

Art Autobiography: A Journey in Visual Art

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### Recall

I do not remember much about my art experiences before elementary school. Coloring books were my life as they are for most four year-olds. When I began elementary school I had one art teacher for the duration of my time there. I honestly do not remember any lesson I learned in her class. There was a lot of crafting and projects for the youth fair that I was never selected for. While I loved crafting, I still do, the thing I remember most is always being disappointed that my art was not considered “good enough” to display. It was extremely disheartening to try my best and still never have my art chosen.

I do have two good art memories from elementary school. I distinctly remember a summer program lesson, with a visiting teacher, where we were learning how to mix primary colors to create secondary colors and how to change the hue with white and black. I remember the teacher giving us a blank palette, giving the lesson, and then allowing us to explore with the paints and palette. It was so much fun! There was no right or wrong way in the exploration, just an experience that I will never forget.

The second memory was in my fourth grade reading class. We had just finished the book “The Island of the Blue Dolphins.” I cannot remember anything about the book, but I do remember the project we were assigned. We were asked to create a poster-sized map of the island with nothing more than the book as a reference and a box of classic color markers. My partner and I created a map that displayed the island as being the shape of a dolphin and on it were the locations mentioned in the story. That project allowed for creativity, because again, there was not a true right or wrong as the shape of the island was never mentioned in the story,

so it was up to the artist to decide. I ended up keeping that project and still have it in my school memory box because I was so proud of my work.

In middle school I did not have any art experiences beyond music. I lived and breathed band and chorus. I had an amazing teacher who pushed me hard and allowed me to gain a better understanding of instrumental and vocal music. This love carried on into high school where I again, played and sang all four years in various ensembles. When I went to college, I joined the university's marching band and rushed the band fraternity Kappa Kappa Psi. To this day I consider myself a musician. More so a vocalist than an instrumentalist, but every once in a while, I pick up my "baby" and give it a go to make sure I still remember how.

College brought on so many new experiences with all of the teaching classes we needed for graduation. One of them was "Art in the Elementary Classroom." I dreaded signing-up for this course after how long I had been away from any kind of visual art, but it was a mandatory course and so after putting it off until the semester before student teaching, I registered. When the professor began explaining the projects we would be completing that semester my anxiety rose and so did that of many others in the class. We were to create a portfolio that would contain original works using a variety of media. Included in the portfolio would be sketches, a self-portrait, a work in watercolor, a work in pastels, a craft, a children's book, and a student created video.

I dreaded this class from day one until about a week in. Our professor was very nurturing reminding us that every piece is a learning experience. The only "bad art" was the one you did not even attempt. He guided us through how to create these pieces in the way that we would teach the children in our classrooms. When we did not understand or became frustrated, he

would offer to model for us step-by-step to help us get to where we wanted our art to be. This was the art teacher I needed back in elementary school. I learned so much that semester and still use many of those techniques in my personal art and with my students.

### **Reflection**

I think the biggest theme in my experiences with art is how the teacher used art and how they made me feel about my art. When the art was simply something that everyone else was also doing and the teacher would then judge my work against all the others in the class to select the “best” I felt defeated. I did not enjoy art when it was a competition. However, when the art was used to enhance a lesson and was a way for me to show what I learned in a way that made sense to me, I was excited and ready for the challenge.

The same went for music. Music felt good when we worked together to create something out of nothing. We were challenged to bring to life the notes on the paper so that others may be able to enjoy it as well. Music also had its issues as I did not enjoy the pressure of competing to be the ensemble who recreated the music exactly how it was written. There was no enjoyment in perfection, only in experiencing and exploring the music as we interpret it.

### **Connection**

I believe art is an experience. It is a way to take in what is all around you and create something that allows others to experience it the way you do. I do not believe art was ever meant to be used as a way to judge one person versus another when neither has done anything unique. As I mentioned earlier, I love a good craft, but even with those, there is room for interpretation, variances based on how I am feeling and what I like, rather than what my teacher said I had to do.