



Catherine Clark,
Community Voice

ARTISTIC

Spirit

MOST OF US CAN ONLY DREAM of successfully combining our passion and profession, but Ottawa watercolour artist Jennifer Nicol has done it.

Several years ago, Jennifer founded Flying Colours, a watercolour workshop that lets her share her love of painting with people of all ages and abilities. So when Ottawa's Aphasia Centre was looking for someone to teach art to stroke survivors, Jennifer was a natural fit. "I had taken an art therapy course, and I know how important it is to express an experience through art."

Before long, word of her classes spread and Jennifer was contacted by Candlelighters, an organization that provides resources and support for children diagnosed with cancer and their families.

Candlelighters wanted to start a program that would be offered exclusively to the brothers and sisters of kids with cancer, because even though they aren't sick, the impact on their lives is dramatic. "We really wanted to create an outlet for the healthy sibling to put away their worries for two hours of concentrated happiness," explains Candlelighters Executive Director Jocelyn Lamont.



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— Jennifer Nicol, founder,
Flying Colours

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK HOLLERON

Jennifer was a shoo-in to lead the class, and now, one Saturday afternoon a month, she arrives armed with painting supplies and lots of enthusiasm at Ottawa's Plant Recreation Centre for what's called the Sens Smiling Siblings Watercolour Workshop.

"When the kids get to class their faces light up," Jennifer says happily. "They know it's going to be a positive experience just for them, and that means a lot to me."

Every month, Jennifer chooses a different theme and teaches a new technique. "We focus on happy things like butterflies or dragonflies," she explains, but sometimes the sadness creeps in. "If the kids are quiet, I judge carefully how I act and react, and often we break out in to conversation about what they're going through."

While Jennifer offers therapy and creativ-

ity all rolled in to one, she has a practical side too. "I bring my blow-dryer along and dry each painting so that it's ready to go home at the end of class," she laughs. "That way when parents or grandparents come to pick the kids up, the children are the sole focus of attention as their masterpieces get fussed over," she notes. "It makes everyone feel good."

And feeling good is what it's all about. Jennifer offers her students an oasis from the medical appointments and hospital visits that dominate their lives. And she helps them create something personal and beautiful while connecting with others going through similar experiences.

From Jennifer Nicol's perspective, it just might be the perfect job. — Catherine Clark is the host of *Beyond Politics* on CPAC.