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### ***Personal Art Education History***

My mom had to hide the crayons from me as a child. She says I would find them and sneakily color on everything; underneath chairs and tables, on toys, and even on the walls. I believe this is where my journey to becoming an artist began. I followed in the footsteps of my older sister, being enrolled in dance at the age of three. When it came time for my older sister to go to elementary school, my parents followed the advice of the kindergarten teacher and enrolled her in Stephen Bull Fine Arts School. This advice wasn't given in reference to their fine arts program so much, but because it had a good academic program. When the time came, I too joined the student body of Fine Arts. At this school we participated in music, art, drama, and dance every week. We learned Shakespeare, opera, folk and classical dance, and had a visiting artist every year. I began violin in first grade under the Suzuki Method. I began oboe in fifth grade, and I took piano lessons throughout elementary school too. I was highly asthmatic, having several attacks a month that would lead to emergency room visits. Sports were out of the question, and due to the curriculum of Fine Arts, I was exposed to all of the arts from the beginning of my education. This is where the love affair began.

When it came time to go to middle school, I begged my parents to let me go to the local private school, The Prairie School, rather than following my sister to the magnet public school where gang problems, violence, and a lack of a good education were evident. It was expensive, and all of my other five siblings had gone to public school, but they agreed to let me tour the school and take the placement exam. I started at Prairie in sixth grade and attended through graduation of high school. I took my place in the school's excellent theater and music program. My pictures still hang on the walls in leading rolls of many of the musicals performed in my seven years there. Not only did I participate in the music and theater programs, but I also did glass blowing. My art teacher would comment when I would stick out my tongue as I concentrated deeply on my creation, saying, "I can tell you're an artist because you stick out your tongue when you are working." I used to think that was silly, but I became an artist after all! I was a decent student academically and worked extremely hard to get high grades, but my true love was performing. As a high school student, my music teacher gave me the privilege of doing the make-up design for all the school's plays as well as choreographing all the middle school musicals. I was also invited to sing with the jazz band, and my teacher allowed me to design and choreograph our choir concerts. I loved visual art, but it was sacrificed for my passion in music and theater. It wasn't until college that I would rekindle my love of mark-making.

I enrolled in a drawing class my freshman year of college as a way to add something fun to my schedule. I had always wanted to learn how to draw better. I was nervous to be in the class because I hadn't taken art classes in high school; I was afraid I was behind the curve. My professor was encouraging though, and gave me a lot of positive feedback. In my first trimester of my freshman year, in my drawing class, I had filled a void I didn't even know existed. I was hooked, and at the end of my freshman year, my professor pulled my mom into her office and told her, "You have to make sure she continues in art. She is already advanced and doing senior level work." It was a wake-up call for myself and my family, I was an artist! I switched my major from child-psychology to art education, realizing that as an art teacher I would be able to provide guidance and nurturing to children, which was something I really wanted to do in my career. I had been a nanny and baby-sitter throughout middle, high school, and college and I knew that working with children was what I wanted to do. Becoming an art teacher felt natural and my professors said I was born to be an art teacher. As a student teacher, I received the biggest compliment of my career when a veteran teacher of over thirty years, pulled me aside and asked if she could have some of my lesson plans. She told me that she had never seen a student teacher able to achieve such high results with students in her life. She also told me she would be retiring soon and she would be honored if I was the teacher hired to replace her and continue her program. I was twenty two years old, not even a certified teacher yet, and I was already making a name for myself in the community.

After student teaching, I moved to the other side of the world to teach English in Taiwan. I stayed for four months, when I found out that I had been recommended by my cooperating teacher at the high school level to be interviewed for a position filling the shoes of a retiring legend in art education, another teacher who had been teaching for over thirty years. I flew back to the United States and prepared for my interview. They called me the next day after my interview to offer me the position. I moved to Shawano, Wisconsin, a town of eight thousand with more cows than people, to teach Drawing and Painting and Photography One. After the first year, my classes became so popular there was a waiting list for my classes and the school agreed to give me an overload. We opened another section of classes, bringing me to seven classes a day and over 150 students. By year three, the other art teacher also had an overload of classes and other teachers of electives were complaining that their numbers were down, aware they were losing students to the art program. We had smiles from ear to ear. I breathed life into a program that had been successful for over thirty years, but needed to be updated. I knew in those three years teaching at Shawano Community High School that I was meant to be an art teacher.

I was unsatisfied with the location I was living, and feeling burned out emotionally and physically from the demands of teaching, I decide to return to school, considering getting my MFA and teaching at the college level. I was accepted into the Post Baccalaureate Program at the Minneapolis College of Art

and Design. It felt good to be making art again, something I didn't have any time to do as a teacher. A void was being filled, but simultaneously, a void was being made by not teaching. I realized that the politics professors endured at the collegiate level was not something I wanted to endure and that I could make a greater difference, reaching more students, if I returned to teaching high school. I found a job in Florida, only four hours from my parents, where I would be in charge of building the first visual arts program in the school's nearly 100 year history. It is four years later and I am still teaching at Montverde Academy, an international boarding school just outside of Orlando. I continue to teach Drawing, Painting, and Photography, but in addition I teach Introduction to Art, 3-Dimensional Art, Advanced Photography, Advanced Studio Art, Advanced Placement Studio Art (2D, 3D, and Drawing), and Advanced Placement Art History. I run a chapter of National Art Honor Society, a Knitting Club, and I am in charge of our Visual Arts Diploma Program. Even though I have more responsibilities than I can handle, I feel grateful to have such a rewarding career. I love teaching art and I truly believe that I was destined to be an art teacher. From my childhood obsession with coloring, through my exposure to the arts throughout my education, the stars aligned to lead me to this career. I cannot imagine doing anything else; I was born to be an art teacher.