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Above: Spring growth unfolds in the Thompsons' woodland garden. Inset: Pat Thompson in his garden. Photos: David Zeigler. KP News

Pat Thompson: Gardener and Artist

SARA THOMPSON, KP NEWS

Pat Thompson's expansive garden is a metaphor for his life.

He describes himself as a self-taught avid rather than master gardener. And though maintaining the garden is really a full-time job, he finds time for other passions. He is a mixed media artist, producing largely abstract work, and is active with the local Art Pharts. He's a member of the Fuchsia Society and the Bayshore Garden Club and serves as a deacon for the Longbranch Community Church.

Thompson spent his early years near Lake Sawyer in Black Diamond but as the son of a Boeing employee he moved with his family and lived all over the country, including Florida and New York. He returned to Washington and graduated from Highline High School in 1962 before attending Automation Institute, a technical vocational school in Seattle. He worked at the University of Washington as a computer operator and then a programmer.

His background had been straight-laced, but this was the '60s and he was drawn to

the culture he experienced at the UW. "I was a hippie, of course!" he said. His wife at the time was not taken with his choice and they went their separate ways.

"I wanted to get back to the land and subsistence living," Thompson said. He and his second wife bought 12 acres in Arlington. They didn't know much about farming, but they dove in and raised and sold produce, rabbits and a few pigs. From Arlington it was off to Texas and 360 acres to try out pig farming on a larger scale. When a back injury made that work untenable, a friend suggested that a great way to live cheaply would be to "go cruising." Thompson had sailed "a little" and "read a lot" to prepare for this next stage of life. They bought a sailboat and spent the next 10 years on the Sea of Cortez.

A family trip in the midst of their cruising life brought the couple back to the North-

west, and Thompson and his wife began to think about their next phase. They thought Gig Harbor would be perfect. Five years later, when they were ready to put down roots, property prices exceeded their budget. A real estate agent suggested Key Peninsula. "No one had heard of the

Key Peninsula 25 years ago," Thompson said. They bought a five-acre undeveloped parcel in Longbranch and began to build a home, starting with a shed in a cleared meadow.

Thompson and his second wife drifted apart and separated amicably. He met his wife Ruth at a KP Civic Center dance

14 years ago. "Little Bill and the Blue Notes was playing," he said. "I was dancing with some of the Key Peninsula elders, including Claudia Loy's mother, when a friend said I needed to meet someone. After we were introduced, we danced every single number for the rest of the night."



Ruth shares his love of gardening and continues to work for others at least three days a week before coming home to their place to work some more.

Their house has expanded from the initial shed and now includes Thompson's Mexican Patio, where friends gather in the summer. The garden, too, has evolved. He started with vegetables but got bored with them, he said. He turned to ornamentals and the now 10-acre property has gardens that flow around the house. They are a wild and wonderful combination of native and exotic plants, rimmed with beach stones. Internal structure comes from the existing large trees, rocks, driftwood, moss-covered logs and stumps, as well as found objects.

"I'm a landscape designer, but our place is a bit problematic from a design point of view," Thompson said. "Ruth and I are nursery sluts—we can't resist new plants. And so, when we get home, we just have to find a place for our new finds."

The gardens have names and themes. The Gazebo holds new plants and provides a place to sit in the afternoon sun. The Perennial Garden is home to at least 50 kinds of hostas and has a place for miniature evergreens. Then comes Sleepy Hollow, featuring ferns, followed by the Tunnel Garden, then the Lower Garden, the Estate Garden, the Tropical Garden with bamboo and a pond with koi, and the Japanese Garden complete with a dry stream bed, bridge and pagoda. "All together we have over 900 varieties of plants, shrubs and trees," Thompson said.

Clearing to make way for the gardens came through conventional and unconventional means. About three quarters of the work was done through human labor, but the rest was thanks to porcine power. Two pigs—Creighton (named for Michael Creighton, his wife's favorite author) and then Rojo can take credit. Thompson initially bought Creighton and fenced her near the vegetable garden to discourage deer but noticed that her snout was remarkably effective in digging out blackberry roots. He began moving her fenced area around to help clear for future gardens. Rojo arrived as a tiny piglet and lived with the family for 15 years before dying of congestive heart failure. He had a few escapes and gained local celebrity. Thompson was not always sure if visitors came to see him or the pig.

The garden has become a destination for garden clubs, with at least one tour scheduled each year. "It is a challenge to have everything ready at one time." He loves spring, but his favorite seasons are fall and winter. That is when he and Ruth rethink their creation, make new plans and move plants to new locations.

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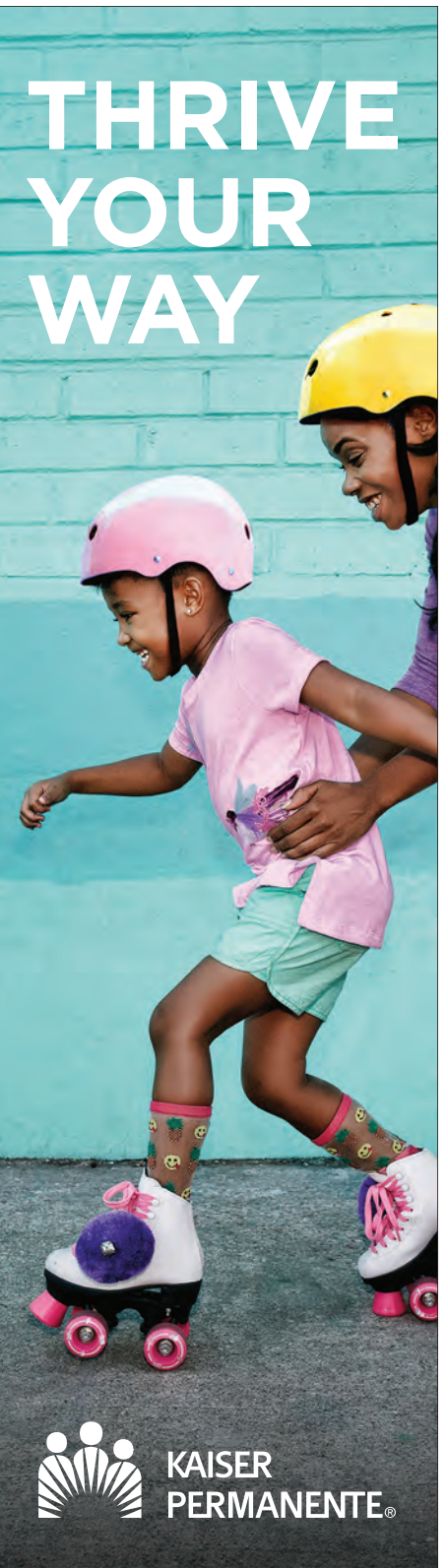
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Tip Toland— Genuine Life in Sculpture

The local artist took a long inward journey to find her vision and her mission.

SARA THOMPSON, KP NEWS

Tip Toland, a sculptor renowned for her arresting, realistic, life-sized figures, moved to the Key Peninsula with her husband nearly two decades ago from Seattle. “At the time I thought it would take me from all my connections in town and I would feel very isolated. But I wouldn’t go back to Seattle for all the tea in China,” she said.

Toland’s spiritual life is central to her work. She follows Mata Amritanandamayi, a Hindu spiritual leader and humanitarian, known throughout the world as Amma, who offers a hug to all who seek comfort from her. Amma began conducting programs around the world in 1987, and Toland first met her in 1990. She said, “I wasn’t looking for anything per se. I was dubious and skeptical and then I got one of her hugs and something really happened.

For some people it’s just a hug. For others it is a spiritual awakening. For me, it was like a spear right to my heart and changed my life.”

Toland said she was feeling self-indulgent as an artist. She needed to hear directly from Amma that teaching and making art had her approval. If she did not get it, she was ready to leave her career and work with Amma caring for the poor. At a program with followers, which went into the small hours of the morning, Toland submitted her questions to Amma in writing. When she saw Amma was reading her questions she went to hear her answers directly. Is it OK to be an artist? “Yes,” said Amma. It is OK to teach art? Again, yes. How do I keep my ego out of it? “Be a brush in God’s hands,” said Amma. Toland plunged back into her work, creating striking images of the vulnerable and teaching in workshops all over the world.

At the time she was living in the Magnolia neighborhood in Seattle with her husband and working in her studio in Pioneer Square. Parking at her studio was a nightmare. She had to constantly feed a meter. “I’d get into my right brain while I was working, would forget to go to the meter. The parking violations department knew me by my first name,” she said.

When Toland received a small inheritance, the couple considered a move. In Seattle, they could afford a “small house in the Rainier Valley with bars on the windows.” They had never heard of the Key Peninsula, but when members of Toland’s satsang, or spiritual community, told them about a place owned by other followers of Amma, her husband paid a visit. “Kenny took one look and said, ‘We’ll take it,’” Toland said. She was a bit more hesitant. “I didn’t want to live in an ashram,” she said. “I’m not so spiritual so that I can’t enjoy my life.”



Photo: Lisa Bryan, KP News

But not long after, Toland and her husband purchased the 5-acre property and never looked back.

A few years ago, a grant allowed her to build a small studio filled with light. Her kiln and other working space is in a daylight basement. “I love that we have a place to park every day. I have dogs and they can just go. It’s like ‘don’t fence me in.’ I’m a happy camper,” she said.

Toland’s early works were wall reliefs in ceramics and wood. She transitioned to three-dimensional work in the mid-1990s. “It just seemed to happen. I was getting antsy, and at one point I just got impatient with the process of doing wall reliefs.”

At first, she said, “I had no real grasp of anatomy and so I went back to school.” She attended Gage Academy in Seattle, taking sculpting classes based on classical observational training. Her first sculptures were dolls. “They were sort of frozen and purposely stiff at first, until I got more confident.”

She said of her choice of subjects, “I tend to gravitate to people who have been marginalized and the vulnerable. I gravitate to honesty. And the vulnerable are stripped down to their basic humanity. Expression means a lot to me in portraiture. Any kind of underdog will grab my attention.” Her current work features the very young and the very old, and a recent exhibition focused on albinism in East Africa.

Toland works from live models. They pose, she measures them and takes photographs, makes sketches and then creates the sculptures, usually from stoneware, in her studio. She works with solid clay, using an armature of plumbing pipe as support. “I have to see the whole thing, to pound it and work with it,” she said.

Once the figure is complete, she cuts it into segments,

hollows it and removes the armature, and fires it in the kiln she designed to accommodate the large pieces. She said it takes as long to finish the surface—making skin and eyes eerily realistic—as the sculpting itself. She uses house paint, flecking colors in multiple layers with toothbrushes. She’ll add chalk pastel to a few areas, paint a fixative, and then add wax where she wants to have a sheen. The eyes are painted with clear nail polish.

It takes Toland about four months to complete a sculpture. She said at a lecture at the Bellevue Arts Museum, “At times one wonders in the many months of making work in one’s basement alone, if this is nuts or not. My belief is that it is nuts and at the same time a calling.”

Toland is now working on a show scheduled next year at Traver Gallery, the gallery that represents her in Seattle. Typically, a show will feature five or six new pieces. If all

are not life-sized, she can produce up to four in a year. She said, “Small is almost more of a pain. I fantasize about doing little quick things but then I know how I am. The ball continues to roll, and I follow it wherever it rolls.”

Toland has been featured in exhibitions internationally, including a 2008 to 2009 retrospective at the Bellevue Arts Museum. Her work is in collections around the world, including at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Portland Art Museum, and the Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian.

She has won multiple awards. This year she was selected by the NW Designer Craftsmen to be featured as part of The Living Treasures Project, described as “video profiles of individuals with lifelong involvement in the arts and a history of personal generosity and outstanding leadership.” The video will be presented Oct. 20 at Broadway Performance Hall in Seattle.

“IS IT OKAY TO BE AN ARTIST?”

“THE VULNERABLE ARE STRIPPED DOWN TO THEIR BASIC HUMANITY.”

TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY SCHEDULE

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EVERGREEN TUES & THURS AM

8:50	Evergreen Elementary School
8:59	Palmer Lake public access 24th St SW
9:00	Palmer Lake 21st St SW @ 193rd Ave
9:05	KPCS Senior Center & Food Bank
9:06	Home Gas Station @ KP Hwy N
9:10	67th Ave Ct NW @ KP Hwy N
9:14	Food Market in Key Center
9:15	KP Hwy N @ Minterwood Dr NW
9:21	Lake Kathryn Village SR 302 & 92nd Ave NW
9:26	Purdy Park & Ride

EVERGREEN WEDNESDAY AM

9:50	Evergreen Elementary School
9:54	Palmer Lake public access 24th St SW
9:55	Palmer Lake 21st St SW @ 193rd Ave
10:00	KPCS Senior Center & Food Bank
10:01	Home Gas Station @ KP Hwy N
10:05	67th Ave Ct NW @ KP Hwy N
10:09	Food Market in Key Center
10:10	KP Hwy N @ Minterwood Dr NW
10:16	Lake Kathryn Village SR 302 & 92nd Ave NW
10:21	Purdy Park & Ride

VAUGHN TUES & THURS AM

8:50	Vaughn Elementary School
8:59	Wright Bliss Road @ Olson Dr NW
9:00	Wright Bliss Road @ 104th St Ct NW
9:05	Wright Bliss Road @ SR 302/4-Corners
9:06	SR 302 @ 150th Ave/Lake Holiday bus shed
9:10	SR302 @ 140th Ave/Lake of the Woods
9:14	SR 302 @ Charbonneau Construction
9:15	SR 302 @ 92nd Ave NW/Lake Kathryn Village
9:21	Purdy Park & Ride

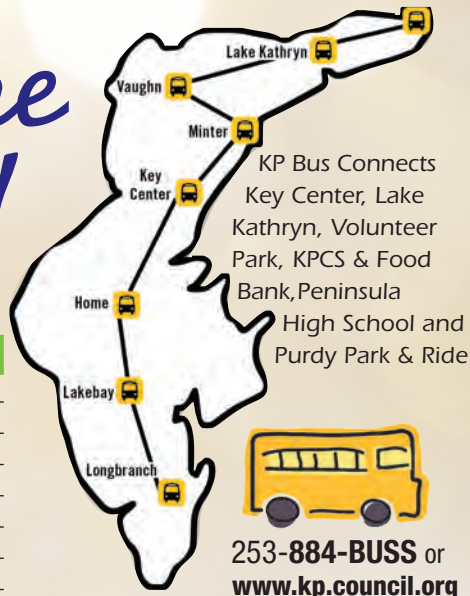
VAUGHN WEDNESDAY AM

9:50	Vaughn Elementary School
9:51	Wright Bliss Road @ Olson Dr NW
9:52	Wright Bliss Road @ 104th St Ct NW
9:54	Wright Bliss Road @ SR 302/4-Corners
9:57	SR 302 @ 150th Ave/Lake Holiday bus shed
9:59	SR302 @ 140th Ave/Lake of the Woods
10:01	SR 302 @ Charbonneau Construction
10:04	SR 302 @ 92nd Ave NW/Lake Kathryn Village
10:09	Purdy Park & Ride

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TUESDAY & THURSDAY MIDDAY

10:33	Peninsula High School
10:35	Purdy Park & Ride
10:38	Cost Less Pharmacy @ Lake Kathryn Village
10:48	SR 302 @ Windermere Realty, near 118th Ave
10:50	SR 302 @ 140th Ave/Lake of the Woods
10:51	SR 302 @ 150th Ave/Lake Holiday bus shed
10:54	Wright Bliss Road @ SR 302/4-Corners
10:56	Wright Bliss Road @ 104th St Ct NW
10:58	Wright Bliss Road @ Olson Dr NW
11:00	Food Market @ Key Center
11:06	KP Hwy N @ 167th Ave Ct NW
11:09	Home Gas Station @ KP Hwy N
11:12	KPCS Senior Center & Food Bank
11:18	Palmer Lake public access 24th St SW
11:19	Palmer Lake 21st St SW @ 193rd Ave
11:25	Evergreen Elementary School

TUES, WED & THURS PM

4:43	Peninsula High School
4:45	Purdy Park & Ride
4:51	Cost Less Pharmacy @ Lake Kathryn Village
4:54	SR 302 @ Windermere Realty, near 118th Ave
4:58	SR 302 @ 150th Ave/Lake Holiday bus shed
5:00	Wright Bliss Road @ SR 302/4-Corners
5:02	Wright Bliss Road @ 104th St Ct NW
5:03	Wright Bliss Road @ Olson Dr NW
5:06	Food Market in Key Center
5:06	KP Hwy N @ 84th St NW/Red Barn
5:10	KP Hwy N @ 167th Ave Ct NW
5:14	Home Gas Station @ KP Hwy N
5:14	KPCS Senior Center & Food Bank
5:19	Palmer Lake public access 24th St SW
5:20	Palmer Lake 21st St SW @ 193rd Ave
5:24	KP Hwy N @ 17th St Ct SW
5:36	KP Hwy N @ 84th St NW/Red Barn



"Music was my shelter, companion, friend and teacher." Photo: David Zeigler, KP News

Music Brings a Rock 'n' Roller to the KP

SARA THOMPSON, KP NEWS

"What is music?" is the first thing Mel Hing said as he sat down in Lulu's to talk about his life and what brought him to the Key Peninsula. "It's been turned into entertainment, but originally it was about communication. Before we had written language, it helped humans remember."

Hing described himself as a jack of all music trades, and music has been constant in his life. What has happened between his start with a violin in grade school and his current work as folk rock guitar technician (he modifies guitars to make the sound musicians seek and makes adjustments to accommodate aging hands) could fill a book. In fact, he said he is writing a book, which he will call "Yellow Mustard."

Now 80, Hing grew up in Seattle's south end, the black sheep in a family of Chinese immigrants with ties to the business and restaurant community. His father was a chef with the Four Seas and owned the Jade Pagoda, and wanted him to go into business. "But music was my shelter, companion, friend and teacher," he said. When Count Basie donated his repaired upright double bass to Hing's middle school, he was hooked. Later, he played strings in the band at Garfield High School.

He also worked at his uncle's electronics repair shop during high school. He became an electronics technician, but music was his passion. Hing discovered jazz and blues in the clubs in Seattle's Central District. "I hung out after gigs and learned," he said.

He married and left music for a while,

worked full-time in electronics and tried to start his own business. His marriage fell apart, and he returned to his old haunts. He worked as a watcher in the gambling clubs, and after hours he joined the music scene, first as a side gig and then full time as a roadie for some Seattle bands. "I basically traded a gun for a guitar," Hing said. "I was responsible for getting all the equipment onto the stage, making sure it worked, fixing it if I could and knowing where to get it fixed if I couldn't."

Hing thought the Seattle music world of the time was a snob scene. Intrigued by what he heard about Haight-Ashbury, he moved to San Francisco in the Sixties. He connected with Chet Helms, the promoter who founded the Family Dog production company, operated the Avalon Ballroom and recruited Janis Joplin to Big Brother and the Holding Company. "It was a magic carpet ride," Hing said.

He drove and provided security for Helms, wrote music, and worked closely with lead guitarist James Gurley, refining his guitar tech skills. He regarded Joplin as a close friend and mingled with just about every big name that passed through, including Jerry Garcia, Bob Dylan, Mike Bloomfield and Ram Dass. Money flowed and it was a star-studded life.

Then Joplin died. Hing said that with her death he felt like the San Francisco music scene ended. He moved to Los Angeles and spent time in Big Sur. He worked when he could, but described that time as a blur. There were a number of deaths from overdoses, and paying bail for others ate up any

extra money. His beloved pet wolf Mojo died. John Lennon's death in 1980 was the last straw for him, and he moved to Hawaii.

A friend introduced Hing to the slack-key Hawaiian guitar, and music returned to its critical role in his life. He volunteered at the university radio station and started the Monday Night Live program, which continues to this day. He helped remaster recordings for Hula Records, opened his guitar tech business, and discovered good nutrition and aquaponics.

Then, last year, after a 27-year separation, he found that his mother needed him. Now 102, she lives in Lynnwood, and though her mind is intact, her body is failing. His good friend, Palmer Lake resident Tom Murphy, who drummed with the Robert Cray Band, found a place for him to stay on the Key Peninsula in July.

The move has had its challenges. Hing had hoped to have a place to run his guitar tech business but that has not worked out yet, and his car broke down, making it hard to get to his mother. But the community stepped in.

At lunch at Key Peninsula Community Services, he learned about The Mustard Seed Project and connected with a few resources. Volunteer driver Larry Bingham took him to Lynnwood once a week. Financial help from the Gig Harbor FISH food bank and St. Vincent de Paul in Tacoma helped cover the costs of replacing an engine. And, in turn, he took a look at the sound system at the Longbranch Improvement Club and offered some advice.

Hing said he's one of the last people standing from those heady San Francisco days. Although he lived the same hard life as the others, he thinks that staying under the radar is what kept him alive. Despite the cold and dark, Hing said he likes the Key Peninsula. "Everyone here is really cool. I'm meeting people my age who could care less about rock stars, and I like that." He's not sure about what the future holds, but he could see this as a place to settle.

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Hugh McMillan: Four Decades of Impact on the Key Peninsula

Ex-CIA recruiter uses multiple talents to strengthen community.

SARA THOMPSON, KP NEWS

He is a ubiquitous presence, camera slung on his neck, quick to share his opinion, ready to step in if action is called for, and equally prepared to recruit others to his cause.

Hugh McMillan, retired CIA agent and Key Peninsula activist for four decades, will be 94 this year and shows little sign of slowing down. And Janice, his wife of nearly 68 years, while also being an active volunteer, has kept the home fires burning to make his work possible.

Hugh was born in British Columbia in 1926 and moved to Tacoma at age 3. He describes himself as a middling student academically but a “self-proclaimed big man on campus” in junior high and high school — serving as yell leader and student body president. He joined the Navy in 1945, but World War II ended while he was still in training and he was released. In 1948, he enrolled in what is now the University of Puget Sound.

It was there he met Janice. “I started ogling her in ’48 but we didn’t go on our first date until ’50,” he said. When he moved to Berkeley, Calif., for graduate work, Janice and her family moved to nearby Alameda, allowing the budding romance to continue.

Hugh went to the University of Washington to pursue a Ph.D., but a car accident left him strapped for cash. He went to Fort Lewis to look for a job, but the receptionist declared him overqualified for labor and handed him applications for other opportunities. Among them was one for the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency.

Hugh was hired as an operations officer; a recruiter of spies. His original reason for joining, he said, was to give himself an entree into public office. From age 10, when he met then Congressman John Coffee, he wanted to be a representative. He figured a background in the CIA would be just the ticket when he decided to run.

In 1952 Hugh moved to Washington, D.C. Janice joined him six months later and four days after that they were married. “We lived in a furnished apartment that cost \$115 a month, with plastic curtains that had holes in them,” she said.

Their first posting was in Japan. “We were there for six years. Our kids were born there,” Janice said. They went on to consulate and embassy postings that included India, Turkey and Egypt with intervals in Washington, D.C.

In 1964 Hugh met U.S. Sen. Henry “Scoop” Jackson, who said he’d give his blessing to him to run as U.S. representative. “I was in the stratosphere for about three days,” Hugh said. And then, as he realized how much more of the world remained to be seen through his job, “I came crashing down.”

Jackson suggested he wait until the Republican incumbent retired the following term, and the two-year wait made sense to them both. But the Democratic challenger won that year in an upset and went on to serve six terms. Hugh had no intention of running against him or the men who followed him — Norm Dicks and Derek Kilmer — and his dream of becoming a representative came to an end.

Janice kept the household running and worked at times during their postings, helping to file reports. In New Delhi she started a boy scout troop for sons Lance and Marshall. And, she said, “I was very good at big receptions, at meeting people that Hugh would be interested in. I’d say, ‘Oh, I want you to meet my husband, and that way we got to know a lot of people.’”

“She was superb,” Hugh said. “She was so effective that when we landed in Egypt we weren’t met by Americans. We were met by the Lebanese consul, who gave her a bouquet and took us to dinner.”

Hugh retired in 1978. “I loved the business,” he said, “but after 26 years I was pretty well burned out.” There was never any question as to where they would move after retirement. “Janice is a Stadium girl. I’m a Lincoln boy. The Pacific Northwest is home to us.”

They knew they wanted to live on the water. From the moment they saw their house in Home they knew it was where they would settle. “I walked to the bulkhead, looked down and could see the pebbles through four feet of clear water,” Hugh said.

They busied themselves settling in, and then tragedy struck. Marshall, then 19, died in a boating accident in 1980. The family was devastated. Hugh credits the KP fire department with giving him something to live for. The fire chief called and asked him to join as a volunteer firefighter. Soon after



Janice and Hugh McMillan, together every step of the way. Photo: Richard Miller, KP News

that Hugh helped save the life of a heart attack victim. “I figured I had a reason to hang around for a while,” he said.

Hugh went on to hold an elected office after all; he first became president of the Fire Fighters Association, then was elected fire commissioner for 14 years. He served as a Pierce County Fire Commissioner and as a board member of the Washington State Fire Commissioners Association. For that work he has been recognized as a lifetime honorary Washington state fire commissioner and volunteer.

Hugh brought certain skills from the CIA to his work on the Key Peninsula. “My son calls me gregarious, and that helped in the business,” he said. It also helped him recruit himself into the KP Lions Club and to recruit others to join causes he cares about. “Lots of people would like to do things but no one has invited them,” he said.

Hugh did not limit his energy to the fire department. He was a founding or early member of many local organizations, including the Lions Club, Citizens Against Crime, the food bank now at Key Peninsula Community Services, Communities in Schools of Peninsula, Peninsula Schools Education Foundation, Peninsula Emergency Preparedness Coalition and Hope Recovery Center.

Students continue to be his passion. He and Janice have volunteered as tutors for years. “Hugh is an incredible champion for the children in our community,” said Leslie Livingood, who teaches special education at Voyager Elementary School. “I am the co-chair of Voyager’s literacy night Camp Read a Lot and he has come every year since the event began.”

A frequent and early contributor to KP News, Hugh now writes a long-running column in *The Peninsula Gateway* called Kids’ Corner. He said his goal is to bring the two peninsulas together, and sharing the success stories of students every week is a way to do that. Daughter-in-law Sheri Ahlheim, who teaches at Peninsula High School and is married to son Lance, said, “You’ll go to their house for a bit, and McMillan checks the clock, grabs his camera and jacket and exclaims, ‘Oh! I’ve got to go photograph some kids.’”

Hugh’s mantra is “Don’t tell me what’s wrong. Come on in and help me make it right.” His work to make things right has been recognized on many fronts. The Pierce County Council proclaimed April 22, 2006, as Hugh McMillan Day; the Gig Harbor Chamber of Commerce named him Citizen of the Year in 2010; Gig Harbor Rotary North awarded him their Star Award in 2014; Rep. Derek Kilmer recognized his 90th birthday in a speech on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, calling him the unofficial mayor of the Key Peninsula; and last spring a plaque celebrating his service was installed in front of the Key Center Fire Station.

“If it was up to me, I’d make him governor of the Key Peninsula,” said former Peninsula School Board member Marcia Harris. Her husband Jeff, a longtime local activist, said, “Hugh is one of a kind among many community leaders that I have had the pleasure of working with and knowing who have the ‘Give Back DNA’ that the world so desperately needs more of. The Key and the world are the better because of Hugh, especially the children and our future.”



The artists shown with work in their studios in Vaughn. Photo: Richard Miller, KP News

Phoebe Toland and Dick Notkin — Artists Share a Life

SARA THOMPSON, KP NEWS

Artists Dick Notkin and Phoebe Toland moved to the Key Peninsula five years ago from Helena, Montana. They sat down one afternoon last month to talk about their work and about what it is like for two busy artists to share a life.

“We really understand the artistic need to create and so we are very supportive, and we aren’t jealous of each other’s studio time. And we understand that if your passion is to be an artist, it is a full-time job,” Notkin said.

The couple first crossed paths when Toland was in graduate school at the University of Montana and Notkin was teaching, but they were in different departments and were barely aware of each other. It wasn’t until years later that they were re-introduced by a mutual friend. “I didn’t even recognize him,” said Toland.

They moved here largely to be closer to Toland’s sister, sculptor Tip Toland, and her husband. “Tip’s career was taking off, and we realized that if we didn’t move closer, we wouldn’t see them very often,” Toland said. They were also ready to leave the brutal winters and summers that increasingly brought the threat of forest fires.

They found a house that fit their requirements: It had to have enough studio space for both of them and be a walkable distance from Tip. The brown shag carpet throughout, they think, kept the place on the market for a few years, but that was easily removed. They converted the multi-car garage and lower floor of the house into studio spaces.

The two have much in common. Both knew they would be artists from early childhood. They were raised in urban areas but have spent adulthood in rural locations. Their art is deeply influenced by the world

that surrounds them. And, Notkin said, “We are both left-handed Scorpios.”

But as they talked about their work, the differences became apparent. Toland is primarily a painter and printmaker, and also creates wood and paper sculptures that sometimes harken back to her combined graduate degree in painting and theater arts. Her images are often abstract. Notkin works in clay. His work is tightly controlled and detailed, with a high degree of craftsmanship.

“All my work is so intuitive. I have no idea what it will become until that last moment. Dick needs to know right off the bat what he will be completing,” Toland said.

Toland came from a creative family. Her father was a writer for the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin and then wrote books and plays; her mother was talented in needlecraft and quilting. “My sister Tip was gifted in terms of drawing people, but I was more interested in design, more abstract pictures. We had our own very separate means of expression,” she said.

After undergraduate work at the Rochester Institute of Technology and graduate school in Montana, Toland returned to the east coast where she worked at the Philadelphia Museum of Art for several years. “It was there that I fell in love with paper,” she said. She turns paper into both sculptures and multidimensional collages that incorporate woodblock prints. “You have to like the whole process — if you don’t like all the steps you probably won’t do it because it is all so labor intensive,” she said.

“Although I am an abstract artist, all my work has a thematic basis,” she said. Toland tends to work in series, and is currently focused on gardens. “The pieces are a way

of expressing my love of gardens and gardening but they also stand in for the earth and feeling of concern and apprehension of climate change.”

Toland acknowledges a sense of crowding, a bit of foreboding apparent in much of her recent work, especially in the last few years. Her other works were influenced by the development taking place where she lived in Helena. Another installation was inspired by her father and Notkin’s, who both died in the same year.

Notkin, though he has lived in expansive spaces all of his adult life, said his work is not affected by where his studio is located. From the time he was a student his work has expressed his feelings about war, technology and the environment. “I work out of a political landscape. If an artist can’t

say what they feel in their art, then what the hell is the point?” he said. His father, of Jewish

descent, fought in WWII, and though he was proud to have fought against Hitler, he also described that time as the worst in his life. Notkin came of age in the years of the Vietnam War. Friends served, and of those who survived, he said, most came back damaged. “I think my opposition to war continues to be justified,” he said.

Notkin knew from the time he was in kindergarten that he wanted to be an artist. He went to the Kansas City Art Institute to study painting, but after he was introduced to clay in a sculpture class, he knew he had found his medium. He loved the detail he saw in the extensive ceramics collection at the Kansas City Art Museum and in the pieces he saw at home as he grew up — his father was an immigration lawyer and his many Chinese clients gave him

artwork as gifts.

Notkin is perhaps best known for his unglazed ceramic teapots inspired by 16th century Chinese Yixing wares. He is a master and innovator in the slip-casting technique, which uses molds and liquid clay, allowing him to work in series, adding highly detailed images that make each pot unique. He has created more than 350 pots, most of which are in private and public collections.

Notkin’s tiles serve as another avenue for expressing his alarm. He creates each from clay, using finely detailed images such as skulls, dice, buildings, ears and barbed wire. “Each original tile takes about four days, depending on the detail,” he said. Then he creates a press mold that allows him to create copies. He now has hundreds of tile molds to draw from. Some tiles are glazed in color. Others are fired in sawdust, which causes the value of the tile to vary from light to dark. The tiles are then sorted and stored by color and value to be used to create murals. Two well-known murals, both using hundreds of tiles, are a portrait of George W. Bush titled “All Nations Have Their Moment of Foolishness” and “The Gift,” an image of the Hiroshima bomb.

Notkin’s work has been shown all over the world and is in collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Smithsonian and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. He has received many awards for his work and was featured in a PBS Craft in America Landscape documentary.

Both Notkin and Toland continue to work full tilt. Notkin’s father once asked how he was planning for retirement. He replied, “I don’t have any extra money to put away. And besides, what will I do? Pick up some hobby like maybe ceramic art?”

"IF AN ARTIST CAN'T SAY WHAT THEY FEEL IN THEIR ART, THEN WHAT THE HELL IS THE POINT?"