

Amanda Tornabene
Art Autobiography 5/12/20

Growing up in Brooklyn, NY, outdoor space was limited; so, many times, my sister and I would turn to art for play. My earliest memories of art include finger painting and drawing with sidewalk chalk on our family's shared driveway on hot summer days. I remember drawing a lot of pictures growing up and always getting praise for how wonderful they were. Every art project I completed in school was brought home to be proudly hung up on the fridge by my mother, and I remember the feelings of pride and accomplishment that accompanied that. In Kindergarten, I entered a Reading Rainbow book-writing contest for young writers and won for my book titled, *The Giant Flower*. I don't remember much about the book itself but I do distinctly remember coloring in the "giant" flower I had drawn on the front cover. It was another piece of artwork I was able to garner pride and accomplishment from. My initials are A-R-T, spelling out 'art,' which as a child, was clearly a sign that I was destined to be an artist. While that never happened, my love for drawing and painting has carried with me throughout my life.

My teen years were particularly difficult for me as I struggled with mental health and addiction issues. One thing that gave me comfort through those challenging times and even still oftentimes helps me, is art. High school was not something I participated in, let alone attended regularly. On the rare occasions I did attend, I made sure I made it to my art class. This class was a safe place for me at a time when I didn't have many. The teacher was the kind of teacher that made you feel you were at home in his classroom; that while it was still an educational course, the main focus was growing and progressing as an artist versus as a high school student. This teacher and this art class,

made me feel like a person versus the failing student that I very much was at the time. I do not remember the name of the course but I do remember it was almost entirely composed of drawing/sketching still-life objects. That was almost ten years ago now; and today, I have a drawing of mine from that course framed, hanging up on my bedroom wall. Each time I look at it, I feel strength, happiness, and genuine comfort.

In early recovery (after high school), I painted a lot. My first painting was a large canvas of a tree with motivational words on the leaves; my second, a silhouette of a man and child fishing on a lake at sunrise. They were really beautiful pieces of art and I was so overwhelmingly proud of them. Truthfully, it was the first time in a long time I had felt proud of anything. Fast forward to today - I am happy, healthy, and sober over six years. Many times, I turn to painting and coloring to ease anxiety.

In reflecting upon my experiences with art, I realize the experiences that stand out to me most are those that made me feel good. Some of my earliest experiences with art were based on praise given to me by my mother and/or other outside forces. I suppose I needed that attention and affirmation as a child and receiving that resonated with me. As I got older, art still gave me feelings of happiness and satisfaction but on a more personal, internal basis. It isn't until now - writing this - that I realize how much art has positively impacted my life and for that, I am truly grateful. I may not be the best or most knowledgeable artist, but I have forged a relationship with art that has been life-changing. To me, that equates to being successful in art.

I believe art is the expression of the soul. It is the physical manifestation of feelings and emotion. While my experiences revolved around drawing and painting,

there are so many other forms of art to be created and utilized. Because I have had such positive experiences with art, I have only positive feelings towards art. My very personal, very raw experiences with art have led me to believe that art is something we as people, simply cannot live without. It is vital to our spiritual, emotional, and mental health. As the cliché goes, "Earth without 'art' is 'eh'."