

Science Autobiography

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Recall:

My mother and father are both artists and as a young child I watched them create, often acting as the assistant, while they worked. My father's talent was in decorating pysanky eggs, a traditional Ukrainian wax resist method using colored dyes. He won a few awards in fine art festivals. My father had aspirations of becoming a graphic designer or cartoonist and completed one year at a community college before being drafted into the army. He served in the Vietnam War at age 19, got married, and had a baby (me) on the way. He never finished his degree which he tells me he regrets.

My mother's talents are in flower design, sewing, and crafting. As a child, I remember many nights and weekends helping both parents get ready for upcoming art fairs and shows that I was expected to work. I didn't mind working when I was younger, but resented the weekend art events when I was in high school, especially outside shows when the weather was crummy.

Honestly, school neither hindered nor inspired my creative and artistic talents. I wasn't encouraged to take any art classes in school even though I showed some interest. It didn't help that I was intimidated to pursue art because I couldn't draw well so I avoided them. I was painfully shy as a teenager and rarely stood up for myself.

I have a vivid memory of experiencing extreme anxiety as a third grader when our art class was asked to create a figurine out of clay. I was paralyzed. It seemed that everyone could mold their clay easily and make cute animals. I, on the other hand, could not. By the end of class, my art teacher was so frustrated with me that she took my clay blob and made a simple bunny rabbit in

about 30 seconds. I dutifully took the bunny from her, painted the clay and had it fired. My lopsided eared bunny came home and my parents immediately “oohed” and “ahhed” the imperfections and cuteness. I never told my parents the work wasn’t mine. Besides this memory, I can’t remember a single art project I did in elementary school mostly because interesting materials weren’t available, my schooling was quite traditional and no one ever encouraged me. I think we colored a lot. (I could stay in the lines) Middle school is a blur. I don’t believe I took an art or music class in my teen years and feel like I lost ripe opportunities.

Growing up, I danced, wrote stories, played musical instruments, sang songs or performed on stage- in the privacy of my own home. I spent the majority of my time as a young person playing sports on organized teams. I’m naturally athletic, love being on a team and enjoy movement. The recognition and accolades I got playing sports definitely contributed to my motivation. In college, I was fortunate enough to get hired as a seamstress at a theater costume shop. As a senior I was promoted to assistant designer and helped draft, shop for materials and build period costumes from scratch. Hands down this was one of the best jobs I’ve ever had. It took an incubation period of about 20 years to have the inspiration and motivation to create artistic cookies- my love now. As a young Allison, I wasn’t passionate about the art of pastry work until I inherited my grandfather's bakery recipes following his death. My father and I decided to recreate my grandfather’s famous bakery cookies during the Christmas season 20 years ago. Little did I know that it was the start of a newfound love for me. Plus, having my father by my side, baking and experimenting with cookie designs, shape, flavor, consistency, altitude difficulties, etc. I developed a solid connection with him. We had fun playing and cooking! That feeling of being part of a family tradition and creating a special bond with my

father is what drives me to create. I've been approached by people to start a cookie business, but I'm too afraid I would lose the passion and my motivation would fizzle. Deadlines? Yuck! Criticism? Yuck? Complaints? No thanks! I'm quite content in making yummy and beautiful treats for family and friends.

Reflect:

Before I started writing down all my past art experiences, I never gave much thought into how art shaped and influenced the person I am today. As a child, I was shy, a rule follower and never felt comfortable being vulnerable. If I could avoid it, I did, not understanding that failing is part of the process. Based on my reflections, having the availability of interesting materials to create with, the novelty of trying something new, creating in a low stakes atmosphere and receiving encouragement from teachers and mentors is absolutely what drove my interest and gave me the license to take risks. Plus, having fun playing with art and having the time to do so was essential for me. What good lessons for me to remember as a teacher! The anticipated rejection, criticism, and isolation that may come from exposing one's art to the world, helps explain why some kids hesitate starting a project, get embarrassed easily, or become defiant and feel like they couldn't possibly be a creator of something interesting, innovative, beautiful or worthwhile. This is a lot like writing. It's a piece of you, raw and vulnerable. This was certainly true for me.

When I think back to the time when I was a costume designer, I understand more clearly now the planning, incredible attention to detail and thought that went into our costume designs even before the sewing machine buzzed with life. At the time I was simply enjoying myself feeling like an adult whose opinion and creative insight was valued. Putting on a production requires a

collaborative team willing to hear others' opinions and compromise when needed. This is certainly true now and was then. I spent a lot of time doing my due diligence - leading meetings with directors and actors, learning the actors' personalities and their characters' personalities, sketching plans for costumes, discussing the emotions and mood the fabric, colors, and styles would evoke- before the physical act of costume design could take shape. One doesn't just take fabric and create beautiful art out of thin air. Time and planning are essential components because the costumes become just one visual interpretation of the play and actors and stage designers need to work synergistically for it to all work on stage. Kids need time to plan as well. And a piece I missed prior to writing this paper is the power of collaboration. Many of my creative and artistic pursuits were in conjunction with people and involved their perspective, help and encouragement. Another important lesson for me.

Connect:

When many people think of art, attention is given to the fine arts; painting, music, sculpture, poetry, dance and theater. Yet this narrow vision may limit accessibility because you may think you're only an artist if you pursue these endeavors. There's a profusion of artistic endeavors in the world and technology has only enhanced its possibilities. People trained in the fine arts, earned art degrees, commit to creating art everyday, and are passionate about what they do find offense when people think everyone's an artist. And I get it. Most of us don't pursue art as a career in that sense, get paid and have our paintings in art galleries or play for the Philharmonic Orchestra. However, is being a *true* artist bequeathed to a chosen few people? Who decides what is art and what is not? Are people more creators and innovators than artists if they don't follow

the traditional path or don't have the training and art pedigree? These questions have been swirling in my head for a few days while I've been vetting out a working definition.

To me art is open to many interpretations, can be seen in a multitude of mediums and comes in many different forms. My definition of art is the creative expression of one's experience and interpretation of the world, unveiling what we see, think, and feel. Art can be beautiful, emotional, innovative, interesting and novel.

What I do know is that I'm more happy, creative, satisfied and fully alive when I am doing art.

This makes sense because we know the brain craves novelty and newness and the act of creating helps satisfy that fundamental innate need. Kids need this! If someone would have told me as a child that I was a beautiful precious light that has a creative, artistic spark, I know that simple attitude would have made all the difference in the world for me. What a beautiful attitude teachers can give their students.