

## Autobiography

Memories are not always accurate. They often go skipping by in blocks of unrelated thought.

Through the glass, I remember seeing the kids in my kindergarten class playing on the jungle gym two stories below. Previously, the teacher had asked me where the torso was in my new drawing of a person. Drawing a circle with a face in it, two stick arms and two stick legs protruded from the proud roundness. I was stunned by the question. I did not know the word "torso." When "torso" was explained, this was the first time I was conscious of pen and proportions. Asking to stay inside and continue drawing, my teacher obliged. I wanted to draw the world, and was content.

I was failing out of the Architecture Program at Georgia Tech. A professor with a strange British English and wild, white, glowing, hair asked me what my favorite building was. I puffed up and said, "Ah, the San Sophia in Constantinople." He lifted up the dark, gold-rimmed glasses suspended around his neck, to meet his eyes. He focused and lowered his head directly at me. He gave me complete attention and asked very succinctly: "How do you know that's your favorite building?" I had to think. The question caught me off guard. I told him I had seen a picture in the Art Through the Ages History book. He said, "Oh," despairingly. He paused, and asked if I had "experienced" the Hagia Sophia. I answered, "No." not even knowing where Constantinople was. He took off his spectacles. I thought I understood. I said I would get there one day and later quit college, saving money. I was fortunate. In a yearlong dream, I got to backpack through Western Europe and I certainly went to Istanbul..

Surprisingly, a hike alone up the hill through the rising, morning mist to confront Le Corbusier's Cathedral in Ronchamp, was the best by far. I had hitched to Ronchamp, and shared the boat like, wave like, "smurf hut" of a cathedral with the priest like janitor. The light flooded through modernity, and I was in an intimate undulating womb, crossed up between Le Corbsier's "spirituality" and my own.

Broke, I returned home from Europe. I went to a guidance counselor and showed him my tattered journal. It was full of sketches: scratches of emotions, abstracts, detailed Swiss mountains, the David, the Campo of

Sienna, the Jewish Memorial at Dachau, a collage of Notre Dame in Paris, a beach on Corfu, a drawing study on the work of Gaudi, muttering from Morocco, and a plethora of writing styles. I was learning to create my own identity in marks and letters. The counselor told me of his good friend who painted the simple but crude archetypal Lion painting in his office. He asked if I wanted to be a professional artist. I could not answer. He recommended I go back to Europe. I saved up and went for another year.

There was angst growing up in my conservative Christian, fundamentalism. So, I went to live and study in community at the Swiss L'Abri. I found my Hagia Sophia. There I read about the creativity found in the Bible, heard a lecture on Cuckoo birds in symphonic music, heard a Cuckoo bird while working in the garden, and was read aloud the story of Leaf by Niggle, written by J. R. R. Tolkien. These events crystallized into a belief that we as humans were made in part, to be creative. There is a creative "mandate" given by the Creator of the universe. I built an easel of sticks and cut wood, which I still have and suppose is now considered an antique. Back then, I set out for the European road. I knew I would paint for life.

I hitchhiked overnight to Italy, easel in hand, and rented a country house in Monzambano. I started painting with a little Caran D'ache gouache paint set and no guidance. The local Italians showed incredible passion for art and life. Their eyes told stories and their footsteps led to art treasures. They nurtured me and soon were debating over my paintings. They encouraged me 'out of the studio' and to paint live at a Halloween Party. We put together a very successful show for the small town. I later painted in Milan's Square, the Verona Piazza, Pavia's monastery, the streets of Monzambano, in a snow storm in Switzerland, in the bars of Grindelwald, live at a Swiss wedding, and on the streets in Dijon. I am forever indebted to the people of Monzambano.

I returned to Georgia Tech in architecture and did better academically. After a year, I saw my Swiss L'Abri mentor, by remote providence, while buying a hamburger at the Varsity in Atlanta. He was taking some Scandinavian friends on a tour of Southern dining establishments. I decided to paint 'live' one of Atlanta's historical diners. The Georgia Tech Alumni Center saw the painting and soon secured a sponsor for me to paint many such pieces. I now have had a life long friend, from the GT Alumni Center.

In the process I gave a token geode to my new sponsor with the understanding that it would be returned when I had met the contractual obligations. The geode was palm size, half cut from a sphere, and had an open crystal blue interior. My father had given it to me for one of my birthdays, before I thought “rocks” were cool. Incredibly, it perfectly matched a geode of the same kind that the sponsor’s mother hands given her. She took the geodes glowing in each hand and slowly put them together, forming a spherical globe. My hair went static. We exchanged geodes. To this day she has mine, and I have hers.

Near the end of the restaurant series, I climbed a former tower on Stone Mountain outside of Atlanta, thinking a helicopter was going to pick me up and take me to my own wedding. There was no helicopter, there was no wedding, and there was even no real girlfriend. However, there were guns pointed at me. I had experienced my first manic episode and was briefly incarcerated hellishly for what became a misdemeanor. A compromised understanding of reality during the incarceration radically altered my life. After volunteering to enter the mental hospital, I was diagnosed Bipolar.

I poured all my energy into painting. The incarceration period may be a well of life-long enchantment as the plane crash was for Joseph Beuys. I returned to college, this time at The Atlanta College of Art, receiving a top scholarship. Though I did very well, I did not finish, as, I needed to work through some early mental handicap issues. During these years I was greatly appreciative of the understanding from my first painting professor who ran Barker’s Creek Mill at the Hambidge Center.

Mrs. Rosalynn Carter, a strong advocate for the mentality ill, has long supported the initiative called Project Interconnections, now called 3 Keys. Project Interconnections offered me affordable housing, and encouragement to paint through medicine fog. They also gave a chance to sell work at their fundraiser starting in 2000. Project Interconnections helped me transition back to “normal” society.

Through much of my late teens and early twenties, I studied Carl Jung and attended Journey Into Wholeness conferences. This kept a hopeful inward focus, while challenging my inner core. I channeled and expressed the struggles and ease of creative expression with mandalas. Since being a kid, drawing circles has been more than passion. It has been kind of an

addiction. According to Jung, mandalas are the language of the interior in the form of circles and their representative archetypes.

In 2009, I transferred my credits to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's painting and drawing program. It was an intimate little jewel. I am immensely proud of my BFA from UTC and am profoundly grateful for the support from, my counselors, the UTC community, Tennessee's Vocational Rehabilitation Program, and of course friends and family. Through the grace of God and perseverance, I earned not just a BFA, but was rewarded with a dramatic improvement in the quality of my life. The social and intellectual environment at UTC combined for an authentic, nurturing, and sustaining container: to dialogue, paint, and perform.

In 2012, I was honored with the privilege of giving a short speech and introducing Mrs. Rosalynn Carter at one of Project Interconnection's annual fundraisers. The speech went real well. In 2014 part of my story was used in an Project Interconnection's video.

2016 was a huge year. I lost most of my older inventory in a huge warehouse fire; probably 100 paintings were destroyed. I had my largest solo show in Chattanooga concurrent with the fire. Lastly, though I lost a bunch of art; the year was overall good and my life took a dramatic turn to new situations and I got MARRIED.