

The quilt maker

On our drive to purchase material for a new wall quilt, Martha, the quilt maker, reminisced and described her initial visit to this fabric store. Three years ago she had taken time off from teaching her fifth-grade students and spent the day sorting through fabrics, matching colors to a design. After several hours, she completed making choices and stepped out onto the

THE HOMEFRONT



DR. CONSTANCE JOHANNESSEN

porch to head home. She then unexpectedly fell and experienced her first seizure.

Martha awoke in a hospital. She had no memory of the seizure,

nor did she recall being transported to the emergency room. As Martha learned later, her seizure was caused by a tumor on her brain. The following months were consumed with testing and eventually surgery.

As a consequence, Martha's ability to teach was significantly altered. Up to this point, she had enjoyed teaching in a private school for more than 20 years. She had seldom been absent and loved facing her students each day. Since the surgery, her attendance was spotty. Seizures continued to occur, with Martha never

feeling completely secure that she could detect their onset. Her medications were constantly monitored, with frequent changes.

Martha realized her condition was unpredictable and reluctantly retired; keeping the option to substitute teach. Gradually, she embraced quilt making more and more, and replaced sewing for her teaching days. She made several beautiful complex quilts for our church, which is where I initially admired her work.

As we continued our journey to the Alton Bay fabric store last spring, I welcomed Martha's honesty and appreciated her ability to recognize her artistic gifts and develop a new career. That day, we spent hours examining reams of fabrics, hoping to find the perfect colors/patterns that would contrast and present with whimsy, estheticism, intensity, and not be too bold. We left pleased with our day's find. I purchased the material, yet we did not discuss money or the cost of her labor. We were in agreement that Martha could take her time in making the quilt.

Come October, Martha called to say the quilt was finished. When my husband — director of OdysseyNH — and I picked it up, we were speechless. The quilt is beautiful. Its intricate design is striking. It has movement and one can easily see something new each time you look at it through a spectrum of purples, greens, and autumn tones. Martha's exquisite craftsmanship must have taken hundreds of hours of her time.

At this point, I asked Martha how much I owed her. She said she didn't know and asked me to contact an appraiser who was familiar with her work.

See HOMEFRONT, Page B6

HOMEFRONT, from Page B5
Eventually, Martha arrived at a price and agreed to receive payments over several months.

A week later, Martha called and said she had been thinking about it, and decided that she wanted to give the money to OdysseyNH. She had been to an event several years ago and remembered a young man who spoke about his struggles and journey of recovery. She had heard about the Recovery School and as a former teacher, she emphasized how important the right

educational environment is for students' success.

My payment to Martha will become her gift to help start OdysseyNH's Recovery School.

Upon reflection, the quilt easily symbolizes the new recovery school. The pattern is called rhapsody. It has a purposeful pattern of interruptions at the borders, and other unexpected places. At times it appears to be organized bolts of lightning, and yet other times it can seem calming, much like what one could envision the healing process for adolescents to be like.

Whenever I show this quilt to others, I always think of the woman who has taken time to give to my family and a school. I always tell of her journey and her generosity.

Dr. Constance Johannessen, a licensed psychologist in New Hampshire and Maine, has practiced for more than 20 years and specializes in couples, individual and group therapy. She is with Woodland Professional Associates of North Hampton.

Martha, the quilt maker