

JOAN HARMON PARSNICK

Joan was born in the "North Country" of Potsdam, NY to parents of English, French & Irish heritage, **Estella** and Aubrey Harmon, on September 17, 1946. Living near the Canadian border, people lived, worked, and moved back and forth across the border easily and often. Joan's earliest memories are of clinking glasses and voices as she took naps behind the counter in her parents' restaurant. Her sister was thirteen years older than she, often acting as a parental substitute. Joan's mother was Catholic and her father Protestant. Her grandparents were members of an evangelical tradition, so Joan grew up within a broad perspective on faith and religions. Both parents brought their farming background to the restaurant. The food was authentic. The meat was hand cut and often canned by her mother along with fruits and vegetables that comprised the menu. It was a hard, 24 hour a day business which Joan's father advised her to avoid. He also told her to avoid their other business enterprise: apartment rentals. Joan remembers going with him to collect rents, clean and maintain apartments. Joan took



her to use some of the instruments of his field. She fell in love with the process of geometric designs, both artistic and creative, in a highly disciplined and organized style. An activity in which "one little mistake meant that it was all over" influences her approach to other endeavors. That experience helped shape her destiny. She obtained a degree in art. Her earlier education was probably also a factor in that decision. She attended the campus school at the local university where students were exposed to a cadre of student teachers, monitored by their professors. They were exposed to leading-edge teaching techniques with fresh, talented, teachers-in-training. The university also had a strong music program which often involved the children in the campus school in performances of plays and programs. In high school, Joan was the artistic director for the school newspaper. For college, Joan headed south to pursue a degree in art education at SUNY New Paltz.

She got the first job she interviewed for after graduation as an elementary art teacher in Poughkeepsie, NY. It was there she met Tom Parsnick, a math teacher, who was to become her husband. After a year, the couple decided to see the country to research and decide where they wanted to live. This was in the mid-1960's, when the sons and daughters of post-war baby boomers were beginning to break many social structures, including settling in your hometown and staying in one job for a life's work. This was also a first generation in which a college education became a norm, not an exception for middle and working-class youth. This was a time when adventure might be sought for its own sake. Joan and Tom headed west. They ended up in Algoma, Wisconsin, which is a quaint town and fishing port located on Lake Michigan. They had picked up a local newspaper and seen an ad for teachers. At this time, NYS certificated teachers were considered very desirable. A call to the school superintendent resulted in an on-the-spot interview. While Tom went to the car to get his resume, Joan was hired as the K-8 art teacher. The adventure was rewarding and the location wonderful, but Joan and Tom missed their families who were not able to come and visit. With a second child on the way, they decided to go back to New York. They chose the Auburn area as it has halfway between his family in Niagara Falls and hers in Potsdam, settling in Union Springs. Tom taught math in Auburn while Joan did substitute teaching in almost every district in the area. She worked with migrant children for several years and gradually developed a successful property management business using both her artistic and business interests--- despite her father's advice.

Joan's other role models were friends she met throughout the years. One was a stay-at-home mom whose family and community values were those which Joan admired. Joan's approach to life is also representative of her generation. Given her family background, she was prepared for the ecumenical movement of the 1960's. She was active in the United Ministry Church of Union Springs until she reconnected with her Catholic roots at St. Michaels across the street. She has been active in the life of that church. While not defining herself as a feminist, Joan was influenced by the women's movement. Elizabeth Cady Stanton is one of her heroes, especially the fact that she was so engaged in the suffrage movement while at the same time, raising a family. Similarly, Joan has focused her creative and artistic efforts on raising her children and running her home, while at the same time, running a business and being active in the community. Familial experiences during the Depression Era still impact Joan's practices. She disdains waste and considers herself to be thrifty like some of her Scottish ancestors. She practices various women's arts in ordinary home management. She is deeply interested in history, especially women's history. She is also interested in genealogy and painting. She would most like to be remembered as a kind person who cares about others.