

hope blossoms

ART TEACHER SHARES HOW LOVE FOR GARDENING HELPS COPE WITH LOSS

By David Maxwell, Zoey Perrine, Ben Lehman, Mars Smith, Maya VanVleet, Milo Needle, and Rachel Larsen

It's finally that time of year when winter fades into spring. The time when the grass starts to get greener, flowers begin to bloom again, and leaves grow back on the trees. It's also the time of year when art teacher Julie Makely's garden begins to blossom again.

"Some people paint a canvas in the summertime," Makely said. "I work in my yard."

For most of her adult life, Makely has poured hours of hard work and dedication into creating a beautiful and diverse garden in her backyard. Her passion comes from a philosophy passed down by one of her greatest inspirations.

"Where I first started falling in love with gardening was with my great aunt, who was a master gardener," Makely said. "Most of my plants that I have originally came from her, and I just subdivide them and transplant them into my garden."

For Makely, the garden is a creative outlet. It is the place where she can control exactly how she wants everything to look.

Where she wants her tubular perennial irises. Where she wants her tomato and bell pepper plants.

The plants growing in her garden are enjoyed by the entire family, including the furry or scaly members. Bunnies, koi fish, ducks, a dog named Mr. Bojangles, and a chicken named Blueberry. The garden has a universal appeal.

The most important people in her life observe how much love and work she puts into her garden everyday, and it's no secret that her love for the hobby is contagious.

"It's our education, learning how to become better gardeners every single year," her husband James Makely said. "I'm just exceedingly proud of Mrs. Makely for the care she takes in the garden."

From the outside, people know Makely for her caring, kind personality, and her deep

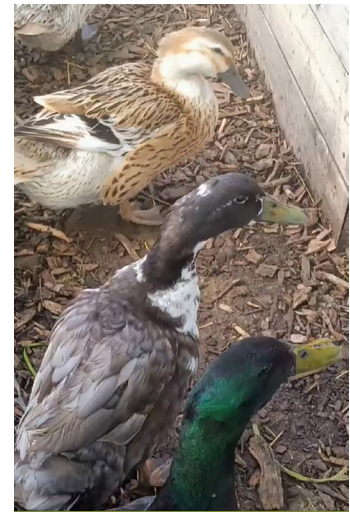
passion for gardening and art.

In 2022, Makely's brother passed away from a major heart attack at the age of 46. The sudden loss came as a shock and took place right around the time her son left for college, leaving gaping holes in her life. Carrying the heavy grief of these hardships, she turned to her place of solace—her garden.

"When my brother died, I planted 1100 daffodils in his honor. And they're all heirloom Winston Churchill varieties, which is an old 19th century variety of daffodils," Makely said. "I probably plant around 500 to 1000 every year."

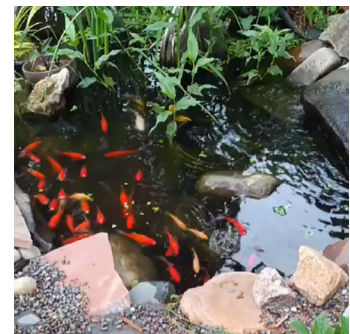
James has also taken note of the extra time and care she has taken in her

Meet the Animals



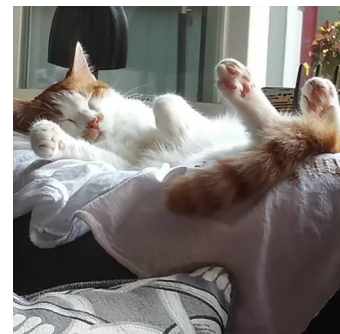
The Ducks

From top to bottom, the ducks' names are Tapioca pudding, Kronk, and Tulip. They are heritage breeds, and one of Makely's favorite things to do is watch them interact in the yard while drinking a glass of iced tea. Makely loves how they all have different personalities.



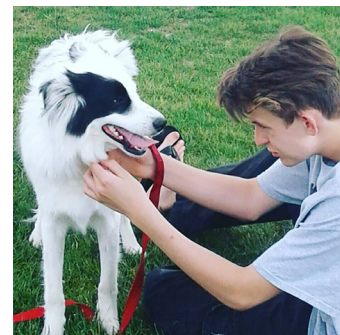
The Fish

The fish in the pond outside are not Makely's only fish. She has 3 other fish aquariums inside, along with a tank for her red frogs that has orchids in it.



Abby

Abigail Granger, or Abby, was given to Makely from a former student, Jenna Foxhaven, after Makely's calico cat had passed away. She came from a horse ranch.



Mr. Bojangles

Mr. Bojangles, Makely's dog was adopted from the Crow Native American Reservation in Montana. He now lives with Makely and her family.



Blueberry

Blueberry is a bantam cochin chicken, with an identical twin named Blackberry. They lay pink eggs and also provide soil for Makely's yard.



Made by Makely

SAMPLES OF MAKELY'S ART PIECES

Oil Painting



Rabbit Totem Pole



Functional Bowl



Rabbit



garden after the challenging events of the past few years.

"There were a number of things that really hit her very hard, and so her garden has really been her solace. It has been the place she can escape into and commune with nature," he said.

Makely's passion for gardening became a place for her to file away all of the heartbreaking events of the past couple of years. And soon enough, she began including pieces of that heartache into her beautiful garden, whether those pieces are the daffodils for her brother or the various other flowers and plants that bloom in her backyard today.

"If you're able to use your hands to build something or make something or create something that could be an outlet," she said. "I believe that everyone needs to learn how to have an outlet as a coping mechanism, so that you can de-stress yourself and let some

of those anxieties or depressions melt away."

Makely brings this philosophy into her classroom and her personal life, and no one has noticed it more than her son, who she says is her best friend.

"She's a person I look towards for guidance," Jackson Makely said. "She's always been the guardian in my life who I know I can rely on."

She brings her personality into her classroom values, and dedicates her teaching career to helping students find their creative outlets, Jackson said. Just like she has found hers in gardening.

"You walk in and she's going to know your name, like she's always gonna say hi to you," Jackson said. "She's going to be so excited that you're there, and I feel like most teachers don't put in as much effort as my mom does."

As she builds a relationship with her students, she tries her best to steer them in the right direction so that they can find their artistic expertise. She knows from her own personal experience that people who are talented artists have brains that work differently than other academically talented

students.
"As an artist I know we think differently than most people do. We may not be the most academic people, but we definitely do think differently than others. And I think that's pretty powerful," Makely said. "Even more than being high on the GPA for academics."

She uses teaching as an opportunity to share her strong beliefs with those around her, whether it's being respectful to the school janitors, or having a positive attitude towards the challenges in life. Just like the flowers and animals in her garden, she takes people under her wing and helps them navigate through the challenging things in life.

"I'm always calling her a mother to many. And that's what I really believe," James said. "She's become a mother to many people."

