

the greatest success. If teaching is an expression of our previous learning experiences then it must also be an expression of our experiences in an even broader sense. It is not just reflective of how we were taught, but also of how we have lived our lives—experiences which are inevitably unique to each of us. In my case, I was not an art educator first, but rather a person with particular interests, strengths, weaknesses, and experiences, living in a particular time and place. I use these various aspects of who I am every day in the classroom. As part of this process, I have gained a certain reflective distance on how those experiences influence what I have done and what I continue to do and value as a teacher. This same process of critical reflection has become for me an important tool in my efforts to move students beyond the safety and comfort of their previous learning experiences and into a position where they may also see how their own lived experiences affect their pedagogy. This is not an easy task for any of us, but one that I feel helps teaching become an organic and therefore integral, part of our lives.

I have spent the last few minutes painting a somewhat minimalist image of my path from the four year old archeologist to the forty-five year old art educator. It's a good thing my mother and father aren't here, because they would have told stories that would make your hair curl—some of which would even be true! The fact of the matter is that the process of looking back and reflecting on how particular events, people and places have led me to this point in my life has been an extremely difficult, yet rewarding, task. What do I say? What do I not say? As I tell my students, history is a process of interpretation and that process is not made easier when it is your own history that you are trying to uncover. Paradoxically, this award—and therefore this story

of my life—comes at a particularly interesting time in my career. I am at a moment of transition. I will soon complete my second term as chair of the Department of Art at the University of Maine. After six years of putting my position as department chair ahead of almost everything else in my life, I am looking forward with a great deal of relief to spending more time on my research and artistic pursuits, and to returning to the classroom on a full-time basis—my students are terrified. At the same time, I look forward with anticipation to finding myself once again and to remembering who I am when my colleagues no longer call me "Boss."

The historical narrative I have just related to you presents a particular portrait—and a pretty plausible one it seems to me from this transitional moment in my life. But the shape of our life's narrative depends not just on what happened in the past; it also depends on what happens next. How will I tell the story of my life in another 20 years? How will that story connect with this one? I am looking forward to hearing that version with great curiosity.

In the meantime, let me conclude by once again thanking you for this award. It represents the spirit of Mary Rouse and the contributions of all those who have received it before me. I am truly honored. Thank you!

*Kathy Connors  
Kathy Connors Award  
Acceptance Speech  
1999*

Hello to all of my friends who are assembled to share meaning. First, I must say that long ago Amy Brooks Snider and I had a conversation in which she said she thought that there should be some sort of a way to recognize art educators other than the by the criteria delineated in

the McFee and Rouse awards. Is it overstating the obvious that I am glad that her wish has come true?!

Secondly, I think it is important to note that Dave Burton told me that he makes a point of coming to the Women's Caucus Award Ceremony because he finds it to be a space and time in the national convention where he hears human stories that have universal meaning. I agree with him. And so, I will share some of my stories that have meaning to me with the hope they bring smiles of recognition to your whole being, through the voice and spirit of my friend Christy Park.

The first eight years of my life were happily spent in Erie, Pennsylvania. When I let my mind wander back to my childhood there, I find very vivid memories as well as a prolog to a career in teaching and the arts. One of my most vivid memories is of me sitting on the floor of the front porch (front porches back then were very important gathering places) of one of my friends or my own front porch with our favorite coloring books spread out in front of us. I would color away and augment the pictures in the book with my own backgrounds. My friends would see what I was doing and ask how to "color that good." I would give them instructions in crayon technique and add that it was even more fun to do your own drawings in the background. I remember them being especially impressed when I showed them how to solve the problem of coloring the Lone Ranger's white horse. They had thought that leaving it uncolored was the only solution until they saw what I had done in my coloring book. I had used light blues and yellows to make it look "real." Now, remember there was no color TV back then, so, I can't tell you how I thought of coloring Silver in that way. Perhaps it was from observing shorthaired white dogs? And then there was the ragman's horse that was part

white. No matter how I had come upon my shading and color techniques, when I taught them to my friends, I did it with all of the confidence of a master.

When I was about five years old, I was given a lesson in tolerance. After a long day at play with my friends that had ended with a very heated verbal battle over whose religion was best, who was going to heaven, who had the best church, temple, synagogue, whose parents were the smartest, and who would be going to heaven or hell, I needed to talk with my mother. You see, I couldn't enter into the argument because my mother was Lutheran and my father was Catholic. He had been "kicked out" of his church for marrying her. It was my "luck" to have no religious affiliation. Whenever any friend invited me to go to church or temple with them, if my mother didn't need me to help with my baby brother or help grandma, I would go. Churches and temples all looked basically the same to me. Some were just fancier, lighter, darker, or had carpeting or cushions, etc. Some even served grape juice and crackers! Some had great art supplies to make pictures about God. And some had old ladies teaching you how to sing songs about God and Christian soldiers.

So, whenever my friends argued with one another about religion, I mostly kept quiet. (Hard to believe, huh. . . but, as a child I hardly talked.) My mother used to worry that I would be too withdrawn all my life; that I was too shy. (When I was a teenager, she revealed that to me.) When, in actuality, I wasn't shy at all. I was just always fascinated by what I was looking at and hearing. I loved to hear other people tell stories and I loved to study plants and bugs (my grandmother taught me a lot about those things. . . plants, bugs and stories—all models for an artist/writer/teacher).

A consequence of the argument my friends had that day

was I found myself quietly leaning on my mother's knee as she sat on the front porch peeling potatoes—must have been the summer before I started school. I just leaned as she peeled and enjoyed the warm evening air. Eventually she asked if I was hungry. I wasn't. Then she gently probed, "Is something bothering you?" I said, "uhhuh." She waited. Then I asked, "Are you going to hell?" and she asked why I should worry about such a thing. And I told her about the argument my friends had had. She smiled, which I thought was a curious thing to do in such a serious conversation. Then she said—now this is from a staunch Lutheran woman who made no bones about having many questions concerning the Catholic church and who was married to an alcoholic Irishman—"Everyone has his own beliefs. No one is better than anyone else, People aren't very strong and we all need help. Don't ever make fun of anyone for his beliefs. We know religions are all trying to do the same things. Lots of them say they are the best. None of them are. They are all the same, but some people are still working on that." That was the end of our discussion, I helped her pick up potato peels off of the wooden floor of the porch and went inside to help grandma make supper.

When I was in the second grade, two events foretell of my current career. The mother of a first grade boy in our neighborhood somehow found out from my second grade teacher that I was good in mathematics. (I think that was the last time that I was). She asked me if I would tutor her boy in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. I did so, twice a week for several weeks, until he seemed to be doing well in school. I remember I was paid in Jordan Almonds—I nibbled on them as I tutored. He passed into second grade with good grades in arithmetic. That was more rewarding than Jordan Almonds.

The second event, well, really, it was a series of events, during which time my second grade teacher held up my cut out pumpkin, or turkey, or heart, or black cat, or snow man, proclaiming them great models to aspire to. She was good at noticing achievements and qualities in all of us and giving praise. She made us happy that we were different and proud of our abilities. At the same time, she gave us a model suggesting that we could try to achieve more.

The model that she gave me was one in many that, over the years, I, sometimes subconsciously and sometimes very consciously, incorporated into my teaching repertoire. Whenever a teacher did something that made me feel that I loved what I was learning, I remembered that style, that spirit, that methodology, that caring way, and I tried to keep it as part of my own behavior and intent. My teachers included people outside of formal educational settings such as all of my students, all of my friends, and my grandmother, who taught me that the yard around our house, her house, was a place of plenty. Besides the elderberries, the victory garden, and the rhubarb, even the dandelions were part of our harvest. She made me feel very grown up and capable. And, of course, there were the many children I babysat for when I was a teenager in need of money to purchase art supplies. They all taught me how to survive the encounters. I always brought a bag of things that would engage the children in some enjoyable activity. It contained card games, crayons, pencils, papers, scissors, and puzzles.

One very memorable day, I was babysitting for pre-school Geoffie Grout alone, whose 3 brothers and sister were, for some reason, with their mother. It was just me and Geoffie on a rainy day. I got out the drawing paper and crayons. Geoffie immediately started drawing what some art education textbooks call

"tadpole" men. They were all drawn with a very straight horizontal line for a mouth. Suddenly, Geoffie stopped drawing and started looking into space. At first I thought that blank look indicated a need to visit the bathroom. Then he smiled. Then he made a serious face. Then he smiled again, repeating the behavior over and over, until he returned his attention to his drawing and made a tadpole man with a very big smile. Then he took delight in making hundreds of them. I was witness to something extraordinary! I guess that was when I was really hooked on art education but I didn't even know it until years later. If I ever write an autobiography or if we are ever sharing life stories in cozy chairs somewhere, I'll tell you more. Let me end with a page from the statement I wrote for another occasion about my teaching and a poem that I wrote last summer, when both my sister and mother died:

Throughout my teaching career, the foundation for all of my research, educational philosophy, and teaching methodology has been a vital interest in and investigation of human potential. Underlying all that I pursue is a profound belief that the living core of education is self-knowledge. Engagement in the arts and teaching allows one to find and explore value, meaning, and purpose in life as well as help others to do the same. This foundation has repeatedly provoked me to ask questions about the boundaries of innate human potential and the effects of cultural and environmental dynamics upon human achievement and development.

This quest has led me to teaching practices, creative acts, and research ventures that are concerned with the psychology of creativity, self-esteem, gender studies, cultural and personal mythologies, multi-cultural, cross-cultural, gender and age

studies, the historic and cultural importance of the autobiographical narrative, humor as an indicator of social change, conflict resolution, problem solving, and developing uniqueness, self-reliance, and talent in people of all ages and abilities. My Achilles' heel is that I am unable to perceive the above interests as separate. Instead, I see them as part of an interdependent complex and dynamic whole which influences how we define the living and evolving thing called art education.

Initially, the journey was provoked by a need to fulfill my own potentials and interests as a person and as an artist. This need inspired in me a desire to share my love of the arts with others so that they might find the kinds of joys I had been privileged to know. Art Education became the vehicle of sharing. The consequence of this path has been a discovery that I am passionate about teaching and the value of arts education in relationship to human development and self-knowledge. The course syllabi that I design provide the framework for how I wish to share this passion with my students. The syllabi are the beginning of a learning dialogue. While I supervise students in their student teaching experiences, advise graduates and undergraduates, I look for ways to help them keep alive their personal passions about art and education and to keep them in touch with the infinite value, meaning, and purpose of what they are about.

As one strives to achieve virtuosity in a medium I strive to achieve virtuosity in teaching. Teaching is, as are clay, paint, poetry, and other art media with which I create a vital articulator of my creative impulses and drive. It is the vessel into which research, praxis, and artistic discovery are poured, stirred, and stored, and from which much is

recreated as I learn from the process.

Teaching, creating art, writing poetry, engaging in and documenting research, and serving in professional organizations are mere milestones distinguishing a lifelong journey, milestones that may allow one to survey the legacy of the lively trek.

One is fortunate when she can share the pilgrimage with others.

#### Night Crawlers and Fireflies

After hunting night crawlers in wood's earth moist  
Summer dusk, balmy evening, lying on  
damp abundant grass,  
Elbow leaning, belly-stretched,  
Out under silhouetted trees –  
Lightening bugs!  
Are they dispatched in a romantic  
tailspin by the evening star?  
Does the soaring westward supersonic  
transport make them swoon?  
Are they fireflies and not lightening  
bugs?  
That would make everything different.  
Fireflies are more of the earth than of  
sky.  
Are they then moved instead by moons  
mirrored in dewdrops?  
Street lamps reflected in puddles?  
Chrome hubcaps on tricycles  
overturned?  
The gentle radiance in a child's eyes?

Fireflies are arrested  
As much by the myth that this is what a  
child must do  
As by a jar with a punctured lid.  
They can't be kept for long.  
Their flashing insistence, their intense  
burning  
Desire to satisfy their fate inflames  
even a child's breast.  
... all captives freed to join the lights of  
the night.

Kathy

28 August 1998

You have all honored me in the  
greatest way I could ever imagine.  
Thank you from the heart of my  
heart. Kathy.