

Self-Empowerment

Summer 2016

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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Artistic Expressions

Writing this newsletter and various pastoral speaking engagements have been the focus of my most prolific creative expressions of thoughts and feelings. Now that I am retired from fulltime employment and recovering greater health, I am willing to stretch and give more attention to other artistic expressions. I expect to devote more time to playing my electric piano, singing/chanting, photography, knitting or crocheting, graphic artwork, as well as working on the book that I have begun to write.

I believe that the time I spend in creative endeavors has many benefits for my body, mind, and spirit, and may also extend blessings to others. Creative practices in which I have invested my time and energy have nurtured my character, self-knowledge, and peace of mind.

Some 30 years ago I attended a workshop in which the facilitator had each of us draw a picture of our heart's desire. I created a rather unsophisticated drawing of a building that was to be a healing center, surrounded by trees and flowers. I have kept that drawing all these many years and feel joy whenever I look at it. I know that it was not a physical building that I was seeking to establish, but rather a symbol of the ministry to which I have devoted myself. The healing work that I do is focused on the mind and spirit, which ultimately affects the physical body's well-being, too. That simple child-like drawing that I created embodies my heart-song. It is my touchstone, a movement of inspired creativity that points to my life purpose.

If anyone had spoken a negative judgment of the quality of my drawing, might it have affected the joy I feel when I look at it? When I was in school I received grades and criticism of my drawings, but the safe space of a workshop allowed an uninhibited expression to be created that is quite meaningful for me. I think that we need to have opportunities to access and express our

creativity without criticism or judgment to let that inner spark have its say without negative interference.

There are plenty of times when we are in a learning mode, which would be nurtured by a teacher or mentor's guidance and constructive criticism. Then there are times that we need to simply be supported in expressing whatever is coming through at the moment, without any comparing, judging, or evaluation to limit the flow.

I can remember workshops that I have led that, in hindsight, could have been led with greater skill. There were sermons that I delivered that could have been better; and, of course, there were other artistic endeavors of mine that were less than perfect, but they were all part of a process that was evolving. We need to be kind to ourselves and others as we learn to express ourselves more fully and with greater skill. We need to forgive ourselves and others for the imperfections that may be an important component at the time, or just a passing phase as we learn and grow.

In the Summer 2013 issue of *Self-Empowerment* I wrote about creativity as a spiritual path. I highlighted Ellie Harold's book *7 HABITS of Deeply Fulfilled Artists: Your Aesthetic Needs & How to Meet Them* and I shared some blog postings from FineArtViews.com, a website that offers a newsletter and various supports for artists and art lovers. These and other resources encourage us to make the time to nurture our creative expressions in a safe environment to fulfill a need that feeds our soul.

In this issue

In this issue I want to remind us that art and life are both informed by inspiration as a precious creative impulse from within. In that spirit I have included three blog postings published in the FineArtViews.com newsletter to inspire and motivate.

As always, I wish you a deep connection with the creative impulse that brings joy, love, and beauty into your life experience. Blessings Always!

Your fellow traveler, *Rev. Jill*



The Art of Juggling

by Donald Fox

I've been practicing on and off to learn how to juggle. I began with three rolled up socks held into balls by rubber bands. Later I bought some inexpensive fabric covered balls made specifically for juggling. It is not easy, for me at least, to keep three balls going for more than a few seconds. I understand that it is about reflex, rhythm, and timing, and that it takes a controlled touch not to throw one ball up too strongly while trying to catch another on its way down. Left and right hand coordination are absolutely necessary along with synchronized movement since each hand is doing something different, not too unlike a piano player sounding different notes and rhythms with the left and right hands simultaneously. Learning to juggle is a fun and interesting challenge.

Many of us speak about juggling many tasks in our daily lives, meaning that we're trying to complete different jobs more or less simultaneously. This is a bit like multi-tasking except the jobs can be separated by time and place as opposed to what an office administrator might do while sitting in front of a computer, talking on the phone, and arranging documents or something else. Many of us juggle a job, education, domestic chores, official obligations, commutes, and community responsibilities. Though the challenges vary according to individual, age group, and overall responsibilities each of us has, nearly all of us do some juggling on a regular basis.

Artists, of course, are no different from anyone else, but artists might possibly see the juggling tasks in their lives, their creative work, and their businesses a bit differently from others. Artists do have some understanding about rhythm, and those artists who have to develop physical dexterity in order to do their work also understand about coordination, timing, and subtlety of touch. Skillful artists will have mastered these things as they have developed expressive techniques over time. They understand the importance of practice, dedicated work time, and dedicated research time when necessary. How they manage the practice of their art with family and other duties will certainly vary.

History gives us many stories about those artists who sacrificed all for their art, and many of these are considered eccentric, egomaniacal, or socially inept. Caravaggio and Picasso are two that immediately come

to mind. Others, though, like the poet Wendell Barry said that living life and being in relationship with family, friends, and animals take priority over his art, for it is from these relationships that his art grows. Perhaps we could glibly say that art is a difficult path no matter how one approaches it, but we could just as easily say the same for life itself.

Ultimately it is a choice, or better, a series of choices, and we learn to juggle as much as we are capable in both art and life.

Donald Fox is a painter, writer, and educator, living in Houston. His Art Blog may be found at www.DonaldFoxFineArt.com/blog/

Painting by Donald Fox



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Donald Fox

Lessons From the Gym: Poor Old Michael Finnegan

by Luann Udell

Every day, you have to start at the beginning again.
Every day.

In my last article, I explained why advice and information that's useful one year, might be useless the next. And why it may work for some folks, and not for others.

Today is another explanation, which involves insight into our very human nature, on why it can seem so hard to make progress towards our goals.

Consider the children's song, Michael Finnegan, with its refrain, "Poor old Michael Finnegan, begin again." Yep, that endless song that drives parents mad, that never quits until you refuse to sing it again.

This idea hit me at the gym yesterday. A new client had been given a set of therapeutic, strengthening exercises to do over the weekend. When he showed up Monday morning, the PT asked him if he'd done the exercises three times a day. There was that painful hesitation, and then the moment of truth-he admitted he hadn't. (Believe me, I overhear that same conversation with every other client, every day I'm there!)

Consider me, who should know better (because I eavesdrop.) I have a regular workout program, tailored to my needs. I've also invested in a few tools and equipment (the inexpensive ones!) to continue the exercises at home.

I've had one for a month, and just opened the package last week. (And I STILL haven't used it!) I've learned I have to go to the gym. If I don't, I'll exercise faithfully for a few days, maybe even a week. And then I forget. (Or the dogs and cats try to help, which also gets me nowhere.)

We all know what we have to do. We just don't want to.

Many people imagine me to be a very wise person, someone who's got it all figured out. I'm not. I find insight and affirmation in writing about any given situation I'm going through. When I write, I find perspective, perception, insight, and clarity. I always

think, and hope, the wisdom will hang around for awhile.

But every time life throws me another curve ball, I'm back to my journal, or my computer, or leaning on friends to walk me through it. (A rather lackluster metaphor, I suppose, since ideally, we want to hit a curve ball out of the ballpark!)

So it could feel like I'm learning the same life lessons, over and over (and over) again. Sounds depressing, doesn't it?

But here's the beauty in it:
Instead of "Every day, we *have* to start over, and begin again."

Say, "Every day, we *GET* to start over, and begin again."

Yes, creating a set of good habits and practices works for us in the long run. If you want to create more artwork, then making a habit of being in your studio, of painting/making/creating daily, is a wonderful habit. (We all know that.)

If you want to improve your technique, then daily practice, and finding great teachers is paramount.

If you want more exposure for your art, then regularly approaching galleries, researching and applying to good shows, learning how to talk about your art, mastering social media, etc. is key.

But if we become trapped by habit and assumptions - if we assume we know it all, if we believe we have it all under control, if we are content that we have it made -

Then if we stumble, it can feel like failure to begin again. When life changes, all our best-laid plans "gang aft agley" [go awry], as poet Robert Burns put it. And of course, most people at the physical therapy place are there because, well, things went agley.

Again. The beauty in that?

We CAN begin again.

Every day, we can find an opportunity to advance our artistic goals.

Every day, we will overlook an opportunity, too.

And every day, we can take stock, examine our assumptions, be forgiving of our set-backs and our 'bad' habits-and begin again. This practice of 'begin again' is where we get our greatest, deepest power.

AA is not about never drinking again. It's recognizing that every day, we start at the beginning, and do what we can do-today. And tomorrow, we will start all over again.

Meditation is not really about achieving Nirvana, about doing it perfectly, and never having to meditate again.

The actual practice of meditation is where we gain the benefit-learning to recognize buzzy-brain thoughts, learning to be quiet, learning to see our true selves. And our true self is not that frenzied voice that's buzzing and criticizing, and fretting and worrying.

Our true self is the one who is listening. And every time we forgive ourselves, to go easy on ourselves, every time we simply try again, we gain something.

So when creative folks tell me they're scared that they're 'doing it wrong', when they worry that they've blown it, they've lost it, I'm the perfect person to reassure them.

I'm here today, making my art, writing this piece for you - because I'm always beginning again.

Luann Udell is a regular contributing author for FineArtViews. Luann also writes a column ("Craft Matters") for The Crafts Report magazine (a monthly business resource for the crafts professional) where she explores the funnier side of her life in craft. She's blogged since 2002 about the business side and the spiritual inside of art. She says, "I share my experiences so you won't have to make ALL the same mistakes I did...." See luannudell.com for her artwork.

Creations
by
Luanne
Udell



Fish Tale

by Mark Brockman

A friend sits on the counter stool next to you, as you drink your coffee waiting for the waitress to bring you your breakfast. You greet each other, each asking how you are doing. Then you look at him remembering he had gone fishing the other day and you ask him how it went. 'Did you catch any fish?'

'Well,' he says, 'I got there early, it started slow. Didn't even get a bite till mid morning, it fought the hook some but a few minutes later I reeled it in.'

'How big?' I ask.

'About this big,' he holds his hands about six inches apart.

I got the facts of his story but, well, it wasn't very interesting.

So let's rewind and I ask again if he caught any fish.

'Well I'll tell you what. I got there before sunup. What a beautiful sunrise as I was getting my fishing gear together and then walked over to the edge of the lake. It was one of those mornings that it was just good to be alive. You know what I mean? My first cast was perfect, never have I ever done such a beautiful cast. The sound of the lure hitting the water was as soft as a light whisper. It was pure music. But it kinda went down hill from there. Not a bite, not even a nibble. Stood there for hours swatting mosquitoes, cast after cast, nothing. I was getting a bit frustrated. Then, oh I dunno, about 11:00 I got a nibble, though it kinda felt like I might have just been snagged on the bottom, I wasn't sure. So I carefully reeled in the line just a bit, then it struck. I thought for sure it was a big one. It pulled, I pulled, it pulled, I pulled, slowly reeling it in so as not to lose it. I got it to the surface and you'd a thought a geyser suddenly appeared. The water was frothing. Took a long time to reel that sucker in, I thought my arms would fall off, but I got it.'

My eyes wide with excitement I ask, 'How big?'

'About this big,' he holds his hands about six inches apart. I shake my head, both of us laughing with the fish tale.

OK, so the fish was still small, the facts a bit, well no, a lot exaggerated, but which story was the better?

I think of my paintings as telling a story. Granted it is a story where the viewer can often come up with their own plot, climax and ending, but a story none the less. I also feel a good story needs some exaggeration, that's what makes it interesting. It can be blatant or subtle, up to the artist. A good book, movie or play, even music in its own way needs some exaggeration to be good. That exaggeration does not have to be bright colors or overly

strong values, it can be subtle, quiet, understated. Sometimes if you want to be heard it is better to whisper, other times one needs to speak with great passion, not so much to be heard but to be understood.

So how do you tell a good story? It's not just a matter of how you handle the paint or brush, not whether you use strong color or soft color. It's not important if it's one medium or the other, it's about how you feel about your subject and how you feel about your painting. Many artists are introverts, introspective, that's why we paint, but I don't want my painting to be introverted. I want it to speak for me. To say things through paint that may be hard to explain with words. I use my imagination, my memories and my feelings, my moods to help create that story. It's not something that just happens, I had to work at it, to open myself up to it, to be willing to take chances with my medium and techniques but also my emotions. It also takes understanding, understanding the subject, how it feels, smells, what voice it might have and what it says.

You can't tell a good story if you paint in a hesitant guarded way. You have to be willing to put yourself out there through your medium. Sometimes your story will fall flat, you'll mess up the punchline, and just maybe there was no story where you thought there was one. But you got to try. Painting is like fishing you know. Sometimes you catch a big one, sometimes you don't. Big or small though why not make it an interesting fish tale.

Mark R. Brockman is a contemporary pastel landscape painter and an amateur musician. You can find his artwork, blog, events, and opportunity to subscribe to his email newsletter at www.markbrockman.com

Mark Brockman's art



Thoughts for your reflection

Art invites us to become explorers and excavators of our vast internal landscapes, discovering new terrain and digging deep into the past to unearth forgotten experiences and emotion.

— **Jaeda DeWalt**

The story comes, and it is pure story. That's all I set out to write. But I don't believe that we can write any kind of story without including, whether we intend to or not, our response to the world around us.

— **Madeleine L'Engle**

Inspiration is the key to our evolution.

— **Eddie Peña**

I am an artist. Any artist knows that their creations, their pieces must express an array of human emotion and experience. From the juvenile and innocent, to the erotic and the dangerous, and everything in between. Because Life is all of these things and more. It is the artist's divine purpose to reflect what Experience has shown them and others. What truly sets us apart from each other is whether or not we truly know ourselves enough to reflect objectively; but, through our own unique 'voice'.

— **Solange nicole**

Creativity is always a leap of faith. Writers sit down in front of empty pages. Painters stare before blank easels. Thespians rehearse looking toward empty stages. Creativity is experimental by nature.

— **Brian D'Ambrosio, From Haikus to Hatmaking: One Year in the Life of Western Montana**

Everyone has a story someone in the world needs to hear.

— **Tami Belt**



Daily Word

My life is enlivened and enriched by a fresh perspective.

In the movie Dead Poets Society, the teacher instructs his class to stand on their desks for a new perspective on life. Their surprise is apparent as they step up and take a fresh look at their familiar surroundings from this new vantage point. Similarly, a simple shift in my daily routine can open up a whole new perspective.

Resolutions to problems and innovative ideas may come by changing my route to work or the order of my morning ritual. A small conscious change I make today may open a new window in my mind. I look at the same situation or environment with new eyes.

With renewed perspective, I see and feel more expansively. My life is enlivened and enriched by a fresh perspective.

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