

10-2-09 Respite from Stress Found in Art

Sometimes I make art. Not often enough, though. The creative process of producing art is irregular in my life, depending on many factors. Sometimes it seems there isn't enough time left after work and taking care of a home and family. Then there are those other part-time jobs, too. Bills have to be paid. Taking care of responsibilities first is deeply ingrained. But sometimes there is an absolute need for expression. I don't know where the ideas come from. My mother would ask, "Where did you get this idea?" Usually the answer was something along the lines of, "I don't know. I just picked up that stick (or paint or rock) and this is what I knew I had to do."

At other times, the need to make art rises to the surface first as a form of survival and then, secondly, results in a form of expression. Pain and trauma can force and then allow artistic activities to both take away the pain and then lead the way to healing and learning from the very same traumatic causes for the pain.

If you've never experienced the healing benefits of art and tend to minimize the claims, consider telling that to Linda Daniels, Psy.D. She was working the overnight shift for the New York Port Authority as the chief psychologist in the Office of Medical Services, when, on September 11, 2001, she felt the jolt of the plane hitting the North Tower and more than an hour later lived to tell her tale of climbing and crawling down from the 62nd floor. In time, she turned to our very own Cape Cod, to art, to painting, to sculpture and writing as a way to heal. In 2004, she wrote a book, "Healing Journeys: How Trauma Survivors Learn to Live Again." I had the privilege of meeting her once and I saw the look on her face when she spoke to me about the importance of art. She smiled warmly and her face lit up.

Sometimes I am also privileged enough to talk about art professionally. By combining responsibility and art, I have "allowed" myself to create and direct my Docent Art Program for the towns of Plympton and Halifax for the last twenty-two years. My time away from health agent work for that art appreciation program is only seven times each school year. For a couple of hours away from the health office, I am dedicated to helping young people observe and communicate. I can make up the time those meetings take and it is well worth it.

In my Docent Art Program, I teach adults how to bring mounted fine art reproductions to classrooms and have a blast talking to the children about the art. Well, actually, I mostly teach them how to ask open-ended questions and then listen to the children. And listen, we must, because they have a lot to say and not many opportunities to be listened to without being judged.

Sometimes people suggest that I bring in examples of local artists and I have to explain to them the somewhat indescribable differences between great art and not-so-great art. Talking about art that is not-so-great is not-very-enjoyable; it is strained and the conversation, if there is one, does not last long. On the other hand, great art, no matter what the style, time period or subject matter involves more than initially meets the eye, speaks a universal language, has layers of meaning, has an emotional impact on the viewer and even the techniques and materials used are interesting to look at and talk about. One of my measurement tools of great art is that it excites my eyes. My eyes want to keep looking and look again. They dart back and forth. Then the eyes start to communicate with the brain and heart. Ideas and emotions begin to surface.

There are no judgments interfering with that process. It is exciting, draws me in and demands my attention and my responses are elicited. They have surfaced and must escape.

While I'll never own a Picasso or van Gogh or Cassatt or O'Keefe, I can still afford to own great art that meets my definition of depth, intrigue and beauty rising from the soul.

Last Saturday night I walked into the Whitman, MA town hall for a nice event sponsored by the local Mass Cultural Council. It was their third Cake, Champagne and Art event. I walked in, looked to the right and was immediately drawn to one area displaying expressive multi-media paintings of people and architecture. They were compelling and I knew right away I would purchase one. Deciding which was the only dilemma.

I am now the proud owner of *Jeremy* painted in 2009 by 28 year old Matthew Gillis Hall. Remember his name. The day will come when you will say; "I remember when Cathy Drinan tried to tell me about him."

Purchasing original art allows us the very special opportunity to connect with other people on a level we could all use more of. Standing before great art is itself a feeling of honor. To meet the artist is another. To have the treasure in your home to be enjoyed on a daily basis and shared with others perpetuates that honor. It connects you to humanity. Thank you, Matthew Gillis Hall and thank you, *Jeremy*, for a respite from work related stress. You also remind me of the reason for the work: to help others.

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