

August OPAA ArtWALKS column, 2021, Suzan Noyes

**(Part One:)**

*“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking. Don’t settle. As with all matters of the heart, you’ll know when you find it.”* Steve Jobs

I’ve always tried that road less traveled. I know this because my parents complained a lot about my offbeat lifestyle. To be happy, artists must do what they do best and much exploration is involved in our personal artistic journeys.

Point Defiance Pottery is a true family enterprise very interconnected with their community. They deliver skillful and imaginative crafting with break-the-mold concepts. Not to mention lots of fun and whimsy, interspersed with ecological concerns. (Their children bestowed this title in reference to their home and craft. From the mouths of babes...)

Mother and artist Lark Sundsmo says inspiration comes from their environment, nature, experience and loved ones...for example, work envisioned on a family hike along Owen’s Beach, exploring along tide pools with small kidlets and their dogs.

“Our Sailor & Siren’s sculptures were inspired on how Tyler and I met – a twist to Homer’s “Odyssey”, the first truly collaborative sculpture we’d done. After experimenting and working together on ceramics for six years, this was the first piece Tyler made after a serious accident and we tag-teamed it to completion.”

Truly, the Sundsmo family tag-team everything together, kids, chores, home, their business. Much thought, heart and exercise flow into their projects.

“Our flora and fauna creations truly result from our explorations with intellectual and environmental fascinations. We’ve gone home to create whale art after listening to them sing at the beach while walking our dogs! We created “Pleasant Day in Tampa Bay” after a trip we had taken, time





spent snorkeling in the gulf, diving for scallops, swimming with dolphins, sea turtles and manatees in their home space.”

“Our many octopus-styled pieces focus on the Pacific Northwest Giant Octopus native to Puget Sound, also, many whale pieces highlighting oceanic mammals migrating through these waters – most specifically, “Tallequah’s Grief”, based on the aggrieved Orca from the Puget Sound J-Pod, which we found to be heart-breaking.”

Tyler is a potter but also clearly a sculptor using much detail in his work. I asked if he had modeled in clay as a youngster - or how else was he directed to this medium?

“I was lucky to be introduced to ceramics early on at Peninsula High School. Christine Tabor-Buchanan, my pottery instructor influenced me big-time.”

Christine still teaches at this school. (YAY for our art teachers.)

Tyler traded his pottery for a kiln, his wheel was a gift from his mother after high school graduation. Then he traded his apron for a uniform during the 9/11 disaster and joined the U.S. Navy as a Hospital Corpsman. Tyler spent five years overseas. Upon his return to Tacoma, he enrolled at Tacoma Community College on the G.I. Bill. There, he took another elective – pottery was available. Under tutelage of T.C.C. teachers Rick McAfee and Reid Ozaka, Tyler rediscovered his love for working with clay.

His potter’s wheel remains in use today, but the old trusty ’63 Crest Manual Cone Sitter kiln lay down and died last year. Tyler turned an old shed into a workspace to help handle his stress, putting in as much time as possible, self-teaching and honing his skills between work, school, and family. Tyler had little patience with glazing, rushing through it, so Lark picked up on glazing skills. They quickly began producing artwork devoured by their artistic community, while melding the couple as an artistic power-force.



Lark recalls:

“My very first project with Tyler was a lovely smooth bowl he threw. On this I painted a scene of our four-year-old daughter as a cherub with some clouds and gardens as a Christmas gift. I was curious to see how the colors played together and fired out. This was not my first-time painting pottery, though...”

Years ago, her grandmother had taken her to ceramic painting shops where Lark created things for her mother. Meanwhile, Mom brought home boxes of bisque ornaments to glaze as gifts for relatives. Lark learned early on that good color requires a good bit of glaze. When in doubt, add more, she states.

Lark had painted prior to this stage of her life. Her biggest mediums growing up were paper collages, polymer clay sculpting and painting – and watercolor evolved into acrylics. “I still paint in my non-existent spare time between raising three kids, homeschooling, and their activities, while running a household, business and studio. Our collaborative vase series, “Circe’s Sirens” and the “Anchors Aweigh” (with mermaids and sailors) were my first truly collaborative sculpture pieces with Tyler. He is incredibly talented with creatures and textures and movement. I’m better with forms, faces, and details. Between us, we’ve spent twenty-two hours taking turns entertaining kids and sculpting a project. (SN’s note, take in the lovely glazes in the attached photographs of Anchors Aweigh... wowza.) Since then, we’ve worked on several more together, as well as independent creations. We strive to create results that seamlessly blend our separate talents together.” Truly a creative and dynamic duet.



A year after collaboration on projects, they were invited to the Seattle Home and Garden Show, and the following year to the Coos Bay Maritime Art Museum’s Annual National Juried Art Show, where they’ve exhibited seven years running.

Tyler says his job as a specialized home infusion nurse allows him to balance between home, work and studio. This includes visiting and viewing shows and galleries while traveling to see patients. “When I’m not working my tail end off, I’m in my happy place with my best friend, our clay and our imaginations...and yes, maybe a bit of chaos

(inspiration?). Three kids, two dogs, a cat and a variety of birds contribute to the pandemonium that is our Sundsmo Household.”

Lark reflects that their work has taken much trial and error, but each piece is equally contrived with passion, shared debate and painfully specific execution. They appreciate what it has taken to get to this point, to create together as a team. They’ve struggled, questioning their very purpose, foundations, and drive because their art is very much part of who they are. They question if such focus detracts from or bolsters their family base - but to quit creating is about as easy as not breathing for the Sundsmos.

I’d insist: *You’re passing a loving baton to your children, much as art was passed on to each of you.*

After eight years, they’ve established a foundation, “forged in the fire of adversity and tempered into a state of flawed perfection,” adds Lark.

Like Steve Jobs said, “As with all matters of the heart, you’ll know when you find it.”

**Part Two continues in September** with the Sundsmo family of five, their imaginative design concepts and projects... love of ecology and nature.

[www.pointdefiancepottery.com](http://www.pointdefiancepottery.com) Etsy Shop: PortDefiancePottery

Work displayed in the PNW:

**Todd Fischer Gallery** 115 W. Railroad Ave. #112, Port Angeles, WA 98362

(360) 301-9391

**The Laughing Crab Gallery** 1341 Bay Street, Florence, OR 97439

(541) 521-9430

**Seattle Times**, article: Tallequah’s Grief:

<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/i-am-sobbing-mother-orca-still-carrying-her-dead-calf-16-days-later/>

**Christine Tabor-Buchanan:** <http://www.buchananfineart.com/>



### Images:

1&2) "Tallequah's Grief" (Mother Orca carried her deceased babe for over two weeks)

3) Octopus

4) Sailor & Mermaid Series - notice the glazes!

5) Illustrated plates