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Virginia Woolf, I Understand

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VIRGINIA WOOLF, I UNDERSTAND

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Almost twenty-five years ago I began to develop a genuine interest in art. After barely "scratching the surface", I found a new world opening up for me and this discovery made a drastic change in the course of my life. I feel that a great deal of my growth as an individual during my adult life is due to my exposure to the field of art. My interest, study of and activity in art has led to a deeper feeling of worth, identity and self-confidence as well as an addition to my social and financial security. Through this interest I acquired the desire to see, study, travel and create as well as the motivation to continue the learning process and to teach others.

Oddly enough, in this "age of liberation", in the midst of the feminist movement, I must truthfully concede that the majority of encouragement I have received in the art field (and in my life in general) has come from men, men whom I believe have felt secure enough in themselves not to find me a "threat" or "just another woman", but rather an intelligent human being wanting and willing to learn. Their warmth, their attempts at understanding me and their genuine concern and respect for me has instilled my trust in them. This association has been a valuable stimulus to my growth and creativity in the art field.

However, there are also a number of women with whom I have found meaningful relationships. I have valued their friendships and advice and have admired the ways in which they have directed their lives. They also have served as my mentors and models. I

A BEGINNING

"A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." Virginia Woolf

"A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to become creative." Nancy Follis

While I was growing up I had a room of my own. It was a lovely room with beautiful dark furniture and a big high bed that was like an island in the middle of a deep green carpet. I chose the colors myself, forest green and soft yellow, a blend of warm and cool colors. In the room there was a desk, a bookcase, a big mirror and a wonderful window that looked out over our side yard and my father's rose garden below.

For as long as I can remember I dreamed of becoming a writer and I spent hours writing poems and short stories at the desk in my room. This room belonged to no one but me and I never felt that my parents or anyone else invaded my privacy there. However, I felt very possessive about my writing and it was always neatly tucked away (hidden) in the drawers of my desk. I doubt if anyone else ever read it.

I discovered reading in that room and the books in my bookcase were worn. I loved horse stories and especially poetry and those books were practically memorized.

I watched myself grow up in that mirror on my closet door. Through the years I saw myself changing from a little girl, to puberty, to a young woman. Sometimes this was a painful experience and I was unhappy with the image looking back at me from the mirror, but there were also times when I was pleased with the image that I found there.

From the rocking chair by my window I could see the big maple tree outside and I especially loved it in the summertime--all green and full and filled with bird sounds. I did a lot of dreaming from the window and often I felt like one of those birds in that tree--up high and looking out on the world, yet very safe from other eyes. I had the privacy and the freedom in my room to be creative. There was time there to think, to write, to dream, to pray, to fall in love. It was a place where a little girl could escape from the world long enough to gather strength and confidence to face it all again the next day.

In that room I grew into an adequately educated, well-poised young woman. One who had been exposed to the "finer things in life"; travel, society, dancing and piano lessons, and horsemanship. Therefore, being a product of the 40's and 50's, I was destined for what most middle-class young women "desired" at that time: marriage. So one day I stepped out of that room of my own without so much as a backward glance into the world for which I had been programmed. Not giving it a second thought, I pushed aside my dreams, my poetry, etc. to enter into marriage with a loving, kind and ambitious young man who had been programmed by the same society. Naturally, the young man had been trained for his profession while I, on the other hand, was totally unprepared for my numerous careers as wife, business partner, mother, homemaker, etc. Little wonder that I didn't think consciously again of that room for many years. The circumstances of my busy life would never have allowed me a moment of time for a room of my own.

SOMETHING HAPPENED

After fifteen years as a homemaker, wife and mother I was suddenly faced with the unbelievable opportunity to return to college. I was terrified at the thought of exposing "my ignorance" and leaving the security blanket and the identity I had found for myself as wife and mother. When I look back to this time in my life I am extremely thankful that I had the support of my family and the personal courage to take this incredible step forward.

I returned to undergraduate school at Utah State University in 1969 at the age of thirty-six. I had decided to begin by taking a few courses in art, little dreaming that this decision would greatly change the direction of my life. After a term of classes I gained the confidence and desire to earnestly work toward a degree in art. The next three years were some of the most exciting and stimulating years of my life and I will recall and treasure them always.

The following was written at the time of my graduation from Utah State University, June 1973:

There once was a time (not many years ago)
When all of my life was content.

Each day was filled as mother and wife
And that's how my hours were spent.

Dr. Spock was my mentor, Betty Crocker my guide
While cooking and cleaning with a child at my side.

But after a few years I mastered the kids,
The housework, the cooking,

And then something happened--
My mind started looking.

My mind started looking for ways it could grow -
My mind started asking, "How much do you know?"

"An old lady at forty?"

"Oh, God, no not me!"

But my mind kept on asking,
"What else will you be?"

So I went back to college,
I was frightened to start.

But my fears were soon stilled
By the dream in my heart

To do something for myself,
To have something all my own,

And to reach for the knowledge
That was mine all alone.

Well, I made it in spite of all
Those frustrations and fears.

And God, it was worth all
The work and the tears!

Yes, I'm still a wife and mother
And I feel quite fortunate to be,

But what's more important,
At last I've found me.

N. Follis 1973

MY POTTERY

My pottery is scattered from coast to coast. Most of it has been sold or given away to friends. A few pieces are still in my possession. Sometimes I visit a friend who says, "Do you notice anything on my shelf that looks familiar?" and then I see a pot, unmistakably mine. I look at it as if for the first time, through new eyes, and usually I like it. My pottery is good, it is respectable and some of it is even quite beautiful. But the world is full of many pieces of pottery, some dating back to the dawn of civilization. However, this writing is not concerned with a history of pottery -- not even an account of my own pottery -- but rather it addresses the experiences I have encountered in my lifetime due to my exposure to pottery and its material, clay.

In undergraduate school I was required to take some three-dimensional studio courses and for reasons still mystifying to me, I chose ceramics: beginning wheel throwing. The first few weeks of class I struggled daily at the kick wheel trying to learn to center the clay. Younger students (and they were all younger in those days) around me were throwing lovely straight, thin-walled cylinders while I silently labored, perspired and concealed tears of hurt pride and frustration. I was convinced that I had made a big mistake, a bad choice and I wanted to forget the whole thing. Now I understand that at that time I was more concerned with not failing than I was in learning to center the clay. Nevertheless, the harder I tried the worse things became. I worked alone in the

studio, sometimes until midnight, pushing, pulling, struggling with the clay. Many nights I returned home late, covered with caked "mud", stiff and sore and mentally depressed. I desperately wanted out of it all before I failed. I asked my instructor (who by that time I considered a real charlatan who had made it all look so easy) if I could drop the course. He replied in an emotionless voice, "Tomorrow is the last day to drop the course. I'll sign your drop card in the morning - go back and work on the wheel for the remainder of the class."

With a sigh of relief I returned to my wheel, threw a ball of wedged clay onto the plaster bat and began to kick. Within a matter of a few minutes a miracle occurred. I had centered the clay! My hands felt something different about the clay which they had never experienced in all of those weeks of struggle. The ball of clay and the wheel had become one -- the clay perfect and symmetrically centered on the bat. My hands communicated the story through my arms, shoulders and into my head. What a feeling! What wonder and joy!

It must have been at that moment in time that my passion, my love affair with clay was born. And like with the birth of a child, at the moment of birth the parent only knows the unique joy of the event, little realizing the responsibilities, concern, frustrations and enduring love which will follow that joy. Thank God my instructor had not signed the drop card a day earlier! Why, of course, he knew what he was doing. Hadn't he patiently told me all along to relax, to ease up, to be gentle and sensitive with the clay? He

was no longer a charlatan in my eyes -- he was my savior! So my love affair was to continue for ten years or more with this most basic element, this special kind of earth - clay.

Already I had grown one giant step and now I had to learn to use all of my mind and body in total concentration over the clay in order to bring about the forms I wanted to create: the thin, even walls, the gently swelling of the body, the drawing in of the neck, the full thickness of the lip. Not only feel but sound also became important in the final trimming of the leather hard pot in order to determine the thickness. There was so much to learn that must eventually become instinct: how to patiently wedge the clay with a rhythmic rocking motion, the control of my body from head to finger tips, the temperature of the clay to understand the moisture content, the way a pot feels when it is dry enough to fire, how a glaze should be mixed to the consistency of heavy cream, etc. These were techniques I could read about in textbooks, but had to be experienced to fully understand. So began the time in which I set about learning the many technical aspects of working with clay.

While at Utah State I was exposed to handbuilding with clay as well as wheel throwing. I began to experiment with glaze calculation as well as some gas reduction kiln firing. The more I learned there, the more I began to realize that I had barely scratched the surface of this medium.

Shortly before I was to receive my BFA from Utah State we moved to Missouri. I still needed more studio hours in order to

graduate so I enrolled in ceramics with Charles Proffer at Lindenwood College. I eventually became his assistant and it was there that I began to learn by first-hand experience how to load and fire a large gas reduction kiln. Mr. Proffer's encouragement and confidence in me at this time reinforced my own self-confidence and increased my motivation to take graduate courses in ceramics after graduation. I attended a summer workshop at Washington University, worked again at Lindenwood for graduate credit in ceramics with Linda Mosley, and spent three summers in New Harmony, Indiana with Les Miley, instructor from the University of Evansville. Attending a number of institutions was beneficial in that I was exposed to various techniques and ideas from a number of instructors. I had the opportunity to work first-hand at building kilns and with kiln firing methods such as gas reduction, electric oxidation, pit firing, salt firing and raku. I learned more about glaze types and glaze formulation for these different types of kilns as well as the mixing of various clay bodies such as porcelain, raku and stoneware. Time and time again I found the avenues for the exploration of this medium to be unending.

But as I stated earlier, this writing is not about my pottery or the technical aspects of making pottery, it concerns the experiences I have gained through my work with pottery. This growth and learning has been more enriching and valuable to my life than any lovely piece of pottery could ever be.

If lesson number one was relaxing, easing up, letting go-- then this lesson must be followed throughout the whole process of working on the wheel. In order to do my best work at the wheel I learned that I had to "let go" of everything when I came to the clay. This amazing practice of totally "clearing out the mind" was truly new to me. The act of thinking of absolutely nothing except the clay between my hands was of utmost importance. I was learning to concentrate only on making my body (legs, arms, fingers, fingertips) do exactly what my mind was telling it to do. This type of concentration could last for hours when my mind was void of any thoughts not devoted to the clay before me. I was amazed at how I could sit down at the wheel early in the morning and hardly look up again until noon. Ideas for forms, containers and sculptural pieces came rushing into mind. There was so much to be done, so much to be created with the clay that there were never enough hours in the day. Often I became so absorbed in my work that I truly resented those hours which seemed "wasted on rest." The good days and nights in the studio (and there were many of them) still stand out in my mind. Those were the times when everything worked: myself (mind and body) and the clay. Feeling this "oneness with the clay," together "we" created the forms. Those hours brought a unique happiness and richness into my life which I had never experienced before or since. Other potters will understand. Those who are not potters perhaps may not understand.

My continued interest in clay led to a variety of fulfilling experiences which I might not have otherwise encountered. As my work improved, I had the opportunity to exhibit my pottery in a number of shows. I exhibited with groups of potters and artists in the area as well as having a one-woman show at Lindenwood College the first fall that I worked at the art department there. This kind of exposure was a great boost to my self-confidence and reputation and also helped lead to the sale of my work. I began to learn about marketing my pottery. I never had any difficulty in selling my work; and in time I built up a rather steady clientele. With this income I was able to invest in more equipment and supplies and even pay my tuition for additional classes.

Another experience which had a profound effect on my life was teaching. Because I had taken a number of graduate courses in ceramics, I was offered the opportunity to teach ceramics part-time at Lindenwood College. In the past, as a student, I had always enjoyed working with others in a studio environment. I felt that it was important to my work to see the work of other students, to communicate with them about our work. This creative feedback in class critiques had always been a stimulus to me. Now I found that I was learning even more as a teacher than I had learned as a student. I had to think about how I felt and learn to express those thoughts verbally to the class. I tried to recall the times when my instructors had given me the most help and then

assume those same attitudes with my own students. Having learned to be critical of my own work I now learned to be critical of the students' work. I found that critiquing was a delicate balance between reprimand and praise; it was important to point out weaknesses in the students' work, but equally important to praise their progress in order not to be discouraging. I remembered well from my own experiences how easy it was to become discouraged and want to "give up." Earning the respect of the students was a challenge but I found that this could often be done by my own enthusiasm or by just being able to say, "Frankly, I don't know the answer but I can find out."

Certain students from those classes stand out in my mind. I remember one foreign student who spoke very little English. We learned to communicate with each other through the clay. I would place her hands on the centered clay so that she could feel how it should be for herself. From watching my demonstrations in wedging and working on the wheel, she learned as rapidly as the others. Words became unnecessary. One of the students was a young man (very much the "macho" type) who, I realized after the first class, resented having an older female instructor. I knew that with his intimidating attitude we might have problems. I taught him to fire the kiln and gave him numerous studio responsibilities which satisfied his ego. By the end of the term he called me "boss lady" with affection. I appreciated his help and ideas and we became real friends.

I always enjoyed working with older women students, perhaps because I could identify so much with them as I had been in their position myself not so long ago. Often they were the brightest, most conscientious and hardest working students in the class. I learned that a few words of praise could "move mountains" with them. Often when they were trying to learn to throw on the wheel I could "talk them through a pot" by just standing near and telling them how to move their hands and when to gently apply pressure while pulling the clay up. Once they got the feel of it they were "on their way." These women were the students who always came early to class and stayed late.

It was fun demonstrating to the class on the potter's wheel. I would throw a ball of wedged clay on the bat, quickly center the clay and then open and pull up a nice thin-walled cylinder. As the class marveled at the piece, I would stop the wheel and with a long needle cut the cylinder in half so that the students could see the thickness of the walls of the pot. This cutting was a big shock to the students and I could tell by the expressions on their faces that it hurt them to see me destroy something which they had been trying to learn to make for weeks. I explained to them that there were several lessons to be learned through this demonstration, that being able to destroy one's work sometimes frees one to progress, to try something different and not to rely on success. "If you can do it once, then you can do it again and the next time it will be even better."

Although I made mistakes while teaching, I learned from those mistakes. If I was too soft with a student, I learned to crack down more the next term. Having always been a sucker for a hard-luck story, I soon learned to detect those also. Perhaps it is not wise for a teacher to become friendly with her students, but I still count many of those students as my friends. I began to realize that the relationship of student/teacher is a very basic human relationship, much like that of a parent/child relationship and I found pride in seeing students learn and grow. As I felt more secure in myself and my teaching, I began to let the students take on more responsibilities in the studio. I welcomed their ideas and suggestions. I realized that some of them would probably become better and more creative potters than I would ever be. I could accept this by understanding that my own work would always stand alone as long as it was honest, unique, my own. I wanted my students to learn and understand this about their work. It was important that they understand that the reward was not necessarily the pottery alone, but also the pride within themselves which they felt for their work.

Through teaching I learned so much about myself: my insecurities, my fears and my strengths, as well as learning that I knew more than I realized. I believe that during this time in my life I had more self-confidence than I had ever had before. Yes, in many ways, teaching was an ego trip which I needed. Don't we all at times? So this background is what really gave me the confidence

to go to New Harmony and live alone for three summers. This was another experience which is foreign to most middle-aged wives and mothers like myself. After twenty-five years of marriage and raising a family, I again found "a room of one's own."

NEW HARMONY

"You're born in one place, but I think all of us, at some time in our lives, feel; 'this is exactly where I ought to be, this is why I'm on this earth.'" Jane Owen Blaffer

New Harmony, Indiana was founded in 1814 by a group of German Lutherans who had settled in Pennsylvania. Led by George Rapp, the group moved west and carved a settlement out of the wilderness on the Wabash River. They called their homestead Harmonie. The Harmonists stayed in Indiana for ten years before returning to Pennsylvania. Rapp sold the town in 1824 to Robert Owen, a wealthy Welsh-born industrialist in Scotland. Owen and his associate William Maclure, set out to establish a utopian society of teachers, intellectuals and scientists. Maclure encouraged a number of scholars to come to New Harmony. Owen's effort to establish a "Community of Equality" failed when members argued over the form of government and the role of religion, and Owen, who had renamed the town New Harmony, left in 1828. New Harmony remained a center for scientific exploration for many years, and through the Owenites' effort, America's first kindergarten, first trade school, first free public school offering equal education to the sexes, first free public library system, first headquarters of the U.S. Geological Survey and first women's club were established there. But, by the Civil War, New Harmony had lapsed into little more than just another farm town and much of the Harmonist's legacy was lost. In 1941 Jane Owen, wealthy wife of a descendant of one of the towns' famous early settlers

came to New Harmony. Mrs. Owen dreamed of restoring the town and she and her husband bought several historic buildings and land which the Owen family once owned but had lost. Mrs. Owen continued to restore many of the historic houses and in 1958 she established a trust fund in memory of her father to administer the properties and provide funds for a ceramics studio in New Harmony.

My daughter and I discovered New Harmony one snowy winter weekend in 1978. We spent the night at the inn and the next day took a historical walking tour of this unusual little town. The most exciting discovery for me was a pottery studio in New Harmony and finding that workshops were offered there by the University of Evansville in the summer. My daughter insisted that I learn more about the program and, by June, I was on my way to New Harmony to work with clay for most of the summer.

I spent three consecutive summers in New Harmony. I especially remember how differently my life was during those summers as this was such a unique experience for me. I had never really known what it was like to have absolutely no responsibilities other than my own art work. I hadn't known such freedom in twenty-five years and I marveled at the pure joy with which I simply treasured each new day there. I guess that this is as close as I will ever come to feeling like "I was living in a dream."

The pottery studio was mine for twenty-four hours a day. I could begin working early in the morning and, stopping for breaks,

work as late at night as my energy allowed. Our instructor, Les Miley, was a fine ceramist and teacher whom I soon learned to admire. The pottery students came from all over the midwest and were a young, creative group. Each student shared responsibilities in the studio and Mr. Miley ran a "tight ship," but I liked that. The work was often physically very tiring, but there is much satisfaction in working together as a group, helping each other mixing glazes, pugging clay, loading and firing the kiln, even cleaning the studio. The physical part of this work is rewarding in itself. In spite of the times one feels "bone tired," it's a true satisfaction to know that your hands are becoming stronger, to feel the muscles in your arms tightening, your whole body toning up and feeling both physically and mentally more fit with each new day. Regardless of the work and demands of the studio, there was still time for fun, activities and companionship with the students. We enjoyed picnics, swimming, bicycling and even sharing ideas sometimes at the local tavern or during midnight walks through the quiet little town.

Each new day in the studio increased my knowledge of clay and from Mr. Miley I learn much more about teaching. New Harmony provided such a unique environment in which to work. The townspeople are sincere and friendly and take a great deal of pride in their community. The town itself (thanks to Mrs. Owen) is aesthetically pleasing. The streets are lined with historic old homes which have been lovingly restored and a number of architecturally

modern buildings blend nicely with the old ones. Beautiful raintrees and old fashioned flower gardens add to the tastefully planned landscape. The entire setting of the town truly has a dream-like quality. As there were few distractions there, it was a contemplative place that allowed me to think, read and work. This kind of atmosphere is certainly conducive to creativity.

My work with clay evolved into a new style during those three summers. I was somewhat "into" the feminist movement and especially interested in "feminist images" in art. Having seen Judy Chicago's Dinner Party I had gained a new respect for some of the "older crafts" practiced by women in the past. My own pottery had been rather crude, heavy, larger, more "masculine," etc. Now I began to make smaller, more delicate pieces. I had the time while in New Harmony to work longer on each piece and I enjoyed the time I spent experimenting with incising figures, designs and even flowers on the walls of my pots. As I worked I thought often of my mother and the many other women who had spent hours in the past on handwork and crafts. I wondered what their thoughts had turned to during those hours spent quietly and patiently working. Were those hours the only times they may have ever had to retreat into the "rooms of their own"? I wondered if this was how men felt most of the time as they worked. If so, I envied them! No wonder some men were so productive. What a pleasure it was not to have a "care in the world" except for one's own work!

My days in New Harmony were simple ones but they always passed too quickly. I had a lovely room of my own in an old Victorian house owned by Mansen and Adel Martin. They were an elderly couple about the same age that my parents would have been if they were living. I felt that our friendship grew into a real love for each other during those summers. It was quite an unusual relationship. For a few weeks those summers, they had a daughter and I had parents again. I experienced a kind of love and security and a room of my own--all of which I hadn't known since childhood. It was as if I had gone "back in time" for a little while. Ridiculous as it may sound, I actually felt like a happy child and this was a magical, enchanted time in my life. I discovered that by becoming a child again, I also began to grow. The experience was much like the ones I remember as a child in a room of my own when I had gone there to gather strength to face the next new day. Since I had been having a rather difficult time in my personal life when I first came to New Harmony, my time and experiences spent there did give me the strength to "get it all together" and get on with my life.

Someone said "We can never go back, we can only go forward." If I went back to New Harmony it would not be the same for me. Manson is dead, Adel is senile, the old house has been sold, someone else lives in my wonderful "room," the students have gone on with their lives. And I am no longer the same person, yet I realize that I am a very different person for being there. The

memories of that special place I still carry with me and I hope that I shall never forget what the "magic" was like. In New Harmony I had the freedom to become a child again and also grow, both as an artist and an individual. How fortunate I was to have been able to take advantage of that unique opportunity in my life.

July 6, 1979

Dear Mrs. Owen,

I am so pleased that I had the opportunity to know you, even for a short time. I have wanted to thank you daily for the many pleasures I have found here in New Harmony. This has been a turning point in my life--here I have had the time to be creative, to be alone but never lonely, and to be objective about my feelings toward my family, friends and myself. I have been like a little child again--trusting, loving and finding beauty and happiness in such simple things as wrinkled faces, lumps of clay and apple trees.

I realize that it took many hearts and hands to rebuild New Harmony, but someone had to begin with a dream. And, so, I thank you for being one of those dreamers which the world must have.

I would like to give you one of my pots. This pot was made in New Harmony: it is not an ordinary pot, but then, New Harmony is not an ordinary town.

Sincerely,

Nancy Follis

ART HISTORY

"The goal of art history is the discerning appreciation and enjoyment of art, from whatever time and place it may have come, by whatever hands made. Outside the academic world the terms art and history are not often so juxtaposed. People tend to think of history as the record and interpretation of past (particularly political) human actions and of art - quite correctly - as something present to the eye and touch, which of course, the vanished human events that make up history are not. The fact is that a work of art, visible and tangible as it is, is a kind of persisting event. It was made at a particular time and place by particular persons, even if we do not always know just when, where, and by whom. Though it is the creation of the past, it continues to exist in the present, long surviving its times. Charlemagne has been dead for a thousand years, but his chapel still stands at Aachen." Gardner's ART THROUGH THE AGES Edition page.

"Art history has been so valuable to the quality of my life that I would not even want to imagine what my life would have been like without it." Nancy Follis

My major as an undergraduate at Utah State was art history. I was required to take an art survey course early in my education there and became so interested in what I thought would be a boring subject that I decided to declare art history as my major. My first class was offered at 7:30 A.M. and in spite of the early hour, my enthusiastic instructor, Ed Dobson, made the hour go by much too quickly for me. My mind was bombarded with new names and places - paintings, artists, monuments, cultures, etc. Some were familiar, but many were new to me. It was like

eating popcorn, I couldn't get enough! I had to know more about the Greeks! Where was the pyramid of Zoser? Who was Paul Klee? What did all those figures on the Sistine Ceiling represent? It was like discovering a vast universe - a million questions to ask and as many answers to be found. I haunted the library and I discovered the Greeks, the Renaissance, the Impressionists and the Pop Artists. I could not soak it all up fast enough. What about Primitive Art? Baroque Architecture? What was Mannerism? As I added more courses I found more and more treasures that I had never realized existed. There were never enough hours in the day for study and reading and preparation for exams. I even liked the scary excitement of exams and I seemed to thrive on them. I usually left a test feeling disappointed because I knew more than I had been asked. During my three years at Utah State I took every art history course offered at the university along with studio art classes.

For the BFA I needed a foreign language and I chose to take French. Here again was another new world and I plunged right into it and loved it! I had become acquainted with a number of foreign students at the university and we invited them over to our home quite often. This was an excellent way in which to learn more about their culture. Three young Algerian men became my friends at school. They were fluent in French and they helped me every day with the language

and even by phone in the evenings. I got through it all with flying colors and even made the Dean's list.

By the time I had completed my junior year, I was ready and anxious to actually see this art. I knew that I had to go to Europe and it no longer seemed like an impossible dream. I had paid for my education with money left me by my parents and I thought of the trip as a further investment in my education. Again I received much encouragement from my family and that was all I needed in order to say "yes." In July 1972 I took my first trip to Europe with twelve other art students from Utah State. Being number thirteen and the oldest of the group, I was given a single room at all of the hotels. Who could ask for more than six weeks in Europe and a room of one's own?

Little did I realize how advantageous my art history would be on a trip such as this. Now I had the chance to see first-hand the places, monuments and art objects I had studied the past three years. It was gratifying to see these objects, but an added plus to be able to understand the history and the reasons for their "being." Again I realized how little I knew and that nagging hunger to learn more was always with me.

Our days were spent touring the cities and museums and by night I gladly returned to that room of my own where, after a hot bath, I could settle down with a book describing the treasures we would see the next day. I valued the time alone there in my room where I could think about and digest all I had seen that day.

We left each city with regret, feeling as though the short time had not allowed us to explore as thoroughly as we had wanted to. Each new sight visited was more awesome than the one we had left the day before. I realized how much of the world there was to be seen and how badly I wanted to see it all! I returned from Europe trying to rationalize a way to return as soon as possible.

In 1973, after my husband and I had finished college at Utah State, we moved to St. Louis. Moving to a new community, I was anxious to make new associations. In order to keep in touch with the art in the area, I became a volunteer docent at the St. Louis Art Museum. As a docent I learned to speak to groups touring the museum and gained more knowledge of the art objects within the museum. I soon found that my education in art history opened the door to opportunities for employment. My first paying job was at Lindenwood College where I worked in the art department as administrative assistant and slide curator. Again, I was plunging into a new experience and enjoying my work and my association with the students and faculty. This association consequently led to lasting friendships with members of the art faculty, John Wehmer and Dean Eckert and our Dean, Doris Crozier. I learned much through my work with these people as well as through a variety of responsibilities such as gallery work, photography and curatorial work with art history slides and office and administrative work. Not only did I enjoy the work and the environment of the art

department, but I loved having a monthly salary. The money from that pay check gave me a new sense of independence and security at once. In fact, it gave me so much confidence that two years later I applied for the position as slide curator in the art history department at the University of Missouri - St. Louis. After a series of interviews I was accepted as curator and found myself in charge of an art slide library with a collection of 80,000 slides. Through these art history slides I was exposed to the total realm of art, from the pre-historic cave paintings right up to the contemporary art of the 1980's. The slide library was my sole responsibility and due to the apparent confidence displayed by the chairperson and faculty toward me, I was free to initiate many new ideas. I proposed and carried out a curatorial study program for art history students in the slide library. Through photocopy we added over 10,000 new slides to the library as well as reorganizing and updating the collection. I was able to become active in my attendance to audio visual conferences on the national level where I presented papers and eventually became chairperson of my professional group through the College Art Association.

While at UMSL I was free to audit any courses I chose and I took advantage of the opportunity each semester by sitting in on a variety of subjects from Medieval Art to Women's Literature to Watercolor. I even had the opportunity to teach part-time at Lindenwood College (ceramics and humanities) while at UMSL.

provided me with a profession, a salary and the freedom and self-confidence which comes from both. It had taken me to

The slide library became, in a sense, another "room of my own" and along with an annual increase in my salary I had the summers free to creatively pursue my love for pottery at New Harmony, Indiana. I look back on the seven years spent at UMSL as a very happy, creative and productive time in my life.

However, my work in the slide library was beginning to reach a stage where the challenge of the job was fading, and funding for the arts was at a low ebb. I began to feel a nagging urge to continue my education in studio arts. I truly yearned for enough time to accomplish something creative again. I suppose I just wanted to "make art" for a while. It was a rather difficult decision to leave the security of the position at UMSL, but I felt that I had finally reached a stage in my self-confidence that I no longer needed this kind of a security blanket. I would miss my paycheck and the stimulating association with my colleagues and the students, but by now I was realizing by past experiences that there was usually something even "more exciting" right around the corner. So again, I returned to Lindenwood College in 1985 and this time in the capacity of a graduate student working towards a M.A. in painting. It would be interesting to see how valuable my pottery and art history background would be to me in the studio as a painter.

My interest in art history had opened many doors for me. It had provided me with a profession, a salary and the freedom and self-confidence which comes from both. It had taken me to

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distant places I had never dreamed of--from the Great Pyramids at Giza to Chartres, from St. Peters to Hagia Sophia, from the British Museum to the Acropolis. More importantly, a knowledge of art history had given me a deep appreciation for and a meaningful understanding of far away places as well as the same appreciation for the things "in my own backyard"--the architecture of New Harmony, the Wainwright Building in St. Louis, even our own townhouse in LaSalle Park. It is exciting to find that art does surround us if we truly look for it. We can find it in an old quilt from the attic, as well as in the great paintings of the Louvre.

The first great master that I discovered was Claude Monet. Although only one of his paintings hung in the museum, I spent a lot of time looking at it. It was entitled "Oiveyry." I bought a book on Monet and I read it over many times. I read other art books and I tried to look at as much good art as I could. I dreamed of knowing an artist or even having someone I could talk with about art, but no one I knew was ever very interested. I painted every chance that I had and finally I found that I could take a painting class at night at a small nearby college in Bardonia, Kentucky.

My teacher was Julia Rosefeldt, a young artist from New York. She was the first artist I had ever met and I was thankful that we became such good friends. Julia encouraged me to paint, she went with me to the museum, we talked about her work and her schooling in Florence, Italy. She introduced me to the fine arts and she exposed me to "bad art" as well. I

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I have wanted to paint for almost as long as I can remember. When my children were very small my husband gave me a set of oils for my birthday. His work kept him away from home many evenings and, since the children went to bed early, I had some free time at night. This was when I tucked the children in and brought out the paints and canvas and began to experiment with painting. The hours flew by and it was always bedtime too soon. We lived in a rural area and I had no teacher, only art books. I often went to the Speed Museum in Louisville, Kentucky and the first great master that I discovered was Claude Monet. Although only one of his paintings hung in the museum, I spent a lot of time looking at it. It was entitled "Giverny." I bought a book on Monet and I read it over many times. I read other art books and I tried to look at as much good art as I could. I dreamed of knowing an artist or even having someone I could talk with about art, but no one I knew was ever very interested. I painted every chance that I had and finally I found that I could take a painting class at night at a small nearby college in Bardstown, Kentucky.

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was elated that I actually had a friend who was an artist and I wanted very much to understand her, to be able to speak her "language" and to learn as much as I could from her. I realized how little I knew about painting, and how much she knew! I envied her lifestyle and her artistic friends. Julia and I spent many hours talking about art, books, religion, etc. and she gave me an intellectual stimulus which I had not truly experienced with another friend since I had married. She encouraged me to begin to look beyond my everyday surroundings and discover a new world for myself.

I think my friendship with Julia was a preparation for our move to Utah. I never saw Julia again, but when we said "goodbye" she urged me to go back to college and study art. At the time it sounded impossible, but eventually it did happen. Now I smile to myself when I think of that young wife and mother (me) who dreamed of just knowing an artist. Not in my wildest dreams, at that time, did I ever believe that I would actually become one.

During the following years my painting took a back seat to pottery and art history. I did take some painting courses in college, but painting was always something I did while on vacation or I'd do a watercolor when I occasionally felt the urge to paint. I never really worked at it as seriously as I did with pottery.

Last year I became interested in watercolor again. I felt as though I hadn't really "made art" or had been very creative for a number of years. I had begun my Masters study in pottery

several years before, but I had pushed it aside. Perhaps things had become too comfortable for me. Nevertheless, my artistic life seemed to be in limbo. About this same time a good friend reminded me that I was wasting my talent by not going back to school. My friend, Stephanie, was in graduate school herself and wanted me to share the "agony" with her. Of course I became angry and defensive with her, saying that "I was tired of struggling, climbing mountains, finding new challenges. Why didn't I have the right to take it easy, relax, and enjoy life like anyone else? "But you are different" she replied, "That is not the way you enjoy life." It took about an hour for me to cool off and admit that she was right. The next week I enrolled again in graduate school at LCIE working towards my M.A.

Last May I went to France. While there I visited Claude Monet's garden at Giverny which is in the country outside of Paris. I photographed the gardens, the lily pool, the house and grounds, and when I returned home I began to paint from my photographs.

Again in October I returned to Paris and to Giverny. This was a special visit as my son and daughter were with me. It was late October, but the garden was even more lush and beautiful in the late afternoon sunshine than it had been in the spring. That afternoon we three enjoyed the same garden which Monet had painted in that picture I had loved at the Speed Museum so many years ago. Then my children had been very young and so had I.

Now the children were grown up and I knew that I had grown also. How far I had come since then! And how much I had learned! I felt as though I had completed a full circle in my life. Yes, it seemed like I had spent a hundred years in completing that circle, yet how rich and exciting and fulfilling those years had been for me!

Again I returned from France with more photographs of Giverny and truly motivated to spend the year painting in preparation for my M.A. exhibit in the spring. Now as I paint, I find that my knowledge of both ceramics and art history are valuable assets to me in being innovative and critical with my work. I know that there are elements in a painting to be considered: subject matter, composition, color, line, light and dark values, perspective, etc. to name a few. My art history background has given me an understanding of these elements and of their importance in painting. At this time I have no idea where my painting will take me and it all seems to be a long, on-going process of trial and error. However, I am finding that the search is an exciting one!

I decided to use Giverny as the theme for my M.A. exhibit for a number of reasons. Last year while painting I found that I had success with my work when I painted a "series" of one subject. By repetition, I found that I gained an in-depth understanding of the object. I first realized this while painting the plants in my kitchen window. Starting with a photograph of

the window, I made a number of watercolor sketches and then followed up with several acrylic paintings on canvas. I used the photographs only as a reference for the light source, perspective and color. As my paintings progressed, I no longer referred to the photograph. Claude Monet had spent years painting with this series method in order to understand the effects of light on subjects at different times of day. With his haystacks, Rouen Cathedral and especially Giverny, Monet had painted a series of parts of the garden: the lily pond, the Japanese foot bridge, the house, etc.

In addition, I chose Giverny as my subject because of my love for the work of the Impressionist painters. I never enter the Jeu de Paume Museum without excitement and each time I find something new in Cezanne's still lifes, Monet's cathedrals or Degas' dancers. I never fail to stand in awe before Manet's "Dejeuner sur l'Herbe." The more I paint, the closer I look at the paintings of the great masters and each time I find something which I had not seen before. I have looked at a great range of art through the years and invariably I always "go back to" Impressionism. I can only explain this by simply saying that Impressionism is a source of great happiness to me. Mostly, I enjoy the subject matter: the landscapes, the smiling faces, the feeling of music, the sunlight on objects.

One must admire the Impressionists. They proved that it was possible for painters to break the monopoly of the Paris

Salon by organizing successful shows of their own on a regular basis. Additionally, their color, line and brushstrokes freed painting from traditional Western standards and they introduced a new style of painting. They paved the way to modern art and made the journey easier for all of us.

I decided that I wanted to paint Giverny, not in order to copy Monet, but I wanted to experience the joy of painting Giverny as Monet had. I could not spend much time there physically, but I did try to capture the garden and area in my photographs. This has enabled me, as I paint, to better recall and feel the essence of the garden as I record it on my canvas.

Grant Hargate, Dean Eckert and John Wehmer (all instructors in painting) have been very helpful during my study at Lindenwood-- all three have been willing to critique my work often and to make suggestions and give me advice. I could have been influenced by their varied styles of painting, but I believe that each of them has encouraged me to continue to work in my own style. Each instructor, in his own way, has given me a great deal of interest and encouragement and I sincerely appreciate it.

There have been a number of influences on my painting that I am certainly aware of as I work. I have used the subject matter of the Impressionists (landscape) as well as the influence of sunlight and color in my paintings. Other influences that I have been aware of have been the flatness of Manet's objects in his paintings, as well as the photo-realism of Estes,

Flack and Pearlstein. There are probably a number of stylistic influences in my work of which I am not conscious. However, in spite of various influences, I feel that I have developed a style of my own. I have wanted my work to have an "up" feeling about it. Giverny was a special place that I found beautiful and I simply want to present it to the viewer as I saw it. If there is an obscure meaning there, it might be that I have found a "paradise" still existing where we might, for a few hours, escape from our cares.

In this project I have set up a number of problems for myself. I did not want to be influenced by Monet's work while painting, so I tried to look at his work as little as possible. Since I could not paint on location, I had only photographs for reference. At times it was difficult painting a spring scene in the Autumn or painting tulips in the studio during the dead of winter. I needed to refer to my photographs, but tried to use them as little as possible, because I didn't want my work to look impressionistic nor did I want it to look photographic. There was often the problem of reaching the middle ground.

I decided to use acrylic paint on canvas as my medium. I had used oil in the past but felt that acrylic was newer--another departure from impressionistic techniques--and I liked the brilliance of the color. Also, I liked the fact that acrylic paint dries quickly and this enabled me to work very rapidly. I was often able to finish even a large painting (forty-eight by

fifty inches) in two or three days and I like the free, spontaneous look of my work.

Since I was also taking a drawing class while I was painting, I began experimenting with pastels in the class. At that time I was having a real struggle with drawing, feeling very inadequate in my drawing skills. This particular class was very structured and I found the subject matter boring. I wanted to continue drawing from the Giverny theme, but the instructor, Mr. Wehmer, disagreed, not wanting me to use photographs. I was drawing from still life with pastels (a new medium for me) and wanting to rub and blend the pastels into the paper. My instructor insisted that I "not rub." Unhappy and frustrated, I went into the adjoining studio alone and taped a very large piece of drawing paper onto the wall and began drawing a scene of Giverny with pastels. I did not rub! Finding that I was getting some rich shadows from the violets, blues and reds, I let the colors of the chalk blend together on the paper. My work began to take on a free and exciting quality about it and I began to enjoy drawing for the first time. Mr. Wehmer was pleased with the outcome of my work. He won his point, as I had not rubbed the pastel into the paper. On the other hand, I was pleased with my drawing and with being able to continue with the Giverny theme. I produced four handsome drawings for my exhibit and felt that I had learned a number of important lessons in the drawing class.

As I've worked, I've found that the larger the canvas, the easier it is to express myself. At first, I was very intimidated

by a large canvas, but this didn't last long and I enjoy painting "big." One of my paintings is five feet by eight feet and I have just completed a hinged four-part folding screen which is eighty inches by eighty inches. Now I think it would be exciting to be able to paint the garden in actual human scale.

Also, I find that I am thinking of ways other than painting on conventional canvas. I want to experiment more with hinged screens or panels. I have experimented with painting on glass mirrors and would like to incorporate actual three-dimensional objects into my pictures. I like the idea of building a quasi three-dimensional environment to accompany my paintings. At the present time I am very impressed with Jennifer Bartlett who incorporates some of these ideas into her work.

I look forward to the exhibition of my work with excitement and anticipation. The idea of putting together a show is much more motivating to me than painting "piecemeal." I like the process of organizing a show: planning a theme for the exhibition, executing the paintings, framing and displaying the work, designing the invitations, planning the menu for the reception, etc. I feel that this preparation is also an important part of the creative process. Perhaps this is why I enjoy Christo's work. It seems to me that making all of the arrangements for his projects, plus the details and the negotiating of the work would be fascinating.

In It is my hope that I will be able to continue my work
 next year with the same interest and motivation. There is so
 much more I would like to do that new ideas for work material-
 ize each day! I realize that I need much more training and in-
 struction, especially in the area of drawing with special
 attention to figure drawing and perspective. I do hope to get
 back to watercolor again and regret that I have not had the
 time this year to develop my skills in this interesting medium.
 In the meantime I am encountering some of those same feel-
 ings I experienced while working with pottery a few years ago.
 I am again going through that process of "clearing out the mind"
 in order to truly concentrate as I work; thinking of nothing
 but the paint and canvas before me. Again, there are never
 enough hours in the day and during those wonderful hours in
 the studio when "everything is working right" I feel a pride
 and satisfaction in my work. However, that nagging urge is
 always present--the urge which makes me anxious for tomorrow's
 arrival in order to have another chance to make my art better
 than it is today. And once again I find myself retreating into
 that comfortable, old familiar "room of my own" where I have
 found the freedom to be creative. room of one's own."

CONCLUSION

In concluding, I would like to point out some important lessons which have contributed to my growth both as an individual and as an artist. I am no longer afraid (as I once was) of failure. I have learned that failure results from the rejection of new thoughts and I believe that failure is simply never trying. I also believe that success is simply the willingness to try. Therefore, as long as my mind and my art are open to try new ideas, new methods, new people, new places, etc. I cannot fail. Success is mine!

I also have learned that, as a woman, in order to be creative, I need both security and freedom. I have found financial security through my family, my personal salary and the sale of my art work. My freedom has come about by realizing that I needed my own "room" in which to grow. I once felt guilty about longing for a space of my own until I realized that a man has his office, a child his play room, even a dog his house; then why shouldn't a woman have a room of her own? So my freedom has come through finding my own space in a number of ways and locations. Yes, I do understand Virginia Woolf's advice. The security and freedom which have contributed to my creativity and growth have come through "money and a room of one's own."