

September OPAA ArtWALKS Column, Suzan Noyes 2021

“Art, in itself, is an attempt to bring order out of chaos.” Stephen Sondheim

Point Defiance Pottery, Part Two:

Lately, the world leaves me feeling much like Alice in Wonderland, “We’re all mad here.” While a certain amount of chaos is healthy for creative thought, we receive a typical amount of wackiness at home and work even without global crisis. Staying focused on positive things like our creativity is a saving grace.

Take time out, turn off your TV and your phones. Ditch social media for several hours. Retreat to your studio or go take a walk in the woods. Berry picking is good for the soul – and tasty. On difficult days, I recite a microcosm/macrocosm mantra: *“I’m a small blip in time, inside an immense universe.”* For some reason, this calms me.

On that note, I return to Tyler & Lark Sundsmo of Point Defiance Pottery, who state, “We wouldn’t be here without the love and support of our friends, family and community. Each time we’ve wavered about shutting down shop, our community rallied around, encouraging us to keep creating and to achieve our potential.” Very calming, as Covid-19 cast a long shadow over their efforts to persist in their goal and artistic journey. They are grateful for support of galleries such as Todd Fischer’s in Port Angeles, which encouraged and represented them throughout the pandemic.

Like other artists, the chaos of shutdown offered time to experiment with new methods of creative projects. Fountains and planters... along with experiments in home-gardening, family activities like old movie night with too much popcorn, and sourdough starter and a new website.



While revisiting Tyler and Lark’s coping mechanisms (available to a family of five), I confess to curiosity over how much of their children’s input and ideas take root in their parent’s approach to pottery.

Tyler shares some thoughts: “When we first began, whatever we did they wanted to be part of. For small kids, it was a matter of giving them a job they could do without it becoming disastrous. We can’t even explain how many times our projects were thwarted by childlike curiosity or glee for sensory play. Fingers poked through drying pieces. Finished pottery on the wheel, launched across the

room. Chocolate-chip ice cream painted across a glazed masterpiece. (And one confused kid over why the treat was no longer edible.) We survived.”

They never targeted their children’s creative efforts, even in the heat of frustrated moments.

Their personal motto is: “We’ll make it better next time...it’s just time logged in the saddle; we’ll be better for it.” Lark touts a book about Jim Henson’s art titled, “*Make Art, Make Money*”, by Elizabeth Hyde Stevens, which does a great job explaining this theory.

A framed corkboard wall displays their children’s artwork, along with Pablo Picasso’s quote, “*Every child is an artist,* (The rest of the quote says, “*...until they’re told otherwise.*”

Early on, Lark took a position as a painting instructor at a local gallery, teaching adults to copy paintings step by step. The biggest take-away from this experience for her was about giving permission to create. “So many adults are scarred by past comments that *merit* alone is the point of creating – which revokes permission to ever set paint to canvas.” She stresses the importance of taking the journey, not fixating on the outcome. “When you view art, you’re looking at hours and days and weeks of failure, emotional breakdowns, also triumphs - resulting in a finished work.”



Tyler describes the fun helping the children’s creativity come to life. “When they were just tiny, beginning to use crayons and markers, Lark would draw outlines of their favorite cartoon characters or dragons or mermaids for them to color in. These ended up on their gallery wall. Then they’d ask me to make a clay frog – but they’d pitch in and help build it for something of their own to glaze and fire. We learned early on to always have things on hand for their projects.”

This evolved as the children grew, with Lark on the sidelines of basketball courts, football/soccer fields, pools, camps, etc., sketching images in her purse sketch book, pictures later printed, made into silk screens. “We’re teaching the kids how to personalize these silk screen images,” she adds, “learning the process of modifying images, adding their own artistic touches.”

Presently, Tyler is teaching Lark more about turning clay on the wheel as she expands his interest in the painting/glazing process. “We’re both getting pretty good,” she says.

The very last step in all their ceramics is one clear coat adding a glossy finish to Point Defiance completed pottery. This glaze is a thick coat over all that careful painting. Their young ones loved doing this and quickly learned a light hand, turning each finished piece into a true family product. “We traveled to our first museum exhibit as a family,” says Lark. “Our six-year-old immediately spotted our ceramic tureen and hauled it off the pedestal. We thought the curator would have a heart attack. She had no idea how many times our daughter had handled it at home.”



That little girl began a ceramic jewelry business at ten, sometimes outselling Mom & Dad at art festivals. Always, she donated a percentage to her favorite recue organizations and shelters. “Today, she’s a talented teenaged digital artist, jewelry and costume-maker,” says Lark. “She sells her NFT (non-fungible token) art online and in person and works as hard as any adult at festivals, shows, and during crunch time over distributions.”

For the very first fountain the family made during the pandemic, their daughter sculpted a common Western Banded Gecko. (These scurry around the family gardens, so she had a serious grip on styling the gecko.)



“Several people thought it was real,” says Lark.

Their children’s enthusiasm and participation has evolved over the years.

Their involvement is self-inclined. Tyler and Lark don’t force the issue. Their eldest is now fourteen and sometimes friends and play take top priority. Parents stress that the projects their children do participate in are compensated generously. It remains a Mom and Pop business, and they juggle much.



The immediacy of their lives engenders a certain amount of chaos. Weeks away from the studio for mom stuff, ambulance rides, emergency surgeries, a brief hospital stay for one kid while another announces a major weighing-grade project due tomorrow. Or it's a holiday wherein the cat goes missing, culminating in search and rescue and a whopping vet bill. And no clean laundry (including team jerseys for tomorrow's game) because filling the kiln by one p.m. was also a priority. But, hey...if your new website just got launched that morning and your ceramics shop just scored a great venue you've lusted after for years...doesn't it simply put you over the moon?

Lark says, "Juggling means getting the max from watching your kids grow, building a home with your teammate, partner and best friend. Indulging in the many facets making up a colorful and fabulous life."

That says it all.



www.pointdefiancepottery.com Etsy Shop: PointDefiancePottery

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

FYI: a related article/TIME about digital art sales (online) , *"Teen artists making millions on NFT's"*

<https://time.com/6093982/nft-art-teens-money/>