

Ramsdell, Amy

## Art Autobiography Essay

I live in an area that has an annual art festival that began in the early 1980's. This festival, called Panoply, happens every April and is a major event in the entire region. Thousands of people from all around the world come to downtown Huntsville for this four-day event that showcases many forms of artistic endeavors. It is not uncommon to see music, theatre, dance, sidewalk art, paintings, and other forms of expression. Thursday is always a special day for the elementary schools in the region. Busses from each school take their fifth graders to the park to spend an entire day. This right of passage provides some students with their first (and only) experiences with the arts.

Around ages six to nine, I attended dance lessons in ballet and jazz. My dance troupe was invited to dance at Panoply both years that I was a member. I remember being in awe of the 'older' kids in the audience. I also remember intense embarrassment at having to perform for the students during the Thursday performances.

In elementary and middle school, I was lucky to attend schools that had art classes weekly. Twice, once in fifth and once in seventh grade, I had my art from class selected to be put on display at Panoply. I remember exactly what those pieces were. One was a street scene where we were learning to draw from different points of view. I liked this assignment because it involved geometry and the use of straight lines and rulers. The second art that I had chosen for display was a drawing what I thought King Tut's head (the sarcophagus) would look like. It was a glorious rendition on paper that used quite a bit of charcoal and gold paint. I remember the

lesson that included this activity as a hook. This collaborative lesson connected art class and history class and sparked my fascination with Egypt, pyramids, and Archaeology.

Huntsville is also known for the children's' theatre series that is an annual event. Attending Fantasy Playhouse performances was a highlight of my childhood. My mother always bought season tickets for us and going to performances of shows like Pinocchio, Tom Sawyer, and The Christmas Carol was a special time for us to share and talk about. I even attended 'Playhouse Camp' a few summers where I learned about acting and stage makeup.

My parents would also buy season tickets to the Huntsville Symphony most years. This was a huge, grown-up event for me to be able to attend. They even bought me a rabbit fur coat to wear to the symphony. I was in third grade, and I remember this event clearly. I was so proud of my coat. I loved that coat. One day, I wore it to school. Keep in mind that I did not attend a private school, or even a school that was on the 'good side' of town. The fact that we had season tickets to the Fantasy Playhouse and the Symphony did not equal wealth. These were examples of my parents' budgeting skills that we were able to do this. I hung my coat in the classroom coat closet. Throughout the day, students would walk by my coat and stroke it as they walked by. This did not bother me because I thought they loved my coat as much as I did. When the day ended and it was time to go home, I found that my coat had bald patches where the students had pulled handfuls of fur off it. I was crushed and that was the last season we had tickets to the symphony. There may or may not have been a connection between my coat being destroyed and the symphony tickets not being purchased again. Most likely, not connected, but in my third-grade brain I considered it all my fault.

One summer, while visiting my biological father for a month, I was able to be the assistant choreographer for a children's theatre production of Peter Pan in Parkersburg, West

Virginia. I was probably around fourteen at the time and this was a ton of fun. I even had a professional photo made with the head choreographer for the playbill.

As an adult, I love attending theatrical productions of our local Broadway Theatre League. I also enjoy going to the Huntsville Museum of Art and the Huntsville Botanical Gardens. I appreciate beauty and artistic endeavors. I respect the work that goes into all of the varying forms of art. I do not want to be on the performing end of these expressions. It is much safer to be on the viewing/appreciating end. Since becoming an adult, the closest I have been to the performing end of artistic expressions is to help the local community chorus with their annual dinner theatre production. I have several friends that perform in this and my husband and I were recruited to help. He was the photographer and I ran the front-of -the-house which entailed ensuring the guests were seated at their tables, beverages were served, and the food was served.

Upon reflection, I have quite a bit of experiences with the art world. Except for the rabbit coat incident, my experiences have all been pretty positive. I seem to be most worried about embarrassment and being judged as not good enough. I honestly believe that art is an original expression of creativity or emotion. What I can do is follow directions or copy the work of others or what I can see, like for scientific drawings for laboratory exercises. Because I am surrounded by what I consider to be true artists, it is easy for me to say that I am not one.