



**From the very young to the young at heart, local artists of various generations have different inspirations and stories to tell about their passions to create**

By Tracey M. Dooms

An artist can't control when inspiration strikes. For some, the first spark comes at an early age, while others don't feel the urge to create until retirement.

*Town&Gown* recently talked with five local artists ranging in age from 11 to 78, discussing their passions, practices, and dreams. These artists include a novelist, a dancer, a musician, an actor, and a sculptor. Although their ages and disciplines vary, they all consider art to be an essential part of their lives.

### **Kieryn (Nicolas) Ziegler, 15**

*Novelist*

Kieryn Ziegler has had one novel published, is about to publish her second, and has 13 works in progress. Oh, and she's just 15 years old.

"Probably half my time I am thinking about stories and writing," she says. "It's not a hobby for me — it's a lifestyle. I *have* to write."

Her earliest writing — other than school assignments — was as a second-grader, creating stories about the Oregon Trail and about her dog becoming principal of her school. In seventh grade, she wrote a fantasy book that she submitted for publication.

"I got some very nice rejection letters," she recalls. "Everybody kept saying, 'Are you OK?' At that time, I was already writing *Rain*, so I didn't mind at all."

*Rain* is Kieryn's first published novel, an action-packed young-adult tale of spy-school intrigue. It took her six months to write, and more than a year to edit. She published it under the pen name Kieryn Nicolas, based on her middle name of Nicole and her tendency to head toward the middle of the alphabet when she goes into a bookstore.

Kieryn's next book, *Flawless Ruins*, is a "futuristic dystopia" story about a society where a man is not part of a woman's lives except as the gift of the "perfect husband" on their 17th birthday. She would note ideas for the book on her iPod while riding the school bus to and from State College Area High School and then spend at least an hour a night at home writing. Her friends are important to her writing, both as inspirations for characters and as readers of her works in progress, often begging for new chapters so they can find out what happens next.

"I almost never write anything that I don't show to anyone else," she says. "I think it's fun."

When she's not writing or attending classes, she watches *NCIS* and *Castle* on TV, hangs out with the State High Swing Dance Club, and takes martial arts classes. (Taekwondo started as research for *Rain* but became a passion.) She lives in Boalsburg with her parents, Mara and Tim; younger sister, Brynna; and a yellow Lab, black cat, and 10 hens.

Entering 10th grade this fall, she is beginning to think about college but says her choice of majors may depend on how her "authorly career" is going.

"If I can, I want to pursue writing as a career," she says. "If I can't, I think it would be great to be a forensic scientist. It would be great research for a book."