

# Dream Weaver

BY CHRIS KUHNI & SUSAN JORDAN BENNETT

*“Follow your dream”*, says Milbridge native, teacher, artist and now illustrator, **Janie Snider**.

**J**anie’s dream came true earlier this year when she learned that a children’s book she had illustrated with author Chris Higgins was being published. “Mr. Marden’s Garden” was actually written 19 years ago. Janie met the author five years ago and together, they brought the story of Mr. Marden to life. “It is a

great story”, says Janie, “with many early, emergent reading skills. I loved putting pictures with the words, all the while thinking like a child. As a lover of gardening, it was a perfect fit.” But the success did not come overnight. The book was turned down by a couple of publishers, but Janie and Chris never gave up on their dream that one day it would become a “REAL” book.

Her journey to become an artist and illustrator took a winding path. Although she knew as early as third grade that she wanted to be an artist, that dream, too, was put on hold for a number of years. Janie graduated from Narraguagus High School in 1977 and went to work at the Red Barn Restaurant in Milbridge as a waitress.



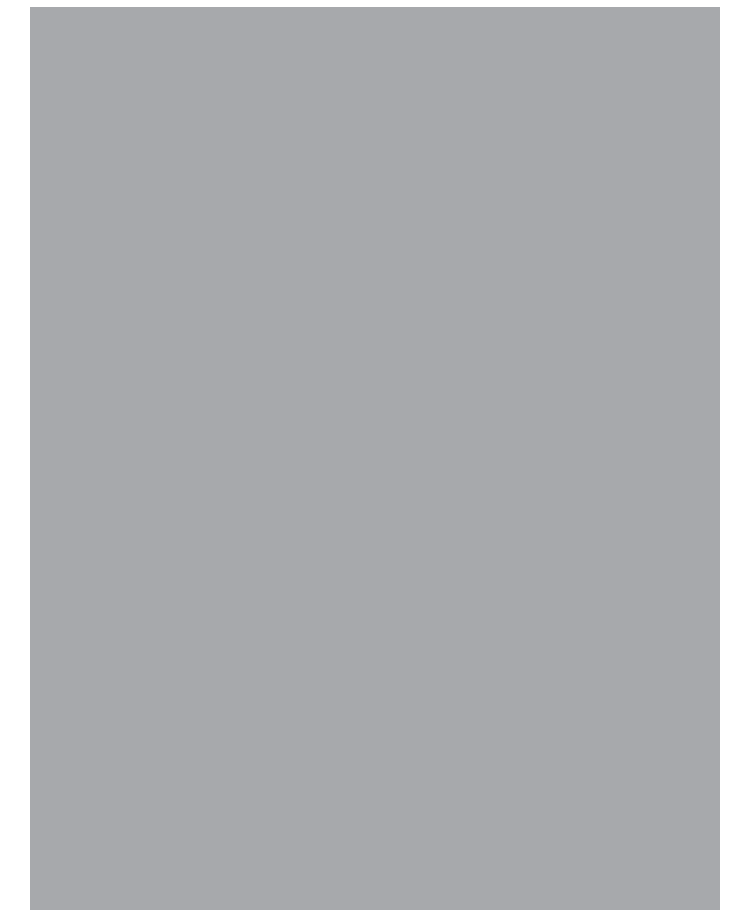
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After 10 years of waiting tables and raising two small children, she decided it was time to pursue what would become her life’s passion. In 1987, she enrolled at the University of Maine, Machias. She graduated in 1993 with a degree in elementary education and a minor in art.

Fate led Janie to her first teaching job, where she was hired to fill in as an itinerant substitute art teacher for SAD#37. She ended up staying for nine years and transformed the arts program into a vibrant and exciting experiential program for children. Anyone who ever had the pleasure of visiting the annual “Arts Night” at one of the local elementary schools remembers the captivating work that she inspired from her students. The hallways of each school were transformed into wondrous art galleries.

In 2002, Janie started teaching at Hancock Grammar School,

where she continues to inspire children to reach their creative potential. She earned her K-12 Visual Arts degree through the



### From a former student of Janie's:

"I was the kind of student that didn't think of myself as creative, and had trouble coming up with my own artistic ideas. Janie really knew how to bring out my own creative ideas without doing the project for me. She really made this deathly shy student comfortable and confident during art class. Actually, I still think of her when I see anything to do with 'Where the Wild Things Are'. She used the book to inspire my class to make 'Wild Thing' masks and I still have mine, all these years later. It was one of my favorite art projects from elementary school. I loved having Janie Snider as a teacher and thought of her often and fondly after she stopped teaching at my school."

—Kayla Pinkham, Milbridge, 2015 graduate UMaine Machias, with a degree in English, Creative Writing and Book Arts.



Janie reading to her students in the read-to-me challenge!

Maine Department of Education, "not the traditional path, but a path that has served me well."

Alahna Roach is one of the many young people who count Janie Snider as an inspirational mentor. As a teen, Alahna assisted Janie with a summer arts program and saw firsthand her masterful techniques as an art educator. "She prioritized balance between process and product, between learning about great art movements, and being true to one's own artistic voice. And she just plain made things fun. She was so skillful in child development that her students followed her lead like joyful little ducklings. And after all these years, she shows up to support every effort I make to offer art to our community, and brings her total confidence in the creative process to bring out the best we all have to offer." Alahna now holds a master's degree in art therapy.

In 2014, Janie was named Maine Middle School Art Teacher of the Year. Her selection was, in large part, based on her history of bringing the arts into her community. Her passion for her work is evident. "I love what I do! Art, children, nature and a love of people are my inspiration! Art means the world to me; it is an essential part of who I am. Over the years, I have noticed it grows with me. As I reflect, there was a short time when art was not in my life much and I was a bit lost. I remember the day I realized this loss and it scared me. Had I lost a part of me? Was my art still there? What did I have to do to find that joy again? I found it in an art class and I never once took it for granted again."



For this artist and educator, her art is always evolving. "I have personal art, symbolic and abstract, public art, commissioned work, florals, landscapes, seascapes and now children's book illustrations. My art is maturing along with me. The dreams I had as a child are coming into being, because I never let them go!"

Life is busy but rich for this full-time teacher, mother and grandmother. But she shows no signs of slowing down. Janie is the curator for the Milbridge Historical Society and has created several stellar displays highlighting the history of the small fishing village. Her strong desire to reach young people has been an integral part of her museum work. "I made a commitment to myself and my town to elevate youth involvement in our community. I have developed and instituted a children's museum literacy program for the past two summers. Seeing kids enjoying all the museum has to offer has been so rewarding." This past summer, Janie and the

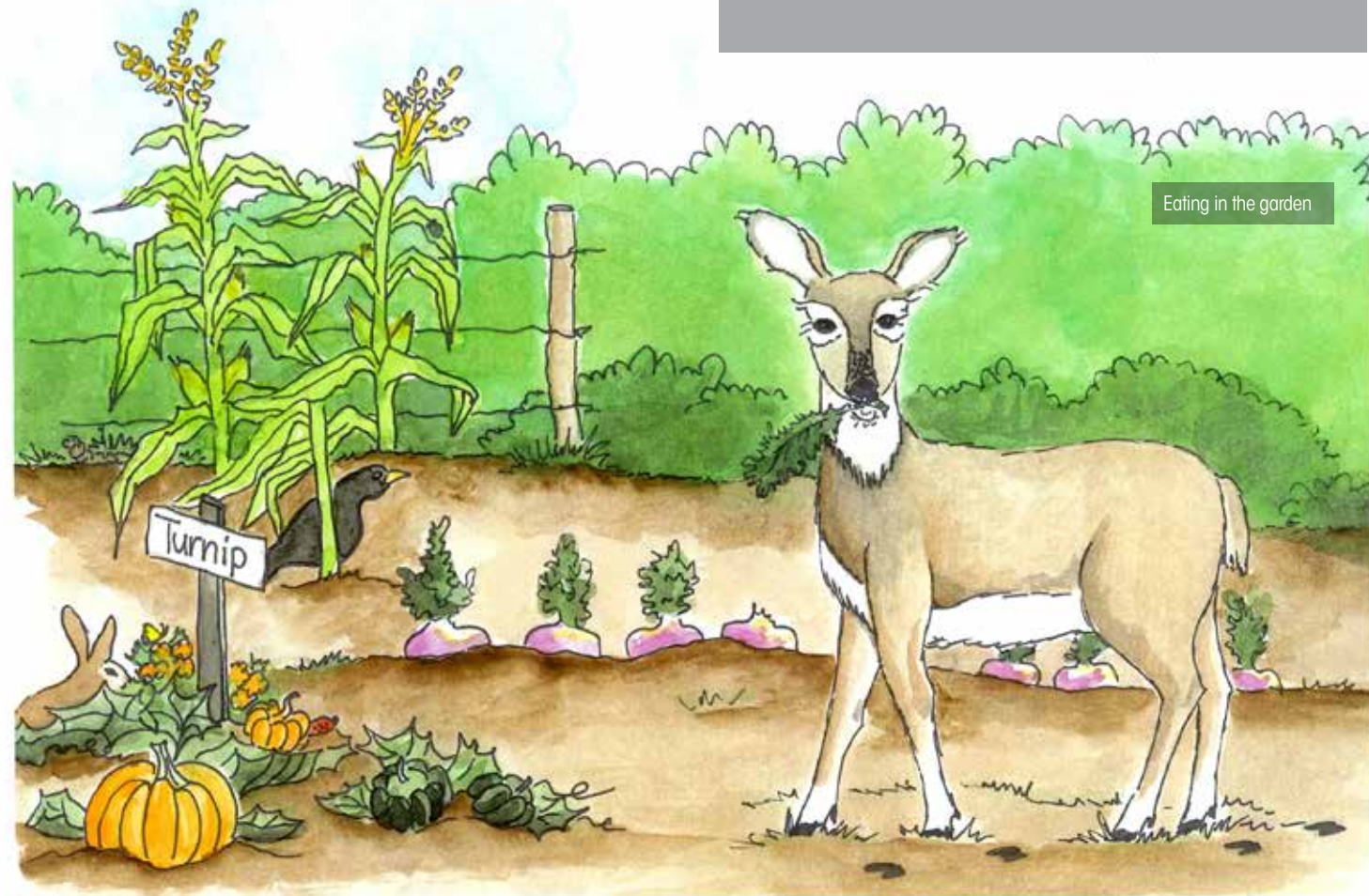
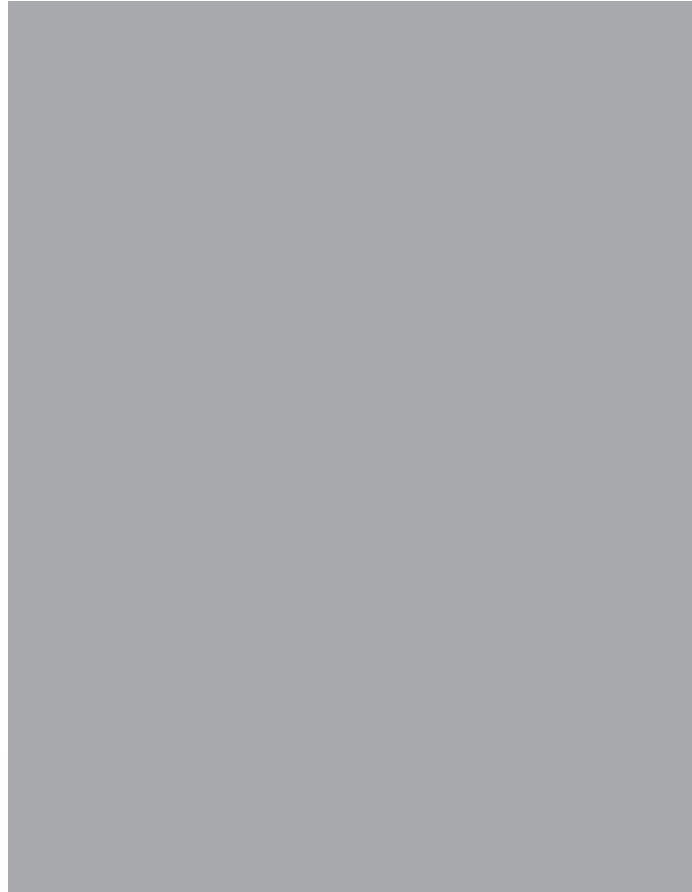
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Historical Society introduced a youth nature study that honored local naturalists and authors Frank and Ada Graham. The Grahams provided summer nature camps at McClellan Park in Milbridge from 1968-1976. A young Janie Snider attended those programs and was strongly influenced by the beauty she found in the natural elements.



Drawing from nature, age 8

Janie is an avid gardener and is known for her spectacular perennial beds. Illustrating Mr. Marden's Garden was a natural progression and provided the opportunity to meld her passion for art, gardening and teaching.



Eating in the garden



Copy of Caroline reading and looking at Grammie's illustrations on a winters day! 2017

**Recent notes to "Mrs. Snider":**

"You will never know the impact you've truly had on me. The little ways of guidance, motivation and love you've poured out have really touched my heart."

—Samantha, Lamoine Consolidated School

"Ever since kindergarten, I have been in love with art, and you being my teacher has strengthened that love. Art has been an amazing way for me to express myself and I felt that in every class I learned a little bit more about myself. You have taught me many techniques in art, always a helping hand when I was stuck. When I said 'I can't', you said I could. Your encouragement has strengthened me in art and beyond."

—Lucy, Hancock Grammar School

Another great passion for Janie is her support of the Maine Discovery Museum in Bangor. Each year for the past ten years, Janie has been one of the Maine artists contributing to their annual art auction. For Janie, this provides another opportunity to promote art. But the auction is also her way of contributing to childhood enrichment programs at the museum, something she values enormously.

For over twelve years, Janie has been a dedicated volunteer at the Women's Health Resource Library in Milbridge, most recently providing her popular painting classes. She has also been a volunteer gardener for the WHRL's Incredible Edible Milbridge community vegetable gardens.

"My advice to others: Never turn your back on your dreams! You might have to tuck them away, close to your heart, during parts of your life that require your attention. But be there, be present, work hard, work with others, build relationships, collaborate, communicate, share your ideas, your talents and your gifts with others. Believe in family and community. Envision yourself as you are in your dreams. BE FULL OF LOVE."

MSM



Janie painting in her studio



Mr Marden's Garden