



*(Close-ups on the bottom of the narrative)

During my younger years of school, art seemed to be the only subject that I did not struggle with. I faced a very difficult childhood, experiencing several medical setbacks for not only myself but for my family. During kindergarten and first grade I found myself in and out of the hospital due to respiratory issues. In addition to my own medical struggles, my baby brother was born. He spent his first four months of life in the hospital due to complications during delivery. Trying to continue to get caught up from my missed work and to also cope with my parents constantly being away from home because of the drive back and forth to the hospital, I shut down. My ability to cope with all that was going on took a huge toll on my course work. After much discussion with the school, my parents decided to keep me back in first grade. It was honestly the best decision my parents ever made for me. I began to turn to art as my outlet. My parents began to notice my desire to be around art and encouraged my creativity through at home arts and crafts. I loved art class and would come home at the end of the day to practice what I learned. I can still remember watching Mr. St. Marie demonstrate how to create a perfect circle - tracing the outline of the circle on the paper with his hand before dropping the lead to the paper. Today, I still use his some of his techniques. These memories are of my first of how art played an important role in my life.

In the third grade we moved to a new town. While my coping abilities improved over the course of the two years, my fear of failure in my course work was still there. Luckily I had my one strong point - my art. My parents allowed me to join the after school art club which permitted me the creative outlet that I needed; it also

made for a smoother transition into the school. In sixth grade, we moved again only this time to a very small neighboring town. On my first day of school I was able to meet the art teacher. I immediately latched onto her. She made art so exciting and I started to really excel in not only my art class but in school in general. The teachers at this school were very different than any other teachers I had ever had before. The environment was extremely caring and they worked very hard to appeal to all areas of learning. During my junior high years, I finally found my place that I could be artsy and work hard at my studies. Mrs. MacBride always introduced us to the topics of study, making historical and contextual relationships before beginning our projects. She was also great at making connections between art and other subjects. Her creative nature and enthusiasm influenced me in a positive way and gave me the confidence I needed to excel. I believe this energy and special attention is so important in teaching art. It was because of her friendly and encouraging attitude that I felt comfortable in the art room. I also believe that the school schedule allowed for the appropriate amount of time we needed in each exploratory class. We were on a three week rotation which meant we had art for three weeks straight which gave us the time to grasp the art concepts and techniques. Mrs. MacBride has been a wonderful mentor over the years. It is because of her patience and motivation that I am pursuing teaching art. She was also my inspiration to begin picking up a camera. When she told me she was a photographer in addition to a teacher, I thought it was a perfect combination.

While art seemed to be a major focus for me in middle school, once in high school I took a side step from art. I decided to pursue medicine instead. Following my eighth grade year, I found out that my father was diagnosed with cancer; I was determined to work in a field that would allow me to work with people that struggled with medical illnesses. Starting in my freshman year through my last semester of my junior year, I had lost my desire to go into teaching. Art became more of a hobby that I picked up here and there when visiting my Grandmother who is a painter and porcelain doll maker. During my junior year it was by chance that I was placed into a study hall which was located in the art room, of all places. It was the first time I had stepped foot into an art room in years. Once again, the artistic energy began to fill my body. I began using my study halls as my own personal art period and the art teachers convinced me to register for an art class the following quarter. It's funny how something as small as a study hall would re-center my life around art. I began to feel whole again. In addition to the art and photography classes that I began to take, I was also a member of the yearbook staff. I loved having the ability to work with design and photography. It was not long after, that I began to reevaluate my life goals. I began to look at colleges that offered art programs.

I went into college with an open mind, not sure of what field I was going to pursue. My only criterion was that it had to do with art. I enrolled at Oglethorpe University, in Atlanta, GA, where I majored in Studio Art. During my first two years at OU I really was able to immerse myself in the fine arts. I was able to touch upon multiple mediums; I had found exactly what I had been missing in my life. The professors challenged me to recognize the importance of art and the history and philosophies around it. I had an opportunity to travel to New York on a summer seminar with 20 of my classmates and my art professors. The trip was inspiring and encouraged me to start photographing architecture. After taking an architecture class in the spring of that year, I was enamored with the complexity of the city scape and loved photographing the city around me. The seminar's title was "What Counts as ART?," a concept that I found to be so ambiguous and even almost elitist. I felt that no matter how hard I tried to fall into the artist's mindset, I just couldn't understand why it was necessary to question the motives behind an artist's work. Even with my lack of understanding of "what counts as art", I continued to pursue a life of art. After two years in my studio program, I started to reflect on my past and how my experiences with art shaped who I was. At the time I reconnected with my middle school art teacher, Mrs. McBride and began discussing my thoughts of going into teaching. She was so excited that she invited me to work with her classes while I was home on winter break. While shadowing her, I realized that teaching art was really where my heart was.

During my student teaching experience, my teacher was part-time at two different schools; having to divide her time evenly; while trying to provide the best art education she could to two times the number of

students. I learned that the constraints that art teachers are up against are sometimes difficult and strenuous. While my site teacher had several obstacles to overcome, I believe that she is a fabulous teacher that offers so much to her students. Even with all that she is up against, she still manages to provoke the student's inner artist. Angela takes great pride in her work and has set the tone for my future as an art teacher. And like Mrs. McBride she too is also a photographer, which has also inspired my inner photo junkie. 😊

After my experiences working with Angela, I knew that no matter the difficulties I would one day face as an art teacher, I needed to be true to myself and follow my dreams. Over the last few years I have had the ability to discuss my future plans with my Mother. In talking with her she has shared stories about how art has shaped the person that I am today. She said growing up I was very much a perfectionist in what I did, if I didn't like what I had created I would crumple it up and start over. She also said my crayon box was neatly organized and each crayon was not only sharp but was in rainbow order. Apparently, my obsession with keeping my art supplies neat and orderly has not changed much over the years. She also said that she came across a paper that I wrote when I was in second grade, entitled, "What I want to be when I grow up...An Art Teacher." She said it made her smile that I was actually pursuing my childhood dream.

However, over the last four years I have stepped away for art once again, and have found that void in my life. This past January, 2012, I decided that after four years of working with the Dean of Students at an Atlanta catholic school it was time to find my art again and that also meant finishing something I started many years ago. My plan is to return to the classroom while I pursue my masters degree in Art Education. Since my decision of returning to teaching, I have passed my teaching certification test and was accepted into the graduate program at the University of Florida. In addition, to my recent educational successes, I was also hired as a weekend art teacher at a local children's art studio called Purple Hippo. I have enrolled myself in a pottery class and a photography class to reacquaint myself with the art world. It has been less than 5 months and I can actually say that my life is finally back on track.

While I have countless experiences with my own personal art, I am still learning about teaching and what works and what doesn't work in teaching art. I cannot say I am an experienced teacher, but I can say I am learning from others before me. What I have learned is that teaching art is not only about art, it's about providing the opportunities for students to grow and flourish in a safe environment. Also, by making artistic connections between our past and our present it will provide a well-designed curriculum for the students to relate to our world and our culture. Before starting my undergraduate program, I did not realize how important this part of art was, until I began to explore the history of our world to the history of art. Art really plays hand and hand with every major event throughout time. Finding these connections between the arts and where we are today, has made me realize that teaching art is much more than teaching techniques and skills; it's about introducing facts and making art relevant to our everyday life. As a future art teacher, my goal is to provide my students the opportunities that my teachers and professors have offered me - a chance to see their life in abstract colors, and to have the ability to comprehend the value of art and how it has created our world.



