

Self-Empowerment

Summer 2013

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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CREATIVITY AS A PATH

I used to think that creativity was only accomplished by a relatively small population of “recognized” artists, such as famous painters, sculptors, musicians, etc. My dear friend and founding minister of Ecclesia Spiritual Center, Reverend Rhetta Morgan, set me straight. She is truly a powerfully creative woman. Before founding the Ecclesia ministry, Rhetta was an opera singer and voice teacher. Now she has brought together creative arts with her spiritual path for an exciting and inspirational environment that nurtures individuals to grow in consciousness.

In a recent talk, she shared some insights about the “Holy Practice of Creativity.” I want to share some highlights of her inspired talk that I found valuable, and although the written word lacks the power of her vocalization, pauses, repetitions, phrasings, & musicality, I will do my best to capture the main points.

I am most grateful for an expanded understanding of creativity that not only includes some of my own previously established activities, but that

*births the new by way of inspiration!
and mirrors the activity of God!*

Rhetta said, *We are the artist of our lives. No special talent is needed. Everyday art is a creative process that is accessible to everyone. Indigenous people have expressed creativity for centuries as part of everyday life through singing, dancing, making clothing, cooking, chanting, drumming, drawing, and through other art forms.*

We are like babies learning language through repetition of the sounds we hear, and as we gain mastery, with an innate trust that something new is emerging, we embody and express something new through many forms of expression.

The act of creation teaches us to trust the process, to live in flow, to appreciate beauty, to embody one of the great mysteries, to release that which stands between us and our divine potential, and to allow

healing to happen. Sadness, anger, frustration, and fear are often released as a result of engaging in every-day creation.

I have been inspired to add some fresh components to otherwise mundane daily tasks. *Set an intention. Write, sing, bake, dance, compose, draw, paint, sculpt – whatever expresses the something that wants to come forth through you. An alchemy takes place with your willingness and expression. It’s a state of grace. Time stands still. Seeking melts away. The heart engages. You enter transcendence.*

Practice everyday creation



Make your life a work of art

Some examples of the spiritual practice of creativity:

- *Sing your own name over & over
- * Make a collage*
- *Chant names or attributes of God
- * Tend a garden*
- *Draw & allow for a new insight to emerge*
- * Sing or dance while doing chores
- * Decorate*
- *Write a poem or haiku
- * Sing a lullaby or prayer*

To create is to mirror the activity of God. When we create, we glorify divinity and lift humanity. Make your life a work of art!

In this issue

Included in this issue is a report on the positive impact of the arts in one school.

Interesting blog postings by Jim Benest and Brian Sherwin were published in a newsletter from FineArtViews.com, a website that offers a newsletter and various supports for artists and art lovers.

Carol Spitz wrote about an experience of applied mental creativity, something I intend to try.

I highly recommend Ellie Harold’s insightful book, *7 HABITS of Deeply Fulfilled Artists*, which offers ideas and practices in support of anyone who would like to live a life of meeting aesthetic or transformational needs.

Joseph Anthony writes Haiku, in addition to his many other creative expressions.

Wishing you a deep connection with the creative impulse that brings beauty into your life.



Your fellow traveler,
Rev. Jill



To learn more about finding and expressing your creativity with the help of Rev Rhetta Morgan, contact her at 267-262-1079 or RhettaMorgan@yahoo.com
Ecclesia Spiritual Center's Sacred Gathering is on the 3rd Friday evening of each month, 7:30-9:30pm at
The Memorial Church of the Good Shepherd
3820 The Oak Road, Philadelphia, PA 19129



Principal fires security guards to hire art teachers — and transforms elementary school
By Katy Tur, Correspondent, NBC News

Orchard Gardens, a school in Roxbury, Mass., had been plagued by bad test scores and violence – but one principal’s idea to fire the security guards and hire art teachers is helping turn it around.

The community of Roxbury had high hopes for its newest public school back in 2003. There were art studios, a dance room, even a theater equipped with cushy seating. A pilot school for grades K-8, Orchard Gardens was built on grand expectations. But the dream of a school founded in the arts, a school that would give back to the community as it bettered its children, never materialized. Instead, the dance studio was used for storage and the orchestra's instruments were locked up and barely touched.

The school was plagued by violence and disorder from the start, and by 2010 it was ranked in the bottom five of all public schools in the state of Massachusetts. That was when Andrew Bott — the sixth principal in seven years — showed up, and everything started to change. “We got rid of the security guards,” said Bott, who reinvested all the money [hundreds of thousands of dollars] used for security infrastructure into the arts.

In a school notorious for its lack of discipline, where backpacks were prohibited for fear the students would use them to carry weapons, Bott’s bold decision to replace the security guards with art teachers was met with skepticism by those who also questioned why he would choose to lead the troubled school.

“A lot of my colleagues really questioned the decision,” he said. “A lot of people actually would say to me, ‘You realize that Orchard Gardens is a career killer? You know, you don’t want to go to Orchard Gardens.’” But now, three years later, the school is almost unrecognizable. Brightly colored paintings, essays of achievement, and motivational posters line the halls. The dance studio has been resurrected, along with the band room, and an artists’ studio.

The end result? Orchard Gardens has one of the fastest student improvement rates statewide. And the

students — once described as loud and unruly, have found their focus. “We have our occasional, typical adolescent ... problems,” Bott said. “But nothing that is out of the normal for any school.” The school is far from perfect. Test scores are better, but still below average in many areas. Bott says they’re “far from done, but definitely on the right path.” The students, he says, are evidence of that.

Eighth grader Keyvaughn Little said he’s come out of his shell since the school’s turnaround. “I’ve been more open, and I’ve expressed myself more than I would have before the arts came.” His grades have improved, too. Keyvaughn says it’s because of the teachers — and new confidence stemming from art class. “There’s no one particular way of doing something,” he said. “And art helps you like see that. So if you take that with you, and bring it on, it will actually help you see that in academics or anything else, there’s not one specific way you have to do something.” Keyvaughn has now been accepted to the competitive Boston Arts Academy, the city’s only public high school specializing in visual and performing arts. “All of the extra classes and the extra focus on it and the extra attention make you think that, ‘Hey, oh my gosh, I can really have a future in this, I don’t have to go to a regular high school — I can go to art school,’” he said.

Chris Plunkett, who has taught visual arts at Orchard Gardens for the past three years, spoke with NBC's Katy Tur about the success of the arts program that led to an inspiring turnaround for students. Plunkett said the classes help develop trust between the faculty and students. During one particularly memorable project, he asked his eighth graders to write a memoir about a life experience and what they learned from it and then create a self-portrait. “I couldn’t believe how honest and candid they were, and how much I learned about them,” Plunkett said. “I mean it was really, it was one of the most incredible things I’ve seen in eighth graders.” Noting that kids need more than test prep, he added, it may have seemed “a little crazy” to get rid of the security guards to hire art teachers but “I definitely feel it was the right move in the end.”

Art Comfort Zone

by Jim Benest, painter and photographer

I heard an interesting comment from one of our customers a couple of months ago that I would like to share with you. I had just invited her to an upcoming artist reception and she replied that she was concerned that she would feel uncomfortable, because she didn’t think that she knew enough about art to attend an artist reception.

This got me to wondering how many others pass through our gallery feeling the same way? Or worse, how many don't come in at all because they fear that they will feel out of place? Her remark reminded me of the individual that puts off joining the local health club until after they get in better shape. I asked her if she had seen the movie *What about Bob*. When she said she had, I reminded her about Bill Murray's character and the need to just take baby steps at first.

To enjoy art, is it really that necessary to have taken art history courses, to have visited some of the great European museums or to be or have been involved in creating something yourself? While these experiences may give you a head start, they certainly are not required to enjoy what someone else has created today.

And don't stress over not knowing how it was created. Do you know how your house was built, how your car was assembled or how your clothes were made? And you certainly don't want to know what's in that double dip Gelato now, do you? All that really matters is that you were drawn to it, you liked it and it made you feel good.

So, that's all I'm saying: take a few art baby steps, ask a few questions, and when it makes you feel good, take some home. Art has no cholesterol and is 100% fat and calorie free, so you can put off joining that health club a little longer and feel good about buying some art, for yourself, today! (Oh and by the way, the customer that I mentioned earlier, she decided that she would like to attend the artist reception after all.)

Thanks for stopping by and have a creative day.....
Jim

Visit Jim Benest Fine Art at www.JimBenest.com to see his artwork, blog, events and more, or email him at info@jimbenest.com



"Breakthrough" by Jim Benest

WHAT ACTOR GEORGE CLOONEY CAN TEACH US ABOUT FRIENDSHIP, CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM, AND ART

by Brian Sherwin

Receiving constructive criticism is one on-going goal that many artists share in common. After all, another set of eyes can be a great way to explore your strengths and weaknesses as an artist. It is a worthy pursuit IF the criticism is honest. In the search for honest constructive criticism it may make sense to ask close friends for their opinion about your art. Unfortunately, constructive criticism offered by close friends can be extremely deceptive. Like it or not – close friends may be dishonest rather than risk hurting your feelings. Need proof? You don't have to look any further than Hollywood.

A prank orchestrated by actor George Clooney serves as a perfect example of why legitimate constructive criticism can be hard for an artist to find among close friends. The prank was simple enough – it involved a painting that Clooney had found in a dumpster (which he has described as "horrible"), fellow pranksters within Clooney's circle of friends and a target for the prank... George Clooney's best friend, actor Richard Kind.

George Clooney convinced Richard Kind that he had been studying art seriously between films. Kind – doing what best friends do – supported Clooney's newfound interest in painting. Clooney would chat with Kind about his studio experiences – conditioning the idea that he was passionate about painting. It was all a 'build up' for the prank.

Months later Kind received an unexpected birthday surprise – an 'original' painting by George Clooney. Kind praised Clooney's skill as a painter before hanging the painting on a wall in his home – where it remained for years. Kind had no clue that he had fallen for one of George Clooney's notorious pranks – Clooney knew that Kind secretly hated the painting... he also knew that his friend did not want to hurt his feelings. Point blank – Clooney knew that Kind would be overly kind to 'his' painting.

For several years, mutual friends – who were in on George Clooney's not-so-kind art prank – would comment about the beauty of the painting during parties at Richard Kind's home. Their false support of Clooney's artistic achievement spurred Kind to further praise the painting and the skill of its creator. Clooney accepted Kind's positive support with a smile – knowing that Kind would have tossed the painting out in any other scenario. Clooney's art prank was in full motion.

Eventually Clooney revealed to Kind that it had all

been a prank – one that was years in the making. My guess is that Kind was more than a tad embarrassed for having praised a painting he loathed simply because he had thought his best friend painted it. He had been dishonest in his critique of the painting due to his friendship with the 'artist'– treating it as if it were a masterpiece when in reality the dumpster was 'calling'.

Sharing art enriches lives– but in this case the painting had been a burden (or should I say eyesore?) for Richard Kind... all because he did not want to hurt the feelings of his best friend. As for the fate of the anonymous painting – it probably faced the fate that George Clooney had saved it from years earlier. In other words, my guess is that it is doing a not-so-good job of enriching the soil in some far-off landfill.

There are two lessons to learn from George Clooney's art prank:

1.) Expect to be pranked if you are friends with actor George Clooney – even if you happen to be his best friend.

2.) Don't expect an honest opinion about your art from close friends – there is a HUGE chance that you will receive mock praise. I'm certain that we have all observed examples of that. True, you may receive brutal honesty depending on which friend you ask. That said, friends – in general – will sometimes offer white lies (and put up with a 'horrible' painting) out of fear of upsetting you. That is a fact of life.

The fact that close friends may not be 100% honest about your artwork may be hard to accept (unless you are pranking them). That said, you have to remember to think about it in terms of psychology. In general people are wary of offering constructive criticism – no matter the context – due to concern over how it will be received. Where art is concerned that caution is 10 fold due to the fact that artists tend to be very passionate about their art. We know that passion can fuel a world of emotions – if passion can trigger a world war... it can easily end a friendship.

With the above in mind, it makes sense that Richard Kind was overly kind to the painting he thought his friend had painted. After all, people – in general – tend to be thin-skinned when it comes to receiving criticism... even when the critique is requested. Criticism – even if intended to be constructive – can spur an angry response. Point blank – friendships can be damaged depending on how the criticism is expressed and received. Your friends know this when you ask them to critique your artwork. I'm willing to bet that most of your friends don't want to be in that situation in the first place. Remember that the next time you ask a friend to critique your art.

In closing, constructive criticism for artists can be hard to find depending on where they look. Receiving useful constructive criticism about your artwork may be more difficult to obtain than you realize – close friends are probably not the go-to people for that kind of critical exchange. Even a fellow artist may be kind to your artwork out of concern for your feelings if he or she happens to be a close friend. Thus, you may want to avoid putting your friends on the spot (unless your goal is to pull a Clooney inspired art prank). What should you do to receive valuable constructive criticism about your art? That topic is for another day...

Take care, Stay true,
Brian Sherwin

Brian Sherwin, a regular contributing writer for FineArtViews, is an art critic, blogger, curator, artist and writer based near Chicago, Illinois.
www.BrianSherwin-artcritic.blogspot.com

Love

by Carol W. Spitz

The word love carries the highest vibration of any word in any language. After reading a chapter on love by Charles Fillmore, I decided to practice the suggested exercise, which entailed reading the same paragraph every day for three months.

I already knew that when we have a negative thought, the best way to get rid of it is to replace it with a positive one. The universe abhors a vacuum. I found picturing the word “love” going around in a circle in my mind, easy enough to do. Following is a personal demonstration of this principle:

I awoke one Sunday morning determined to accomplish as many things as possible on my “to do list”. One of the things on the list was purchasing replacement filters for my water pitcher. One of the local chains had the filters on sale at an exceptional price. Since I'm often on foot, I prefer using the most direct route possible.

After attending my morning worship service, I set out to “run my errands”. The only branch of this chain directly on my route between the meeting house and home, was one of the smaller ones. Only intending to ask if they carried the filters, anticipating a negative response the branch is so small, and being in “rush mode”, I dashed into the store only to find the clerk busily talking to her friend on the phone while an elderly patron stood in front of her, waiting for help. As I started to become extremely agitated, I called to mind

the rune I had chosen that morning asking for direction in starting my day. My rune for that day was “patience”. I decided to practice patience by picturing the word “love” circling around in my mind. After a few minutes of doing this, the clerk seemed to emerge from a trance, and addressing the person she was speaking with, said, “Oh, I have a customer.” The customer had been standing in front of her before I even entered the store. The clerk then proceeded to walk with the woman and help her find what she was looking for. As the clerk stepped away to do this, the *one* remaining box of filters was revealed on the shelf behind where she had been standing.

Self-Empowerment reader Carol W. Spitz’s creative use of visualizing a positive mental image is a simple yet powerful application of living artistry. Take a mundane experience of waiting for a clerk’s help and paint a new experience for yourself. I am grateful for the submission of this account by her friend Elliot.

Rev Jill’s book recommendation:

7 HABITS of Deeply Fulfilled Artists: Your Aesthetic Needs & How to Meet Them by Ellie Harold

Artist Ellie Harold addresses tough issues facing artists in all media with practical, experience-based wisdom.

Are you more frustrated than fulfilled in your art-making? Does your creative expression seem blocked? Do you only make art in workshops or classes? Do you want to be something more than a student or dabbler? Does lack of time, space, or money prevent you from doing your art?

7 Habits of Deeply Fulfilled Artists will help you:

- ~ Discover why you need to make art
- ~ Increase your willingness to do your art
- ~ Create intentions and set goals for art projects
- ~ Bring greater awareness, direction, and value to your art life
- ~ Experience whole-hearted satisfaction as an artist

Ellie Harold is a working artist and author based in Frankfort, Michigan and Vieques, Puerto Rico. She started painting when she was 52, after careers as an R.N. and as an ordained Unity minister. In addition to her art practice, she mentors artists in all media to fulfill their aesthetic needs.

The book can be purchased from Amazon.com or through www.EllieHarold.com.

Dear Friends,

Thank you for a successful Spring Fundraiser. Your generous response to our annual Spring Fundraiser is much appreciated!



For those of you who have not responded yet – while it’s never too late to send in a donation of any size, please know that your part in our readership is appreciated whether you make a donation or not.

I appreciate you!

Rev Jill

Haiku from the Heart

by Joseph Anthony

You are a blessing ~
to the world and to the Light ~
shine sunflower, shine



See more of Joseph Anthony’s poetic creativity at blog.thewonderchildblog.com

An Invitation for you to share

I am planning a future issue on the topic of aging. If you have thoughts or experiences you would like to share, please mail or email drafts for consideration to Jilleroni@juno.com
Thank you!

Daily Word

*I use the power of imagination
to create a new world of discovery and joy.*

With each brush stroke on a canvas, artists create beauty and form. Through their imagination and skill, they capture what they see in the world and in their mind's eye. The depictions in their art stir the soul.

My God-given power of imagination opens a world of possibilities to me. By using my imagination, I can turn what seems impossible into the possible. By being resourceful or creative, at work or at home, I can create what I imagine. My imagination allows me to soar beyond appearances, visualize what is possible and bring it into form.

My enthusiasm expands as I apply my imagination. I use my creative power daily to explore new dimensions of living.

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Editor: Michael P. Tunney
Agape Interfaith Ministries, 1100 Friendship Street,
Philadelphia, PA 19111 Phone: (215) 742-0552
Email: Jilleroni@juno.com Web: www.AgapeInterfaith.org

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Agape Interfaith Ministries
1100 Friendship Street
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Love

Sent to you with
Love & Blessings

The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.