

Art Autobiography

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I first remember doing art with my grandmother. My grandfather was a wood worker in his spare time and would make wooden cut-outs of animals and other things like Christmas ornaments. I would spend my weekends at their house painting those cut-outs with my grandmother. The Christmas ornaments we spent long hours on are now family heirlooms that I still decorate my tree with today. I became very skilled with color and mixing my own paint colors long before I ever had any formal art education. I learned to appreciate 'mistakes' as something that makes handmade art more unique, so I don't fret over little errors. When I make art, I see all my mistakes, but others don't notice them, so I have learned to move past overthinking my errors.

I also spent many long hours on car trips with my parents practicing drawing in the backseat. I never truly achieved the skill I wanted as I lack the talent, but I can draw some things better than the average person. I remember asking for a pottery wheel when I was about 9 and I did get a very small one like you might find in a hobby section at Wal-Mart today. I made little cups and bowls from plain clay which didn't last, but the experiences showed me that I can teach myself. I really enjoyed the hand-on aspect of three-dimensional art and crafting which is still my forte today.

In high school I took two pottery classes that taught me many techniques and created permanent fired pieces that I still have today. Many of my family members have kept these items on display even now almost 20 years later. My aunt recently gave me back a slab-built box that I had imprinted with teddy bears that I had given her back then now that I had my own child

to pass it on to. When my daughter was born, I created some pieces that were inspired by who I thought she would be, and those are very precious to me still. I don't have a very good memory at all, but these permanent reminders have given me some anchor points through my life that help me appreciate how I've grown and changed over the years.

During my years in college earning my bachelor's degree I always tried to take an art class at least every other semester. I took two more pottery classes, screen-printing, wood carving and copper plate etching, and other classes which I enjoyed immensely and made earning my degree less stressful even though they didn't help me with my major. My favorite piece I ever created was in screen-printing during a monochromatic assignment that I used my daughter for inspiration. I created her smiling two-year-old face in multiple tones of amber and gold as her name is Amber and it still makes me happy whenever I pass it in my house.

I think art is meaningful to me when I can give it to someone else. Each Christmas for the past several years I have created something as a gift for my grandparents who originally inspired me in the arts. I prefer to give rather than receive, and it's always a joy to see something I made on display in someone else's home. Even when signing my student's yearbooks, I try to make little doodles that mean something special between us. I've even created a unique way of signing my initials that creates a butterfly that is very fluid for me to write and enjoyable for me to see.

I enjoy learning the process and overcoming my mistakes, even turning mistakes into a highlight rather than something to fret over. I feel like I am successful in art in some ways, except that I won't finish, or sometimes even start, a project unless I know I can get it right. I have plenty of partial pieces that I wish to return to but never find the motivation to once inspiration has passed. Sometimes I don't possess the skills or talent to do what I really want to

do, and that can frustrate me. I like to make other people happy with personal gifts that make a connection between us. When I met my newest coworker, I asked her what her favorite animal was. She said it was a sloth, so I found a small natural wood slice and turned the heart of the wood into the nose and left the bark as the sloth's fur to create a cute little sloth face using pyrography. I enjoy seeing it displayed on her desk at work as well as the gifts I have made for many other friends at school. When my principal retired, I burned our school's mascot into a plaque and painted it with an American flag in the background as he had been in the National Guard for many years. It makes me happy to spread joy, and art is my best way of doing so in a physical manner that lasts through time.

I think art is just about anything someone creates, whether it be a quick doodle or something they spend weeks creating. I always tell my students, "There's no wrong way to do art!" and I really mean it. It helps take the pressure off of them and I try to help them see their mistakes the way I see my own, as just a feature of something made by a real human who is trying but may not have all the skills yet to produce exactly what they mean to. Art is not a skill everyone wants to develop, but everyone can be creative if given the right inspiration.

I try to integrate art into my class as much as possible because I get a lot of joy seeing what each student or group creates. There's always something new to see or a new technique that I can appreciate. How students respond to art also gives me some insight into their personality and feelings, which I care deeply about when making these lasting connections with my students. I think the experiences at my grandparent's house on those weekends so long ago have really impacted my lifelong philosophy about art and anything handmade. Even products that aren't art can have these aspects applied to them. I only write and draw in ink and I always tell students, "I live with my mistakes" whenever they're worrying that something they have

made isn't perfect. I think it helps them disconnect some of the negative feelings their have towards their shortcomings when I show them mine quite frequently. We are all human and we are all capable of learning and bettering ourselves over time. I think art is very good at showing anyone can grow and develop new skills and art is capable of teaching much more than standard dry facts and content. I feel that art within education is seamless and brings out the best in everyone while creating long lasting memories and reminders of factual content in new ways. I hope to integrate new art techniques and ideas into my class each year as I learn and develop new methods and ideas using my content and my students as inspiration.