



For years on Manitoulin Island, we have adored our talented artist Christie Best Pearson's gifts.

Her evocative paintings and charcoal drawings of old homes and farmsteads on Manitoulin, children playing in a field, or the serenity of ducks floating in a pond; whatever subject she focuses on, Christie consistently captures the spirit and joy of places, moods and times all over Manitoulin.

I talk to Christie, saying, "When I drive around Manitoulin, I'm always enthralled. You have such power to visualize and capture a moment in time with your observation and skills, Christie, it is so clear you paint with your heart through your eyes. You look for simplicity and beauty in what you see around you."

Luckily, Christie laughs. "Bonnie, thanks, it seems like I've always been painting. I love still life and landscapes. Painting and drawing are my tools of expression. I was shy growing up and this was a way to share what I couldn't say in words."

Christie paints mainly in water colours, graphite and coloured pencil paintings, which works well in bringing out the details, peace and calm of the island.

"When I taught drawing to children in Gore Bay, I told them I failed art in public school. There were times I started something and it didn't turn out the way I wanted. So I didn't finish. I'd crumple it up and start again. Hundreds of times. Keep going.

"I've discovered over the years that artwork takes on a life of its own. If you've a picture in your head of what your work is going to look like when it's done, you have to let that go. Let your piece evolve."

This humble artist has been exhibiting since the 1980s, continuously selling and gifting over the years. The strong design element in Christie's work is the result of working for newspapers typesetting, layout and design work.

"Bonnie, I've lived in other places, and been a member of various the arts clubs on Manitoulin, in Lively, Sudbury, and Elliott Lake, all under the Northern Ontario Arts Association umbrella."

She's an art instructor under the NOAA's visiting artists' program. Her artwork is displayed at Gore Bay Harbour Lights Artisans at the Harbour Centre, and Perivale Art Gallery in Spring Bay. Her current home on Manitoulin looks out onto a back meadow, and her main view is the pasture and farm property around her. "I grew up on a farm just up the road and this is actually home again." Christie has a son and a daughter and two grandchildren, all living in Gore Bay.

"Since I lived in Elliot Lake, I've kept my relationship with the Northern Ontario Arts Association for over 40 years and served on the board in various positions. The NOAA represents around 500 local Northern Ontario artists in 15 art clubs under our umbrella, and hosts a juried exhibition, which travels around Northern Ontario each year. "As an artist, if you have seven pieces selected by the jury for shows, you have the honour of using the letters of using the letters, NOAA, after your name."

When I need to sit at my desk, to stop my New York buzz and get some Manitoulin quiet elegance, I go to her Facebook page/Christie Best Pearson, or to [www.ChristieBestPearson.com](http://www.ChristieBestPearson.com).

"Here's a great story for you, Bonnie," Christie says. "In 1995 I did a series of black coloured pencil drawings I called my Sugar Bush Series. Four of them are on my website. My uncle and another local man shared a shack in a local sugar bush. Each year they'd sit around telling stories, stirring the sap and shooting the breeze. I stopped in with my son and daughter one spring afternoon and took scads of pictures; thus my series began."

"This past spring, I received a lovely email from Jim Fielding, in Mississauga. He was looking for an image to put on his newest line of maple syrup truffles, and stumbled across my drawing. He found the one of my daughter Cara peering into a sap bucket. He asked if he could use the image on the truffle box, remarking the image was so perfect. I was delighted and sold him the drawing."

I'm always mesmerized on the charming miracles made on Manitoulin, which keeps leading me on: with permission from Christie, I phone Lily Fielding, Jim's partner and wife at Fielding Group Ltd. Luckily, she has time for me.

"Jim was thrilled to find not only to find Christie's drawing," Lily says, "which is so perfect for our Maple Truffle Box, but to find her, as well. Well, Fielding Group Ltd. opened its doors in 1981. Our concept was to create gourmet gift baskets for corporate clients. We grew quickly and expanded our scope, but it was difficult to find products printed with Canadian and US specifications, so we developed our own brands and packaging."

Jim and Lily became experts in packaging, product development and import/export. By the mid 1990s, their gift baskets were replaced with gourmet food products.

"After 36 years, Lily said, "our Canadian products, especially our Made Ice Wine and Maple Chocolates, are most popular in tourist areas such as Niagara, wineries, hotels and resorts. As conscientious citizens, we're striving to become greener and more community minded."

Beloved Reader, this gets more delicious. Christie's box will hold pieces of Maple Chocolate. Lily laughs as I swoon over maple chocolate.

"We have a fine chocolatier in Ontario," Lily says, "who makes our Maple and Ice Wine Chocolate for us. These tastes are a natural marriage; pieces of maple chocolate so creamy I have to hold myself back. We work through our distributors in Canada and the US, with a network of wholesale accounts."

I see the newly designed box with Christie's drawing and a red ribbon. What an invitation to dig into chocolate made with maple syrup. Do go to [www.fielding-group.com](http://www.fielding-group.com) for more information.

Yup, swooning over Christie's sweet paintings and the new Fielding box of maple chocolate.

-- Our Bonnie has been writing in the Window Seat for 25 years for The Sudbury Star, loving every delicious moment. Please find her bestselling novel, Manhattan, Manitoulin, published by Scrivener Press at Turner's in Little Current. Please find her at [BonniKogos@aol.com](mailto:BonniKogos@aol.com)