

## **Art Autobiography**

### **Recall**

Preschool is the earliest memory I have of engaging in art. When naptime arrived halfway through the school day I'd pull out my cot and sit in silence, big brown eyes wide open with quiet tears. They'd call my mom and she'd inevitably drive to school and pick me up early day after day. Luckily, I was Miss Judy's favorite student and she managed to figure out a way to help me get through naptime. She started bringing me colored pencils and paper to quietly draw while the other children slept. Coloring was soothing, no more tears. Sometimes she'd even bring me to the staff lounge at naptime and let me color while she chatted with the other teachers.

My elementary school art experience was excellent, our arts program was robust with dance, music, a school chorus, the annual 5th grade production, and visual art classes for all students. The visual arts teacher, Mrs. DeWulf was a classmate's mom and a neighbor who lived just up the street from me. She was one of those teachers who commanded the class through her nutty personality, if she was up at the white board and didn't like her Expo marker she'd dramatically toss it on the floor and we'd all go running to throw it away for her. One of my favorite activities with Mrs. DeWulf was learning to sculpt. Still quiet as a mouse in fourth grade I sat at my desk with three lumps of clay carefully shaping them into the segments of a snowman. When I was happy with the body I started to form a sunhat because my snowman was going to be a snowlady. Somehow while I was shaping the brim of the sunhat it fell down and became a skirt and I just went with it. I recall being asked many questions while I worked since I was going off

script from the traditional snowman attire. This was one of many signs that I was destined to attend a liberal arts women's college and become a feisty woman commenting on the patriarchy.

The arts were a source of escape for me, a place to be creative and experiment safely in the classroom. But my favorite art was practicing ballet afterschool. I had the best teacher, Miss Meg who cared about me as if I were her own daughter. Meg taught me how to perform a double pirouette en pointe while also demonstrating the beauty and possibility in the art of teaching. I loved the challenge of perfecting my movements, the quiet of the ballet studio, the different characters you could embody through dance, costumes, and music. Meg's coaching not only shaped my ballet training and lifelong love of dance, she left the biggest imprint on how I teach from my heart as I nudge my students gently through the year. Meg nudged me to audition for summer intensives with the American Ballet Theatre and with her nudges I was able to get into Orange County High School of the Arts (OCHSA) to pursue their classical dance program.

I loved my experience at the performing arts high school. There were no limits to our creativity. Although I was training in the classical dance conservatory, I was able to try out other art forms like running the daily student news broadcast, "The Art Attack Live." We were tasked with creating commercials for school events like Prom ticket sales and the all school musical. I found myself at home in the edit bays with my film and TV friends. Each year at OCHSA I considered switching conservatories to Film and Television but ballet kept drawing me back.

Throughout college I continued to take ballet classes and earned a minor in dance. Now as an adult I continue to enjoy dance as a junior council patron with the American Ballet Theatre. I stopped taking regular ballet classes after college, but when a friend called to tell me that Meg passed away I signed up for a class at the Joffrey ballet school to reconnect with ballet, myself,

and Meg. Since Meg's passing I've participated in a handful of dance classes but not consistently. This year however, I have moved to the Specials/Enrichment team at work as I develop a STEM program that is offered in a similar way that art, drama, music, and dance are at my school. My colleague Nicholas is a singer by trade and loves to dance, as soon as it is safe for studios to reopen in NYC Nicholas and I will be signing up for a modern dance class together.

### **Reflect**

Rereading my work, I am misty-eyed thinking about my experience learning from Miss Meg. My art experiences have been deeply meaningful especially when tied to teachers who care like Judy and Meg. Through my recollection I've noticed that art is my happy place, whether its coloring with a glass of wine to unwind after a tough week or using my body through dance to process grief and loss. My teachers provided an art education that has allowed me to use art as an outlet for processing emotions, to get lost in a flow state, and to heal. It doesn't matter if I'm appreciating, viewing, or listening to art or creating my own - these art experiences evoke calm and joy.

I do feel that I have been successful in art. Growing up I associated being successful in something like art or a sport as being good at it or being the best at it, like being able to execute that double pirouette en pointe. I no longer agree with my old definition, now I think success is more about attitude and process. Top athletes and artists aren't successful only because they do that particular job the best, they're successful because of their attitude, dedication, practice, determination, and love for what they do. Looking at my teaching practice through this lens, I'm not the top teacher in my district but I push myself to be my best for my students as I expect the same from them - all while loving the process of teaching and learning. I'm beginning to see

myself in this light with my art as well, I was weighed down with a perfectionist complex when it came to making art especially drawings by hand but now through the lens of grace, my art isn't about the product it's about the process. That's what I might love most about going to the ballet, knowing how much practice and rehearsal goes into executing each movement just for that one moment on stage.

### **Connect**

Art to me is a tool and a lens. A tool we can use to share, express, process, and communicate. A lens through which we can better understand the world and one another.

For me, art is a tool I can use to escape and go inward, it's a way I can tune out the noise of the day to day and really figure out how I'm feeling and thinking. When I'm creating I can fall into a flow state where deep work can happen and time flies by. In the times that I'm not creating but appreciating and observing art it is both a tool and a lens. A lens I can use to see someone else's perspective and a tool to relate and process the artist's thoughts as well as my own.

My past learning experiences and teachers have greatly shaped my definition of art as well as my attitudes towards it. Through learning to dance ballet I've been able to use art as a tool to express myself and process my inner knowings and wonderings. Ballet has also allowed me to step back and look into other artists' minds and perspectives through ballets, musical scores, costume design, sets, and lighting. Art is a part of who I am and how I share myself with the world.