

For a Writer-Painter-Singer, Secret's in Her 'Chemistry'



Thomas McDonald for *The New York Times*

A common theme in Mary Carroll Moore's work is "deserved happiness," involving the choices one makes after a crisis.

By SUSAN HODARA
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MARY CARROLL MOORE, a resident of Bridgewater, radiates such calm that it is hard to believe the extent of her accomplishments. Since 1977, her essays, articles and award-winning short stories have been published in magazines, newspapers and literary journals. She is the author of 10 published nonfiction books, two of which are memoirs, and a novel, "Qualities of Light," which is being shopped to publishers. Her soft pastel paintings — impressionistic studies of the light and color in nature — have been exhibited nationally since 2002, and are in permanent collections, including that of the Pacific Street Gallery in New London. Ms. Moore sings with the group Keystone, whose music she described as "New Age pop," and whose 2003 CD, "No Limitations," includes her

song "Melody;" she is also a member of the Connecticut Women's Chorus.

She says her triple vision is focused on common themes. One is the relationship between health and self-expression. The second is what she calls "deserved happiness," which she defines as "a fascination with the choices we make after personal disaster or suffering."

Both concepts are rooted in Ms. Moore's own experience, most notably two bouts of cancer — thyroid in 1988, breast in 1999. "Treatment for breast cancer was traumatic," she said. "Chemotherapy forced me to a full stop."

Her creative work, she believes, hastened her recuperation. "Art and writing bolstered my belief that life was essentially supportive rather

than victimizing,” she said, “and that I would survive.” She emerged with a fortified commitment to her work.

She began writing “Qualities of Light,” whose main character is a young artist grappling with the notion of deserved happiness. She started painting after a 20-year hiatus, and wrote her first songs. “Cancer forces you to re-evaluate your life,” she continued. “I began to make choices, weeding out what was not sustaining, making room for creative work. I can’t say my cancer was a blessing, but it was certainly a wake-up call.”

She expanded her work to include teaching, starting with a class at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis for breast cancer survivors who members’ availability. Last year, that schedule was displaced by the demands of completing both her novel and a master’s degree in creative writing from Goddard College.

wanted to use writing to heal. She returns to Minneapolis regularly to lead a variety of writing workshops, which she also offers at the Litchfield Community Center and at the Hudson Valley Writers’ Center in New York.

“I enjoy deconstructing a process and then simplifying it so others can understand,” she said of her approach to teaching.

Ms. Moore divides her weeks into three days of money-generating assignments and two days of personal projects; her medium is determined by the seasons. She concentrates on writing during the winter, when painting outdoors is impossible.

“Painting takes precedence in summer,” she said, “and I toggle between the two in spring and fall.”

Ongoing Keystone rehearsals are determined by

“It’s taken years to integrate all the paths of my life,” Ms. Moore said. Rejecting the suggestion that perhaps she has more energy or ability than others, she added, “I’m just a normal, struggling person with a focused chemistry.”