

## December OPAA Art*Walks*, Suzan Noyes

*“The greatest gift is a portion of thyself,”* Ralph Waldo Emerson

It’s mid-November. Serious winds have blown in from the west. I cringe as pine cones hit the roof and limbs crash in our yard, wonder why we ever bought into a grove of 200-foot firs. Awaiting the next thump, I remind myself of my previous OPAA column on gratitude. I AM grateful to be here...don’t want a tree through my roof though.

Tree-loving Druids observed Solstice and seasonal rites called “Yule”; thank them for the custom of bringing evergreens indoors to celebrate. The early Church adapted some practices to help yank in the newly-Christianized, introducing a revised concept of *Christmas*.

December has become synonymous with gifts. I’m unsure when gift-giving became necessary this month, though gifting is standard throughout most cultures. Check out Potlatch among tribal traditions in our own state and Canada, the ultimate in gift-giving. Maybe people just like to give presents. This might be one really nice thing in our favor, considering all the other nasty things we do to each other.

During this Covid-holiday, our re-elected Governor has shut down the state again for four weeks. I don’t blame him, rates in Washington are soaring. We’re over 450 cases in Clallam – three deaths as I write - how dear were those lives to someone? My husband points out that we are relatively safe here, unlike a large metropolis. We have relatives and close friends in other states and large cities, I’ve not seen my eighty-year old sister or my brother in a year. While I’m not happy about it, travel isn’t in my future. On purpose. Gifts. The gift of life for sure. Does it get any more meaningful than this?

Every artist out there knows what makes us tick; we’re lucky in the knowing, having a path to follow. People in my past have gifted me unexpectedly. Do we recognize the gift when it arrives? What we give comes back in strange and mysterious ways. That’s the wonderful thing about it. OPAA board member and Parliamentarian **Linda Stadtmiller** offers a thoughtful story:

“As an artist, I thought the worst thing would be losing the use of my left hand. Upon waking from a major stroke, I found this had happened. I was devastated. During rehab in Seattle Swedish Hospital, I was visited by a gentleman who’d had a major stroke like mine.

“He handed me a stack of cards with watercolor prints on them and asked me to choose one. While I was doing that, he explained that prior to his stroke, he’d been a right-handed architect. Post-stroke, he became a left-handed watercolorist.

That short conversation became the best gift I could have received. It showed me that if *he* could adapt, so could I. My stroke took place the end of May; I finished my first right-handed painting at the end of July. It was very abstract and I loved the looseness of it.”



Hope is a true gift. Acceptance and support are too.

New board member and Secretary **Gayle Selby** shares this gift:

“When I first moved to Sequim in 2001, I was a new retiree from the California Bay area. I’d never really done any artistic or creative things in my life. I did know I wanted to capture the beauty of this area but not with photographs. I learned of a two- or three-day workshop taught by Irene Loghry at the Port Angeles Landing Mall. She was an amazing pastel artist. Thinking it was a beginner’s class, I signed up. I brought my supplies and a barn photograph to the session, quickly realizing I was surrounded by professional artists.

I wasn’t given time to be intimidated! Irene and my classmates encouraged me throughout a wonderful learning experience. The art community on the Olympic Peninsula has been the most accepting, encouraging and welcoming group I’ve ever encountered. My husband and I were members of the Landing Gallery and Port Angeles Arts Association for a number of years. We also participated in Sequim Arts and now OPAA for a number of years. What a joy to be part of this creative community – what a wonderful gift it has been and continues to be.”

New friends are prized; old friends are special in another way. President **Anne Grasteit** revives a time-worn, loyal gift that’s still ‘gifting’:

“The first Christmas memory I have is from when I was five; everything was magical! Among my presents was a brand-new Raggedy Ann doll with button eyes and a big heart. Even though she didn’t spell her name with an “e”, I literally loved her to bits. I hugged her in my most troubled times. Ann was a tear-stained rag doll by the end of my teens. I tried to gently wash

her, which sadly tore the thin cloth on her face. Her clothes got ragged and thin, her hair matted - but I never gave her up.

“During the eighties, I attended an artist’s showing of her representations of “stuffed animals” (many Winnie the Pooh pals). I commissioned her for a painting of Raggedy Ann, warts and all. The resulting work was delightful, but I asked the artist why she’d left out the flowers on Ann’s dress. She told me my painting was named “Dancing Ann”, and those flowers could be seen flying off her dress around her! The painting now hangs in our bedroom, right next to my bed, still comforting me. After 70 years, my original Ann is safely tucked away, but every now and then I take her out to hug her and tell her she’s still loved, and I swear she tells me the same thing.”



(I’m sure dolly also reminded Anne about ‘artistic license’.)

**Eva Kozun**, OPAA board Historian, shares a gift she learned:

“Years ago, with two degrees and life experience behind me, I felt I knew everything about teaching.” she said.

Eva landed a job teaching art in a public school district in Maine. Four schools – K through 6, *thirty-two classes a week*, wheeling a cart from one classroom to the next. She taught one class on simple texture, wondering if all her students would get the concept. When the finished work came in, one student (Sally) obviously had not. Eva paused, studying the tangle of lines of all colors and width piled in the center of the paper. (*Geez, poor kid – scribbling away. Time to set her straight.*)

“Tell me about your picture, Sally,” said Eva.

With a baffled, rather annoyed look on her sweet little face, Sally said, “*Shoelaces.*”

Eva says in that moment she learned volumes about art and teaching. She and Sally beamed at each other. *Art is from the heart* - a personal, unique expression. As a teacher she received a serious gift she’s never forgotten...*Arte Pela Arte* became the name of Eva’s business that year.

I wish I'd had an Eva in third grade. We were told to draw a winter picture. I colored snow-capped purple peaks – very dramatic. My teacher shot it down but didn't explain *why* to my little kid self; I was too shy to ask. Maybe I hadn't done the mountains right...? I drew the scene again, only with more purple.

“NO, no, no. This isn't a winter scene,” said *my-Not-Eva-teacher*. I looked at her, took another piece of paper and drew a dumb house, a yard and a snowman. She was fine with that. At age nine, I realized I was on my own...art from my heart was going to be different. Hey, I learned the gift of resilience! Grace hands gifts to us. Recognize the gift when it arrives, however it may be packaged.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa to all and to all a good night. A kiss under the mistletoe for Charles Dickens, please, for Victorian Christmastide, without him the vision as we know it wouldn't exist. (I'll take it up with him in the hereafter and have a good yak about gifts.) Feliz Ano Nuevo, 2021 – may it be a better year for the world.



Photos *-Linda Stadtmiller, Untitled*  
*-Anne's favorite gift*  
*- Tiffany waits for Santa*