

## Artist's Statement: Judy Kensley McKie

I am involved in this project to create the Garden of Peace because my son, Jesse, was murdered by a group of strangers in an act of random violence. He was stabbed to death for his leather jacket. He was my only child, and my life changed overnight. For several years, the only thing that brought any comfort to me was to be in contact with others who had experienced similar losses, for they were the only ones who could feel the pain that my husband and I felt.

Since Jesse was murdered, I have felt the need for a place where his life and spirit could be remembered along with all those others who have suffered similar deaths: a place where those who have lost loved ones to violence could gather to leave flowers and to share the unbearable pain of such a loss. I believe every parent who loses a child to violence goes through the process of trying to figure out what they can do to effect change so that this will never happen again - to anyone. But because not every parent has the skills of an organizer, a political activist, or a communicator, she or he finds an individual way to express this need. For me, because I am an artist, I have to create something visual.

I was given the opportunity of becoming involved in the planning of the Garden of Peace through the creation of a sculpture for this space. The cast bronze sculpture I have designed depicts three ibis ascending. The ibis is a heron-like bird that was considered sacred to the ancient Egyptians. It represented their god, Thoth, who was the god of wisdom, healing, love and truth. It was also the symbol of resurrection.

I want to create a monument that will be uplifting and positive - a universal symbol of the transformation that is possible. The image of ascending birds is meant to send a message of hope. It should convey the idea that out of pain and suffering come hope and the possibility of a better future. Not only can we transcend our suffering, but also it is now the spirit of our children that moves us. They can now soar, and we can soar with them as we work towards peace.

My hope is that the Garden becomes a place where grieving parents, friends and relatives of murder victims, as well as concerned citizens will be able to convene to seek comfort, to rally against violence, organize, and actively address the issues of crime and violence in this city.