plan out larger paintings. Looking through the drawings I can smell the bakery on rue du Gros-Horloge and remember the people strolling on Saturday night. Back in Iowa, a couple of my students saw my Rouen journal and told me about the Urban Sketchers website – it seemed I was doing the same thing as I traveled, trying to capture the essence of a scene.



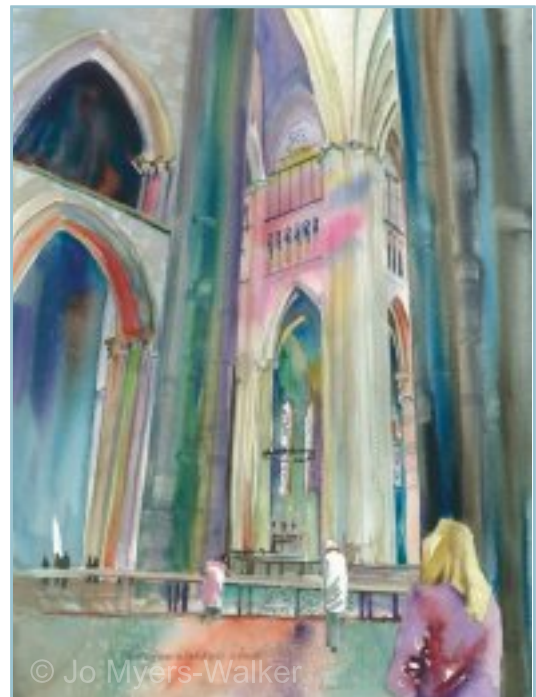
A view overlooking the vines: join me at the beautiful Summerset Winery near Indianola, Iowa for a three-day art journaling workshop, April 8–10 (see theleftbankstudio.com/events for registration).

I returned from Rouen steeped in medieval architecture and history; you can see and read about many of the places I visited on my blog at theleftbankstudio.com. Seeing people's excitement with my watercolor journal has inspired me to offer workshops in art journaling in 2015, where we can practice observing and capturing the story of our surroundings, whether it's in Rouen or in our own back yard.

Jo



My first iPad selfie: here I am at Kirkwood learning about the iPad from a favorite teacher (my daughter Shelby) just before my trip to Rouen.



One of my first stops on arrival was Rouen Cathedral, thanking God for the trip. The sun was shining through the stained-glass windows casting rainbow colors on the old walls, the reflections speaking to me.



What's for dinner in Normandy –
the food was fresh and scrumptious.

Around Rouen

*(Many thanks to Bonnie Dix,
my frequent photographer!)*



La rue du Gros-Horloge was like our Main Street,
where we could buy art supplies or beautiful flowers.



Bertrand of the CHOColate Bar made
us feel at home and helped with the
language (important in deciding
between the chocolate specialties).



Delphine and her daughter Zoe and I painted together
regularly at the French Coffee Shop where I used the
wife to send photos back to Iowa. They shared their
stories of living in Rouen, and Zoe taught me French.

People weren't home with the computer on Saturday night; they were out visiting or eating with friends. Like in Assisi, children and families would congregate in the squares and plazas.



The Undiz lingerie store always captures attention (it's on the left in the painting).



I was serenaded by an accordion player while I drew in my journal by the Cathedral.



We make an appearance in the corner of
"Saturday Night in Rouen."

La Page Blanche

Being invited to paint with these amazing artists and poets was a wonderful opportunity for me, to experience their process and gain their insight.



Artists of La Page Blanche in my sketchbook (round cheese wrapper from lunch at top left; little painting of the studio scene overlaid at top right)



Critique time for Jo: Agnès, Adeline, and Marie-Antoinette gave me incisive critiques of my watercolors and reminded me of the power of line.



The little painting: "Rouen Studio"



Examples of the artwork of (left to right) Adeline Gouarné, Agnès Dévé, Marie-Antoinette Girard



Many of the artists' studios we visited were no larger than my apartment in Iowa City, so no excuse to not be painting!



Rue Martainville

I kept painting the same street with the leaning medieval house looking for a new style, and story. Every corner is a painting and reflects the slowed lifestyle of just being in the moment and enjoying life. People talked to me often, I think because I would get so excited about what I was seeing and sketching.



“Little Gems”



After downsizing to fit into my apartment I still had stacks of old work from decades of painting. I've been cutting up some of the old watercolors (some more than 30 years old) to create “little gems,” adding a few new strokes here and there. It's like traveling through time to revisit different phases in my artwork, such as abstract (looking for shapes), minimalist (less is better), and experimental (using different media). The later work moves on from the abstract, but every painting still needs a strong abstract base to hold it together.

