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# JOAN KELLY

## Joan Kelly

Shortly after I joined MSWG I was privileged to see a demonstration by Joan Kelly. I was enthralled by her fluid movements, light touch and gracefulness at the lathe. If I hadn't already been hooked on woodturning I was then. I later tried at home what she had so elegantly accomplished during her demo with a poor result, something was missing. Not only did I not have the experience level of Joan, I did not have her artistic eye. I often told folks, "MSWG is a collection of craftsman and artists, however in my mind Joan is the only true artist". Joan had a creative vision, combined with a passion for the craft to explore, and a willingness to share her skills. Her work reflects simple forms, elegant shapes and off axis turnings invoking an emotional response in the viewer.

Joan had a never ending abundance of energy. I always remember her in some sort of volunteer capacity i.e., board member, newsletter reporter, and club demonstrator. Joan has a piece permanently displayed at the CBU Art Museum. She displayed her work at the Jewish Community Center Gallery and had demonstrated at the Memphis Zoo Craft Fair. Our loss of Joan is incomprehensible. Everyone who met Joan was touched by her and the incredible person she was. Her warmth, engaging smile, ability to connect and relate to others, and her passion for life was unsurpassed. I feel blessed to have known Joan.

"To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die".

Skip Wilbur

President, Mid South Woodturners Guild

Book Edited By:

Mike Maffitt

July 22, 2011

# HOMILY IN REMEMBRANCE

Delivered By: The Reverend Carla Meisterman

Joan Kelly's memorial service at Balmoral Presbyterian Church

Joan Kelly led a rhythmic life... a life lived well in measured movement and varied pace.

There was the fast and syncopated beat, felt when her steady hand held a scraper to a wooden bowl... spinning spinning spinning on her lathe - a lilting rhythm observed when she was dancing a roll away with a half sashay with her partner in love, Ernest - an uneven rhythm heard when she called a contra dance with the Reel McCoy's celtic fiddle, concertina and bohrain drum keeping time, as she called out, "two ladies left - shoulder tipsy... right shoulder round your partner...swing your partner... lines go forward and back... roll the lady as you come back... circle to... the right...to the right, to the right!" And there was a HOLY rhythm ticking, keeping in her soul... as she sang harmony with the Balmoral Presbyterian choir... played Beethoven's Piano Sonata 14 Opus 27 # 2, on Good Friday, as we contemplated the death of Jesus... and raised her voice - with the choirs of the WORLD - on Easter Sunday morning - singing out - every Alleluia! in Christ the Lord is Risen Today.

Joan learned the rhythm of love, its' give and take - it's courage and it's vulnerability - from the heartbeat of her mother, Miriam. Miriam was a kind and patient soul, a picture of pure love, who nurtured her children with bed time rituals of rhymes and songs - and set Joan's consciousness with a steady beat of gentleness and grace. She learned early to love risk - as her father, Bill, would throw her joyfully up in the air - when she was a tiny child - teaching her to see beyond her natural sight lines and feel that sense of freedom when the wind blew strong against her face.

Joan's artistic talents were spotted early by her parents - and with the encouragement and discipline practiced in her parents' home - she grew to make a life of "making things". She attended Saturday School at the Memphis Academy of Arts and then employed her creativity, imagination and ingenuity to gain a BFA from Memphis College of Art. She learned to garden, watching her father plant and tend flowers, well up into his 80's. She played guitar and learned piano - taking lessons from the same teacher for 15 years. Joan was not a woman who cultivated the spotlight. Her nerves would surface for every recital and she continued with her piano lessons on into college to perfect her playing.

Twin brothers, John and Bill, remember their big sister setting the bar high - as a good student and a budding artist - employing her talent and focused determination. It was John who noted - "Joan was a person that could make something out of nothing". She had the gift of seeing possibility and it empowered her to create. Joan, John and Bill grew up with parents that taught

them to value music and family, simplicity and service, generosity of spirit and the refinement of the talent God gave.

When Joan was a little girl she went often to Old Hudsonville Presbyterian church in Marshall County, Mississippi where her father had ridden to church on Sunday mornings in her grandfather's Gilmer's hay wagon. She was baptized there and learned to play the old pump organ for their Sunday worship. The congregation ended up having to build a cage for the organ because of the infestation of mice that would nibble on the black keys. When Joan played she would always feel the bumps under her fingers where mice had a breakfast of black keys. She developed a habit of pounding the organ a few times when she first sat down, hoping to get the all of the mice out. Once when she was playing, a mouse ran across the top of the organ and she was tempted to let the congregational singing be a cappella from that moment forward. As the church waned in membership, the organ was stolen, the old church closed...and all that was left was the memory of that old pump organ with the well bitten black keys... UNTIL she was antiquing one day, near her home, and saw a pump organ that brought all her memories as a church organist flooding back. She lifted the lid and when she placed her hands on the keys she felt every one of the familiar bumps made by those music loving mice in Marshall County Mississippi.

Raised to be as honest as the day is long, she called the police and tried to have the organ returned to a sister church in Holly Springs where most of the members of Hudsonville had gone. They really didn't have use for the old pipe organ - so it went home with Joan - and sat in her dining room where she and daughter Erin would pump and play music from the phantom of the opera imagining smoke billowing out from the places where once - mice made their home.

Joan was a mother who taught her daughter to cultivate her talent and imagination just as Miriam had taught Joan. When Erin was a little girl, she remembers that when her mother read the Secret Garden to her she also created a space in the back yard for Erin to cultivate her own secret garden. Joan would search for antique keys to hide for Erin so she could unlock the entrance to her own beautiful imaginary place.

Erin and Joan played together making arts and crafts and teaching each other new things. As Erin grew up Joan taught Erin to embrace the gift of teaching, the love of turning wood and the rhythms of contra dance. Erin encouraged her mother - who sang all the time at home - to become a member in a choir. When Joan's brother John - became our beloved Music Director - he invited Joan to do something she had never done before - sing in a choir - our choir.

Erin's encouragement met opportunity and she was called away from her church home at Idlewild Presbyterian Church to become a part of us. Our congregation had the privilege of knowing Joan - as an alto. She loved the community she discovered in our choir. After each rehearsal Joan would call Erin in Alabama and talk about the fun she was having and the joy she

experienced singing harmony - and - seeing her brother, John, teach and lead, direct and develop voices in the worship and praise of our God.

Joan Gilmer Kelly responded to people with the perpetual rhythm of a loving heart. She was a diligent and quiet philanthropist. She served in the city schools as an art teacher, calling forth the talent and imagination of hundreds of children. She was president of Idlewild Elementary's PTO where she created a garden for students to learn to use their heads AND their hands to make things grow. She served as a director for the Girls Club of Memphis, now Girls, Incorporated. Week after week she would work with her friend, Methodist pastor Dennis Neenan at Wesley Highland Place where she would go to play hymns for people whose days on the earth had grown long - as shadows - in the afternoon sun.

When Joan encountered a need - she saw possibility and she used her creativity and her determination to find the person or the process to make things work out better for people in need. In the time that she worshipped here and sang in our church, she befriended a member of our choir, an immigrant from Cameroon, who had to walk home at night from factory shift work. With her friend Clinton Bailey and Clinton's daughter Irene, they helped Mimi pass the driving test, get her TN drivers license and obtain a car so she would not have to walk the streets of Memphis between the hours of midnight and 6am. Rhythm was the pulse point of her life. She resonated with the rhythms of nature. And nature came to play in many of the things that fueled her soul... sounds of the sea lapping against piling... the roar of the surf crashing upon the shore... from her childhood visits to her grandfather White's furniture making workshop in North Carolina and her stretches of time on the beach there, she fell in love with wood and water.

During her final year of teaching art at Georgian Hills she took wood turning, at a Tennessee Art teacher workshop, and it turned.... her life - in a whole new direction. It was there she learned the rhythm of the Wood turners waltz. She was a natural at shifting weight from left foot to right foot. She bought a lathe and began turning astonishing pieces of art. She affiliated with the Mid South Wood turners Guild. As a spokesperson for the guild she appeared on a segment of Live at Nine, on Channel 3, to announce the Mid-South Wood turners Guild's first art exhibit. Joan told the interviewer that she had finally found what she was meant to do.

Beginning in 2003 she started shaping inspired creations out of pieces of wood that she would find on her walks and her hikes. Ernest remembers walking to Marena's one night for dinner when she spied several large trunks of wood lying near the street. Once look and they immediately turned - and went home - to get the van so they could load up the possibility that she saw evident in the wood. Joan Kelly is the only woman I know who got a chain saw from her husband for a present.

And her mentor in wood turning, Joe Raminski - who taught her in that first wood turning workshop - wrote about Joan saying, "I learned early on that she was a person who could do anything she set her mind to. She took real pride

in being able to run a chainsaw and keep up with the guys, if not a little ahead of them.” Joan and Joe went on to take classes together at John C Campbell Folk School and ARROWMONT School of Arts and CRAFT. In a tribute to Joan, Joe remarked, “the really exciting thing for any teacher is to see the student surpass the teacher’s ability. I feel that Joan had done this on many occasions.”

After turning out a number of breathtaking creations she started her own business, Turning Point Woodcraft. In 2007 she coordinated the Beneath the Bark show at CBU and was involved in launching talks for establishing a juried permanent wood turning collection. The permanent collection was constituted and now contains her work.

She was published in the American Wood Turner Journal with an article on the Mid-South Bowl project featuring glorious bowls by mid south turners along with one of her own. She wrote regularly for Turner’s Talk, the Memphis Guild newsletter. She won first place award at this year’s Memphis Association of Craft Artists show at Christian Brothers University. When she donated to the Wood turner’s Guild auction a gorgeous piece of purple wood with gold leaf inserts entitled RAPTURE - she explained that she received great satisfaction from the process of turning wood. She shared that her ideas often came from her spiritual musings. It was her desire to always incorporate a mysterious or ceremonial element into her work.

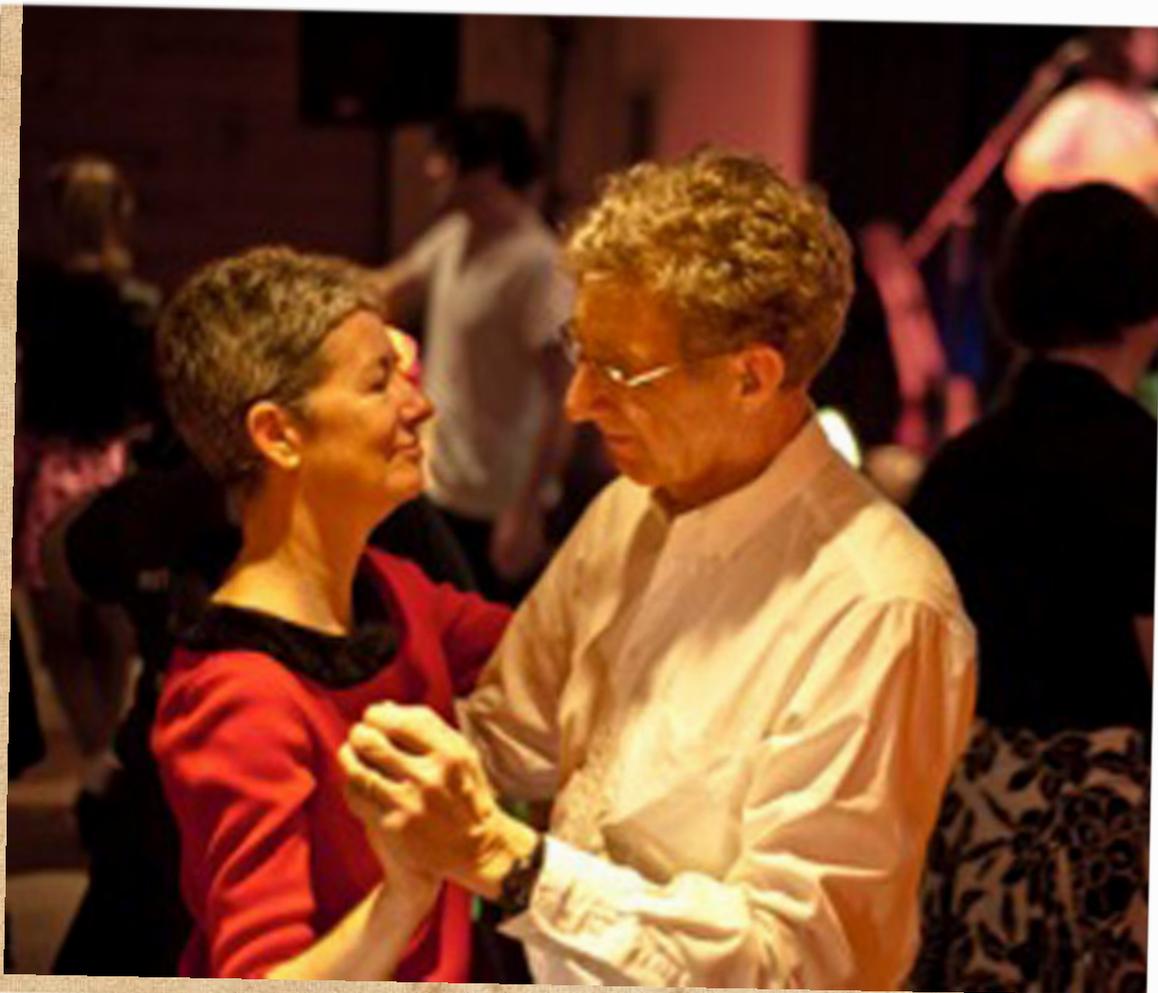
And in her rhythmic life were the rhythmic turns of contra dancing. Fellow contra dancer and hammered dulcimer player, Ron McDonald, in his tribute to Joan wrote, “Joan Kelly’s stature was evident when she would light up a dance floor with her grace and giggle. She loved to dance, and anyone who learned to dance well - quickly learned that she was one of the best. Plus she had passed along that grace, quick response, and light-footed touch to her daughter, Erin. When those two were nearby on the dance floor, it was special—for Erin was so special to Joan, and vice versa. Contra dancers saw Joan grow up as a caller. She applied teaching experience and plowed through those three familiar stages of calling: joyful playfulness, irritation with those who keep messing up the normal flow of the dance, then the acceptance of a seasoned caller coupled with clarity and authority. When Joan took her turn as our caller, we could expect the best dances of the evening.”

But it was the rhythms of the sea lapping up against the shore on Ocracoke Island that inspired her most. Ocracoke was where she could pull together all the passions of her life - her love for family and friends, the joy she found in dance and music, her need for the inspiration from beautiful natural places where pine and wax myrtle grow and sea grass sways in wind off the water. She was invigorated by being able to exhibit and sell her art in the festivals there. It was Ocracoke’s peaceful purity that ignited her dedication for conserving the natural places that she knew to be sacred space.

It was the rhythm of her heart that was captivated by her husband Ernest Kelly. In the years of their marriage, beginning with their honeymoon with teenagers, they lived to the rhythm of one another’s hearts... in the pace of a good hike, a pounding gallop on horseback, and the prospect of possessing a tune

called 'The Selchie's Joy Waltz'. It was composed by Fiddler Dave of Molasses Creek who dedicated it to Ernest and Joan.. honoring his two Ocracoke friends and wonderful dancers...who named the tune in honor of a very special anniversary. It was the waltz of her life...finally playing at her bedside when Ernest, and her family said their final goodbye.

And when the beautiful beat of Joan's heart was silenced, three people whose lives had slowed - nearly to a stop - received the gift of life from her ...so that the rhythm of their lives could begin again... strong and steady within this the turning world...for Joan was waltzing on...turning into eternity - fulfilling the rhythmic words of the Apostles Creed which she first learned as a child - and now LIVES .... forever





Joan's piece in the permanent collection at Christian Brothers University in Memphis, TN. Black Walnut turned on two centers.



Two platters in the Instant Gallery at a Mid South Woodturners Guild function.



Waltzing at Memfest in 2009 with her husband Ernest.



Birdseye maple box entered into the Mid South Perspective, a yearly showcase of talent by the Mid South Woodturner's Guild.

## Joan Kelly

The Mid South Woodturners Guild, the American Association of Woodturners, Memphis and the Nation have lost an enthusiastic, creative artist with unusual educational talents and generous spirit. Recently, while turning a platter from a piece of cedar the wood splintered and a portion of it struck her head and ended her life.

Joan took her first woodturning class in 2003 and was captivated by the possibilities it offered. She loved to turn unbalanced pieces with defects or unusual grain patterns and employed a range of wood species. She was enthusiastic in all her endeavors and creative, both at the lathe and in demonstrating the art and craft of turning. Joan enticed Christian Brothers University to include turned wood items in their permanent collection. Then she encouraged our members to participate in an annual contest resulting in continuing contributions of fine art pieces to CBU.

Joan was also a gifted musician playing both guitar and piano (which she regularly played at Wesley Highland Place Retirement Center). Contra Dancing, a partnered folk dance style, was a special interest and she was a Lead Caller for the local club. This led her to be very active in the annual Clanjamfry celebrations at Evergreen Presbyterian Church. Her musical interests included all genres and for the last two years she participated in Jazzercise and Yoga classes. Joan and her husband Ernest were avid hikers (completed the Thames trail in England) and enjoyed horseback riding as well. Though they travelled widely over many parts of the world, Greece was their favorite destination in Europe.

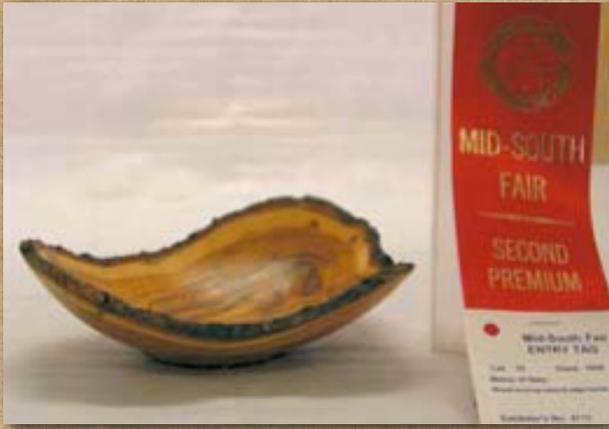
Joan Kelly's artistic talents, enthusiasm, intellect and generosity will be sorely missed as will her dedication to assist those of lesser ability and opportunity.

-- Ray Tanner, MSWG Board Member

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Instant Gallery entries showcasing Joan's offset turning skills.



Two pieces entered into the 2005 Mid South Fair.



The Mid South Woodturner's Guild has been an important part of my turning education. I want to help the club inspire turners to achieve goals and enjoy the craft. I hope to add more recognized turners to our demonstration schedule. I first recognized my passion for turning at Arrowmont and quit teaching school this past year to focus on turning professionally. My education includes a BFA from Memphis College of Arts and teaching credentials from Rhodes College.

Joan's statement when running for the MSWG Board.

## In Remembrance of Joan

A few years ago, at a board meeting, Joan was in a discussion with us. The Wood Turners had been producing a newsletter. At one point, Joan had an opportunity to review the latest version of that newsletter and based on her background she made a suggestion. She realized that we - just a group of wood turners - might not be the best editors or proofreaders of published materials. So Joan offered to write the intro to the newsletter and any of our other publications. Joan knew that our publications could be better than they already were. She wanted a more professional look and she provided her skills. Joan had a special way with words. In testimony to her vision, we only have to look to the newsletter's award we received for 2011.

- Matt Garner



“Collaboration with the Elements”



Chalice and Paten



“Beacon”



Work on display in a gallery in the Overton Park area of Memphis, TN.



“Selchie’s” Jars



“Trailmarker”



Wenge bowl turned at a club demonstration.



I met Joan at the first meeting I went to at the MSWG and from that point on she was always ready to offer a complimentary word about my work and make suggestions. She was a very creative turner and was willing to try her hand at the more difficult pieces. The multi axis and offset turnings she produced were styles that I had no exposure to until I saw her work which opened my eyes to that style of work and what could be accomplished.

Joan, thanks for your insight and for being there to lift a new turner up in his early career.

- Mike Maffitt
- MSWG Board member

We've lost a giant among us, and she didn't know that we knew it. I met Joan while she was an art teacher in the Memphis City Schools. My wife, the school's librarian, who has an eye for good educators, spoke highly of Joan. Though I only knew Joan for about a dozen years, I really saw her talents at contra dances and in her developing art.

Joan Kelly's stature was evident when she would light up a dance floor with her grace and giggle. She loved to dance, and anyone who learned to dance well quickly learned that she was one of the best. Plus she had passed along that grace, quick response, and light-footed touch to her daughter, Erin. When those two were nearby on the dance floor, it was special—for Erin was so special to Joan, and vice versa.

We saw Joan grow up as a caller. She applied that teaching experience and ploughed through those three familiar stages of calling: joyful playfulness, irritation with those who keep messing up the normal flow of the dance, then the acceptance of a seasoned caller coupled with clarity and authority. When Joan took her turn as our caller, we could expect the best dances of the evening. We saw it in her participation in the choir her brother leads at Balmoral Presbyterian Church where she found community that embraced her wonderful contributions.

We saw it in her progress as a wood-turner. Those early simple, beautiful bowls had evolved into complex, magnetic pieces of art. All those years of artistic expression were finding a medium she was mastering. Alas, the very medium that had become home for her blossoming expression betrayed her. Working with a difficult piece of cedar, it exploded from the lathe and killed her in the prime of her creative life. The consolation is that she died doing what she loved.

The tragedy is that she left us wondering what more she would have done and created, and, though she felt loved by many, she somehow felt under-appreciated and unrecognized. We now know that the gratefulness for her gifts that are so talked about as she passes on, were just on the verge of the recognition and honor she deserved. She lived a wonderful life. Her legacy might be contained in a query: why not work on the most complex and difficult pieces so that our creativity is a deeper expression of life, love, and God? That's what she was doing at the point of her death, exclaiming to Ernest minutes before the accident that it was the most difficult wood she'd worked with.

It took two weeks for that chunk to fully take her life, during which time we circled together in a dance of love and sadness that some felt was being called by Joan — she saved the last dance for all of her friends and family.

Joan Kelly, our loved one, died in her blossoming years at 59. We miss her.

- Dr. Ron McDonald.



...My encounters with Joan were few and limited to some woodturning related activity, those encounters were always positive and I knew that I was in the presence of a quality individual. During a recent Octoberfest, I spent an hour three feet from Joan watching her demonstrate the production of a winged bowl. I asked at least a dozen questions which she was excited to answer and later she encouraged me when I emailed photos of my attempts to duplicate her item.

Because of this horrible accident and our loss, my woodturning world has changed. Those funny stories about wood flying off the lathe and banging around the shop are no longer funny. I cringe when I see those You Tube videos featuring high speed turning of large pieces of wood and by inexperienced woodturners, likely the same people I encounter on the interstate as they weave in and out of traffic on their motorcycles. Perhaps most disturbing to me are live and recorded demonstrations by “name” woodturners in which they advocate extreme high speed turning while making jokes about what will happen to the front row if the wood comes off.

Woodturners who promote high speed turning of large pieces of wood have a major obligation to warn their viewers of the inherent risks being assumed, and to make a huge issue of safety gear. For the past year or so, I have expected someone to be seriously injured while attending such a demonstration or, even more likely, while attempting similar turnings in their own shop.

Our Joan was not one of these inexperienced or showy woodturners. She was safety conscious and careful, and to have this accident seems the epitome of “life is not fair.” In a fair world, if such an accident had to happen, it would have happened to an individual who loved to flirt with danger, and not to a responsible woodturner.

I have turned very little wood during the month of May; in fact, I don't even like to look at my lathe. How could such a beautiful machine turn on a person who was using that device to produce such spectacular objects? I will return to my lathe, I am sure, but I won't be the same person enjoying a hobby I was before. My already limited size turnings will shrink further and on those rare occasions where I mount a sizable (for me) chunk of wood, I will be using a faceplate plus tailstock support, turning at a slower speed, and while wearing more head protective gear. For me, woodturning is now a different world.

Joan is gone but she will always be in my shop. - Emmett Manley

The following pieces only represent a fraction of Joan's work.

# ART FORMS



# ART FORMS



# BOWLS



# BOWLS



# BOWLS



# BOWLS



# HOLLOW FORMS



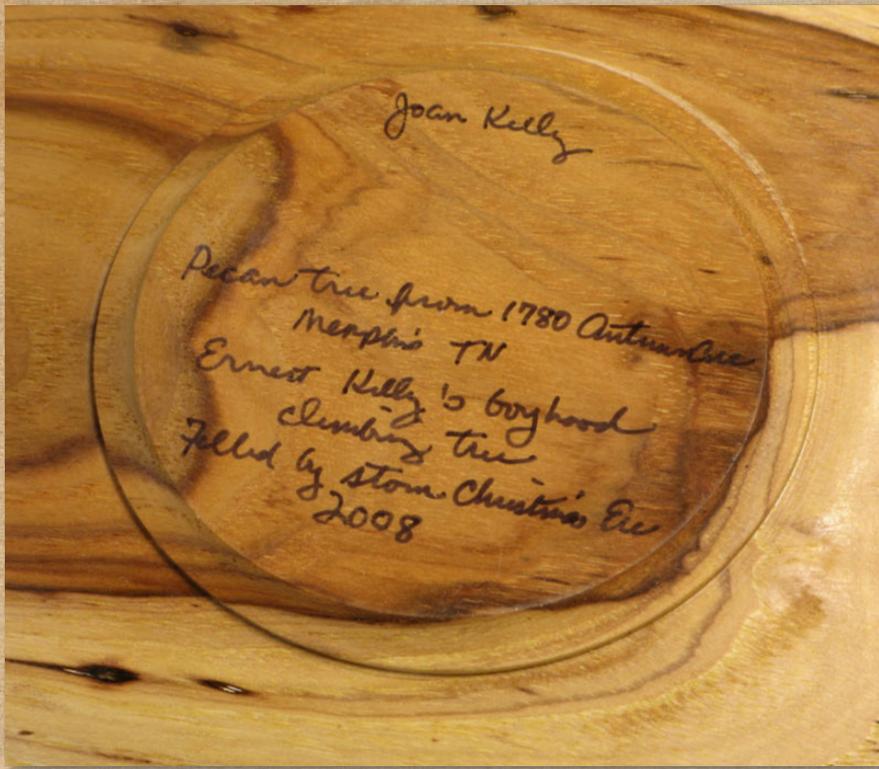
# HOLLOW FORMS



# PLATTERS



# PLATTERS



Skip,

Thanks so much to you and to all the group. I appreciate your kind and descriptive letter and am touched by the vast recognition that has been given Joan as a person and an artist. I remember several years ago going through the CBU show with Binh Pho and hearing his high compliments on Joan's work. It's good to know that she was so appreciated by her fellow artists.

I'm also grateful to Ray and Larry for their photography and commemorative efforts and for sharing the CD of Joan's work. I will send all of this to the family, and I know that they will share my gratitude to you all.

Best Regards,

Ernest

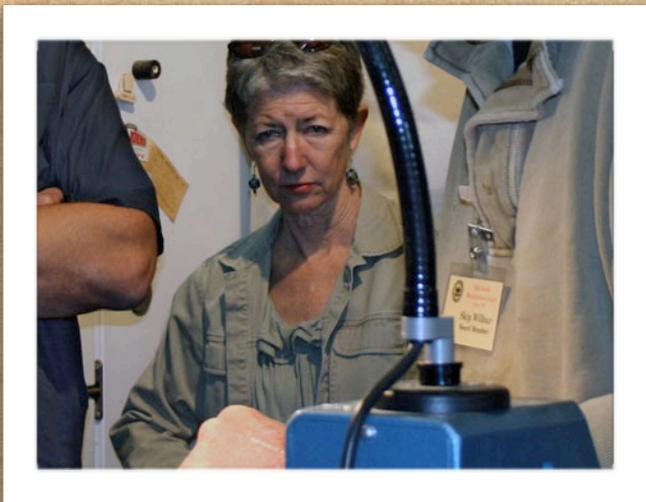


## JOAN GILMER KELLY

Joan Elizabeth Gilmer Kelly, January 25, 1953-May 17, 2011, daughter of the late William J. Gilmer and Miriam White Gilmer, was a devoted mother, wife, sister and daughter. She is survived by her daughter, Erin Elizabeth Maguire of Huntsville AL, by her husband, Ernest G. Kelly, Jr. and his daughters, Martha and Marian Kelly; by her brother, William W. Gilmer and wife, Martha of Oak Park, IL and her brother, John A. Gilmer and his fiancée, Catherine Willner of Collierville. She was also devoted to her nieces, Laurel Gilmer of Newark, NJ and Emily Gilmer of Memphis and to her nephews, David, Matthew and Jonathan Gilmer of Oak Park, IL. She was a brilliant artist holding a BFA from the Memphis College of Art. After teaching art in the public schools, she specialized in wood turnings, creating works of pure art as well as lovely useful objects. She showed her work at numerous local and regional fairs and galleries. She won the first place award at this year's Memphis Association of Craft Artists show. Joan was a graceful and enthusiastic dancer who loved waltzing and contra dance. She was a caller for the Memphis Contra Dancers and delighted them with her skill and charm. She was increasingly in demand as a caller at other cities in the region, and the whole contra community will mourn her loss.

Joan loved music, sang in the choir at Balmoral Presbyterian Church, and played the piano regularly at facilities for the elderly. She supported environmental and conservation efforts and loved the outdoors, walking in Overton Park, paddling the Ghost River, and skiing and climbing in the Appalachians. She enjoyed travel in Greece and the British Isles, including a horseback ride across the west of Ireland; a five day hike in England to the source of the Thames; climbing in the hills of the Isle of Skye; and hiking the Samaria Gorge on Crete. Most of all, she loved the unspoiled beaches and the charming historic town of Ocracoke Island in North Carolina's Outer Banks. The sense of community and the folk music culture of Ocracoke were her delight. It had been a magical place for her from childhood. There will be a memorial service at Balmoral Presbyterian Church at 11 a.m., Saturday, May 21. The family will receive visitors before the service from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. Memorial gifts will be appreciated at any charity of the donor's choice. Joan especially valued conservation and environmental causes as well as church-sponsored services for those in need. Friends wishing to honor her personal sacred space can do so by contributing to the Ocracoke Preservation Society on Ocracoke Island, 49 Water Plant Road, Ocracoke, NC, 27960. Memorial Park Funeral Home, "Behind the stone wall", 901-767-8930. Condolences may be offered at [www.MemorialParkOnline.com](http://www.MemorialParkOnline.com)

-- Obituary published in the Commercial Appeal



I cannot begin to express my gratitude for the incredible outpouring of prayer, sympathy and assistance that has already occurred. Many of you, plus Joan's many other friends, have blessed us with prayers, assistance and love. The community on Joan's beloved Ocracoke Island have sent us their love. The contra dancers are praying for her, including dancers in Little Rock and Huntsville, who were recently delighted by her talented calling. Close friends in Joan's jazzercise and yoga groups have been on hand. Clergy from Idlewild and a number of churches have prayed with us. Dear friends have been with us daily, offering prayer, food, sympathy and greatly appreciated medical expertise. Whatever remains ahead, Joan should know that she is admired, treasured and loved to a degree that exceeds her wildest dreams. For my own part, I am humbled by the staunchness and devotion of so many wonderful people. For the last few days, some lines of Yeats have been running through my head:

"Think where man's glory most begins and ends, And say my glory was I had such friends."

Peace and Blessings on You All,  
Ernest Kelly





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