
Honors Projects and Presentations: Undergraduate

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Till Death Do We Art: Monologues in Reflection on Art and Career

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Introduction

Hello, fellow artists!

You may not think of yourself as an artist right now, but I hope after reading this book, you will. We tend to think of artists as the painters, musicians, and dancers of the world. But what about chemists? What about doctors? What about cosmetologists, blacksmiths, and librarians? We are all artists of a kind--we just share different types of art with the world. I believe that every discipline has a level of creativity, intuition, and aesthetics that allow its practitioners to be considered artists.

My interest in this topic was piqued in my junior year of college while pursuing a BFA in Musical Theatre. I took a History of Modern Science class with Dr. Ted Davis at Messiah University, and his commentary on the interaction of science and the arts made me question the rigid definition of art that had previously existed in my mind. I noticed that we tend to have an “us versus them” mentality when it comes to the arts and sciences—you’re either one or the other, but never both. I started to believe that the distinction wasn’t as black and white as I had previously thought; there’s a lot of art

in science, and a lot of science in the arts. My interest in this topic began to include not just the sciences, but a whole host of other disciplines as well. I began to look for the art in history, linguistics, and any other career that I could think of.

Spring of my junior year I was sent home from school due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Needless to say, I had lots of time to think in quarantine. While the pandemic definitely brought a lot of togetherness in some ways (more time with family, greater connection over distances) it also brought a lot of vocational division; there seemed to be a lot of hard feelings over which jobs were considered essential and which were not. I began to see art as a cure, a connecting thread among the disciplines; something that could bring unity and healing. When we identify only with our own discipline, we close ourselves off from each other. But when we think of ourselves as part of a greater community of artists, each pursuing different types of canvas and medium, we can find unity.

During quarantine, I began developing a theatre performance of song and monologue vignettes centering on this topic. The show was called *Till Death Do We Art*, and was performed at Messiah University in November of 2020. That experience

inspired me to continue researching this topic, and I decided to write this collection of monologue vignettes on the interdisciplinary nature of art. Each monologue is from the perspective of a different kind of professional, sharing about the artistic nature of their work. While some of the monologues were written from my own research, many of them were derived from interviews and personal testimonies from different kinds of professionals. See the acknowledgments section at the back of this book for a full list of those who shared their stories with me. This book would not be possible without them!

Whether you are an actor searching for new monologues, a scholar interested in this topic, or an avid reader browsing for a new book to curl up with on a rainy day, thank you for taking the time to read this, and thank you for all the ways you share your art with the world. Life would be a little less colorful without your contribution. I hope you finish this book appreciative of your skill, and empowered to share your art of choice with the world.

With best regards and warmest appreciation,
Rachel

The Teacher

When a student gave me an apple for the first time, I kept it on my desk so long that it started to rot. At first it was the gesture that I appreciated. Knowing that your students appreciate you and enjoy your class means so much, it just...it never gets old. But the longer that apple sat on my desk, the more I realized that it actually reminded me of my students. When you look at apples, at first glance they look very similar, right? They're always either red or green, they're similarly shaped, they're similarly sized, they usually have a little stem. But have you ever seen an apple in the sun? When the sunlight came through my window, it would fall across the apple on my desk, and the apple would be unrecognizable. Suddenly you could see all of its nuances of color—the highlights and shadows, the places it looks hand painted. You can see any marks or scars it has, as well as the intricacies and variances that makes it unique and beautiful. Well, my students follow that same pattern. On the first day of kindergarten they come in, small and nervous and in a similar state of hesitation and uncertainty. They have similar insecurities and similar apprehension about this exciting yet new environment. And as their teacher, it's my responsibility to shed some sunlight on them, to

make sure that their distinctions, insecurities, and strengths are seen, heard, and valued.

That is easier said than done. I always say that a teacher isn't just a teacher—a teacher is a teacher, but also an artist. A teacher has to be a creative genius in order to fulfill her role well. A teacher has to read the room and surmise the academic, physical, emotional, and social needs of each child, and then create an atmosphere that fulfills all of those things. A teacher has to be an artist; a visionary. A teacher knows *what* she must teach, but has to use some creativity to figure out the *how*. Every classroom is different because every teacher is a different kind of artist, weaving each child's personality and needs together like a unique tapestry that expresses the individuality of the class. It's a hard job. But it's so rewarding.

When a child finally lets you in—when they tell you about their pet that's died, or show you their wiggly tooth; when they share with you about their new stepmother or their best friend that's moving away, they are giving you the best gift they have to offer. Their trust. And as a teacher, I don't take that lightly. Sure, my responsibility is to teach them academics; to send them off to higher grades with a firm foundation in numbers and literacy. But there's so much more than that. As a teacher, my highest

obligation is to make sure those kiddos turn out to be the best *people* they can be, regardless of whatever academic track they choose to take. During their year in my class, I hope they grow in confidence, in self-awareness, and in social and emotional intelligence. I hope they make friends and learn that it's okay to be vulnerable and that it's okay to make mistakes. I hope they understand that it's okay to be like an apple that's a little bruised from life knocking it around so many times—because it's those very bruises that make us unique and strong and beautiful.

The relationships you make with your students are priceless. To know I've been a small part of changing their life for the better. And more importantly, to know they've changed mine. And they do! Every single one of them. Even the ones who are challenging at first. *Those* kids—I *love* those kids. Getting them to open up to you is—an art. Really, it is, it's an art. It's a skill; it's a craft. It takes practice and consistency and creative reasoning. It takes empathy and listening skills and a hearty dose of patience. But it's so worth it. My sister thinks I'm ridiculous. She says to me, “Sandy, you teach a kindergarten class. You're not exactly Confucius.” And, I suppose she's right. I don't expect to change the world. But if, because of me, a

couple of little apples grow to be comfortable in their own skin...it's all worth it.



The Historian

I'm a historian, so I guess it would be appropriate for me to start with the historical reasons for why history can be considered an art. Every discipline has an art to it, and history is no exception. The word *history* comes from the Greek word *istoria* which means "inquiry." We inquire into the past—specifically, we inquire into the human world of the past. We don't study pure facts, we study human intentions, emotions, and events. We locate documents and strive to read the past; we locate photographs and strive to hear its voices. Until time machines are invented, we won't have the ability to go back and see the past, but we recover and reconstruct it as accurately as we can. Even so, we know there will be gaps in our knowledge because the past cannot be absolute; the past is made of people who are never absolute. Therefore, we don't try to prove the past in an analytical way. We have to get creative. History is the art of interpretation; we have to learn to fill in the gaps as best we can. Just like art, history is subjective—although informed and well-researched, with history you are still just getting someone's interpretation of what happened. That's the beauty of history: it's not just the study of facts, but the art of ideas surrounding those facts.

Our historical ideas have to be original. When we choose a topic to research, we're like songwriters considering what new message they have that they think the world needs to hear. We consider a historical subject that we think has been underserved, and look for an untold story to share with the world. Historians are artists because we envision something the past may hold, and then share our original ideas about it. Just like artists, there's no guarantee that our work will be well received--but our work becomes pointless if it isn't shared. A writer doesn't write something, keep it to himself, and believe that it is art. Then it would just be a journal entry. Art requires sharing and human interaction. It's just the same with history, it can only exist in a shared context.

I don't just interact with those I'm sharing my research with. Primarily, I interact with the past. It isn't enough to just know facts about the past; it has to be an interaction, a dance. We transport ourselves to an earlier world and inhabit it for awhile—get to know the lay of the land, and get to know its characters. I feel like I know the people I'm researching and writing about. It's like an actor comes to know their character inside and out and revels in their similarities and differences—historians do the same thing, but our

“characters” really lived. We get to know them, walk in their shoes a bit, and make judgements about them. We have to have a conversation with them and they come alive in our minds, sharing their stories. As historians, we want to encourage others to interact with each story, too. It’s my job to weave a narrative that nudges my audience to interact with the past themselves. My goal is to help people have their own conversation with the past rather than having that conversation for them. There are lots of lessons to be learned from the past, but the lessons learned from person to person may vary. In our inquiry, others may ask different questions of the past than I do. This is another reason that history may be considered an art: it is abstract, and there is often more than one correct answer.

Because of this ambiguity, history relies on feeling and intuition rather than dry facts. History is a *deeply* feeling discipline. Just like a dancer can crank out a set of pirouettes on demand because they know their body and find their center, as a historian I stay on track because I *just know* my discipline. I know when something doesn’t sound right or when there’s something deeper there, and this is because I use my intuition and impulses which have been trained for my craft. There’s definitely an aesthetic quality to it as well. It’s like I can see the past, and I understand when I’ve found a

pattern or stumbled across something that needs to be pieced together. There's an art to knowing where to look next to follow the story.

We talk about needing a muse to inspire our art and creative endeavors—but did you know that the ancient Greeks had a muse specifically designated for history? Her name was Clio. Just like an artist, I lean in to the muse and can feel when she's speaking. Sometimes she doesn't. I don't have full control because it goes beyond me—but I've learned to see the past. My job is to help others see it too. Artists can see things that others can't see, and that's why people come to see their art: because it's original and brings light to feelings and events that previously felt unknown. In history we do the same thing. We give eyes to the blind and make known the unknowable. Yet sometimes I feel unknown. I'm alone a lot. I spend hours locked in a room poring over manuscripts, years researching and writing about discoveries I've made on my own...I'm alone so much that I should feel lonely and yet I don't. The shadows of the past are enough to keep me company. Like Virgil guiding Dante into a different world, I hope to guide others into the world of the past.

The Fireman

Everyone thinks firefighting is some harsh, rough-and-tumble thing, and I guess it is in a sense. But it's so much more than that. It's calculated and skillful; it's an art. I grew up very aware of that fact.

I decided to be a fireman when I was, I dunno, maybe 6? It's a family trade. My father was a fireman, and his father before him. We joke that when our ancestors got off the boat at Ellis Island, they headed straight for the station. I'm at Ladder Company 3, over at East 108th and 13th—have been for, let's see...20 years now? Yeah, it'll be 20 years in January. The attacks on 9/11 happened my very first year, and man, let me tell you, that was a startling introduction to what it means to be a fireman. No warning, no warm-up. Just bam, here you are, a kid still wet behind the ears, and you gotta learn fast. But I learned first hand, from the best there ever were. Those guys were artists—skilled at their craft, knowledgeable of their medium.

After 9/11 happened we went into the schools pretty often, talkin' to the kids about fire safety and whatnot. Stop, drop, and roll, don't play with

matches, develop an evacuation plan—you know, all the basics. Most of the kids looked up to us. Sweet kids, you know? They wanted to try on the hats, hold the equipment. They looked to us as heroes. But it didn't take me very long to realize that most of them enjoyed the spectacle of it more than anything else. They wanted to know how many people we'd saved, or how many scrapes with death we'd had. They'd ask if we had any burns or scars from our work, or how many miles per hour we could drive the trucks. So I'd make it a point to tell these kids no, you've got it all wrong. You've got some fantasy of what firefighting is but you gotta know the truth, and it isn't as pretty. It's not some man-versus-wild, brute force battle against the elements... it's an art that we practice with skill and precision, because we know that lives depend on it. It's an art that we give our lives to preserving and practicing. It's an art that we sacrifice for, and that our personal lives suffer for. Firefighting is missing your daughter's dance recital cause a stranger lit a candle too close to a paper towel roll and forgot about it. Firefighting is long nights at the station when you know your wife's at home eating dinner alone for the third time this week. Firefighting is 24 hour shifts. Firefighting is life or death. Firefighting is losing a buddy on either side of you and wondering why you were the one who lived. So no, it's not romantic. But it's beautiful, I'll give ya that.

Firefighting is an art just like painting, or writing, or singing. You spend your whole life learning all you can and doing your best to practice, hone your skill, and perfect your craft—even though you know you never could. Just like any artist, you have to know your medium. You have to know the tools and materials you're working with, and how to manipulate them in a way that brings about your desired result. It's takes the arts of proper communication, application of skill, timing precision, and accurate performance. We're trained to respond to a situation intuitively, no matter what's goin' on with us. But unlike art, failure doesn't just mean feeble applause and unhappy critics. It means a child dead in your arms. Your success isn't measured by your name up in lights, or your face on a poster, or whether you make a bestselling author's list. Your success is a person living to tell their story, whether or not they ever remember your name. Firefighting is an art with the highest stakes possible. It's a discipline you give your whole life to—or you give your whole life *for*. It's a discipline that you master, or die trying.

The Scientist

A lot of people think there's this divide between art and science. If you're a scientist you're not an artist, and vice versa. I used to think the same way when I was a kid. In high school, I thought of myself as such a science guy. I was the president of the geology club. I led a book club that exclusively read the works of the early scientists, Newton, Galileo...that was my scene. I saw the band kids, and the theatre kids, and I thought they were so different. Like we couldn't have a thing in common. Science is science and art is art, and there's no connection, that's what I thought.

Well, I think that's a childish perspective. This isn't high school anymore. Part of growing up is realizing you're wrong. Now I've grown up. And I'm a scientist. A chemist. An artist. I've spent a lot of my career so far doing scientific research. And let me tell you, scientific research is an art. To me, it is the art of discovery. We scientists have a unique way of making those discoveries: the scientific method. The method is an art in itself, really; it takes curiosity, creativity, and the ability to think outside the box. It takes a ton of originality—nobody is going to be interested in your work if you have nothing new to say. Just like

an artist must develop a new concept to share with the world, a scientist must develop new perspectives, must present new knowledge to the world. We must come up with creative solutions to address current problems. An artist sees the problems in society and paints a picture of a better future, right? They create something that will help humanity be the best version of itself. That may happen through comedy, through drama, through realism, impressionism, satire. But at heart, all art plucks at the same strings: it shows humanity how it could be even better. Well isn't that what a scientist does? Everything we research is with the intention of creating a brighter world; a more hopeful image of humanity. It's a shame, isn't it, that our work is displayed in academic journals, but never on a canvas?

As a chemist, my work is published in articles, and words alone aren't good enough—we depend on drawings interspersed with the text. I have to show the molecules as I discuss them, and the result is that my scientific research becomes an artistic composition; a visual representation of my discovery which is aesthetically beautiful. Each of my articles is like a painting—I hope very much for an appreciative audience. Just like an artist, my work draws upon symbolism. I use arrows and lines

to symbolize the chemical transformations that are occurring.

I think that's another thing that makes chemistry an art: the process of transformation. At heart, that's what all art is. Take some paints and transform them into a painting on canvas, take some actors and transform them into characters in a play. All art is transformation: something taken and made into something else. Well, chemists are always changing one thing into another thing. That's the essence of our job. It is an art because we use that transformation to create things. Our things may be more practical, sure; but we are still creating. We create plastic, medicines, cosmetics, you name it. They may be functional products, but they are created products all the same.

We design experiments to help us in this transformative process, these experiments that are these beautiful works of art; they challenge our assumptions and give us a glimpse into the artwork of the cosmos. Scientific research isn't as straightforward, black and white as you may believe. Sometimes we make the discovery we hope for, but lots of times we simply make a discovery of a different sort. Just like art, science is a process. That process, that craft is never wasted, even if the finished product falls short. There is creativity in

that trial and error, and even if our hypothesis is proven wrong, we've learned something. We've learned something about our assumptions, and about ourselves.

The Chef

In my school district, growing up, we didn't start formal art classes until junior high. I have no idea why...I guess budget cuts. But I think I turned out alright. You might be pitying me, thinking that for most of my formative years I was deficient in the knowledge or practice of any fine art. But that's not true! I developed all the artistic sensibilities I needed right at home, cooking with my mom. We cooked together every single day. Sometimes twice a day, actually, if we felt inclined to bake up a late night dessert. She always said to me, "Emmaline, never forget that you are an artist. The plate is your canvas. The spatula is your paintbrush; the oven your kiln. Spices and flavors are your colors—blend them together in an original way, and make a new masterpiece." I didn't know quite what she meant by that. I was so young at the time, and all I really cared about was whether or not I got to lick the spoon. I think it was one of those things that you don't fully process at the time, but looking back it means a lot because you realize that it formed you, whether you realized it or not. I do consider myself an artist. I create things that are not only tasty, but that are beautiful.

When I finally started art class in 7th grade, my teacher, Miss Walters, told us to bring in a piece of art for show and tell on our first day of class. Most kids brought in photos of the Mona Lisa or something. I brought in a cake. At first Miss Walters thought that perhaps I had misunderstood the assignment, but I hadn't. The cake had flowers on it, and autumn leaves. It was visually beautiful—cooking and baking are all about the presentation. And just like any good piece of art, that cake had meaning. And it evoked feelings. To me, that cake meant the start of the school year, the start of junior high. The leaves maturing in color and flying off to their next stage of life, just like my classmates and I were. It represented the season we were in, environmentally and internally. And when I handed out the pieces, one by one, to each person, it evoked feelings of togetherness. Feelings of solidarity. Feelings that although we were young and awkward and afraid of growing up, that we would grow up together. And we could celebrate that, on our very first day of junior high, with that cake.

Anyway, I'm not sure Miss Walters agreed that my cake was fine art. If she had, I think my grade would have been better. But you know—Miss Walters was a painter. I wonder if her opinion would have been different if she'd been a baker. Or

a cook. Or at least tried to be every now and then. If she'd had to create something that took practice and skill to exact; something that she poured over to make aesthetically appealing, that she slaved over to convey a certain feeling or idea, that she agonized over until its various elements blended, stunningly and seamlessly—and on top of that, she needed to make it edible?! I think Miss Walters would have had a different opinion. But seeing as she didn't, there was more cake for us.



The Social Worker

Social work is getting to know people; social work is caring for them. Social work is collaborating with others to imagine a healthier, happier lifestyle—and then helping them develop the tools to achieve it. Social Work is art. No, really. It is. What classifies something as art? I'm not sure what your definition is—art is a highly individualized experience—but personally, I consider a piece of art to be something that reflects the human experience; something that gives me some hope to keep on living. Even if it's a sad piece, if it beckons to me of the shared experience of human sorrow then that brings me hope. And that makes it art. Well, a social worker's entire job is to join in the human experience, and to come up with creative solutions that bring that experience closer to what it was intended to be. So, a social worker is an artist because they are an inspirer of hope, even in the darkness.

I think that in a way, everybody is an artist. Each of us is born with a blank canvas, and with each decision we make and choice that we choose, we are adding color to our canvas and crafting our lives into a unique kind of masterpiece. And social workers play a special role in that. A social worker is like a master artist, helping in the formation of

the other pieces so that they come out the way their respective artists have envisioned. A social worker is an artist because they rely on intuition and emotional cues to come up with creative and original solutions that fix problems and meet needs. A social worker is an artist because they listen to understand, and to respond with sensitivity to the expression of another. Social work is personal, not mechanical. It is emotion based, not objective. There is not one correct approach—a lot of it comes down to intuition, good judgement, and personal style. Social workers reflect the beauty of life, and contemplating its meaning is all in a day's work. Social workers are artists because they are creators of beauty; brainstormers and problem solvers, inspirers of hope and dreamers of dreams.

The Linguist

What's the difference between *tenacious* and *stubborn*? Between *Curious* and *nosy*? *Selective* and *picky*? Similar meanings, different connotations. What's the difference between a house and a home? A commitment and an obligation? A dream and a fantasy? Similar definitions, different meanings. What's the difference between a Linguist and an Artist? That's a trick question. There isn't one. Linguists don't just study the meanings of words—we are experts in the art of communication. We don't just translate things literally—we capture the essence of what has been said. Sure, part of language is mechanical. A good deal of it, in fact. But it is not purely mechanical—because words carry ideas. Words carry feelings. Words carry culture. Words carry both text and subtext.

Everyone says that my niece Katrina has “artistic sensibilities.” What does that mean exactly? She's six, by the way. Everyone says to her parents, “oh she is just darling. So mature, so sensitive. Real artistic sensibilities.” Her teachers, her Girl Scout leader, her friends' parents—they all say it. So what are they getting at? Well, if you met my niece you'd know. She is highly expressive, and highly attuned to the expression of others. Once her Kindergarten

teacher greeted the class with a feignedly vivacious “Good morning, everybody!” and Katrina responded with, “Is it really a good morning Mrs. Larson? Cause your voice says so but your eyebrows say something different.” For her sixth birthday, I took her to the orchestra and she said, “Uncle Bobby, I think the person who wrote that first song felt trapped by their circumstances. That’s why they made the violins so screechy.” I nearly spit out the water I’d just sipped. At the age of six, Katrina is already an expert in understanding human expression, and communicating that understanding effectively. And that’s what all art is, if you boil it all down. Art is all about expression—self-expression, expression of a particular community, or expression of a particular group of people. Artists create something to express a certain message, idea, or feeling. And it takes someone with “artistic sensibilities”—an artist in their own right—to understand that and to respond to that.

Well, language is all about expression and communication. Language is an art that takes another artist to understand. As a linguist, it’s my job to make sense of what has been said or written. To look at words and interpret them in a way that is not only mechanically correct and truthful, but in a way understands and responds to the act of

expression that has been given to me. It takes artistic sensibilities...it takes an *artist* to do that. It takes an artist to craft words that correctly correspond to an idea or sentiment. It takes an artist to look at symbols on paper and derive meaning from them. It takes an artist to see behind the words to the culture and context that they represent. So yes, I'm a linguist and yes, I'm an artist, and no, those things are not mutually exclusive. They're actually quite inclusive. Although I will admit...as far as artists go, Katrina might have me beat.

The Doctor

In Classical Greece, doctors were considered to be practitioners of the “Medical Arts.” We think of it as a science today, but especially in the ancient world, it was thought of as an art. Hippocrates certainly thought so. One of my favorite quotes of his says, “Wherever the art of Medicine is loved, there is also a love of Humanity.” I consider myself to be an artist because of how human my discipline is. Sure, some of my job is factual and scientific. But at the end of the day, it’s all about the relationship with my patients. My job is to bring healing, and how can I do that if my patients don’t feel like they can tell me what’s wrong? Before I can delve into the science of my job, I have to practice my art. I have to welcome my patients, establish our relationship, give them a safe space where they feel free to open up and share what’s going on in their lives. I have to treat them with warmth, respect, and dignity so that they see me as a confidante, an ally, and a trusted partner on their journey to healing and wellness.

My craft is not exact. It requires a lot of skill and practiced intuition. In one morning I may see two different patients who present with the same symptoms but have drastically different causes. In

one afternoon I may see two patients who present with drastically different symptoms that come from the same cause. Some patients are great at describing their symptoms in detail—others take a lot of prodding. Sometimes there's multiple causes for a particular ailment and most of the time the answer is not immediately obvious. It takes lots of intuition to get to the root of the problem; you really have to know what questions to ask, and how to establish trust by demonstrating care and sensitivity. Patient care has to be individualized. It's an interpretive art, really—the patient speaks and I listen, translating their verbal descriptions to a tangible medical cause. It's not black and white, it takes a lot of practice. And as a doctor, I'm never finished learning. I will continue to hone my skill until the day I stop practicing medicine. That reminds me of another one of my favorite Hippocrates quotes: "Life is so short, the craft so long to learn."



The Cosmetologist

I'm a cosmetologist, and I think most people would agree that there's a lot of art to my work.

Cosmetology relies on creativity—the face, hair, and nails are my canvas and it's my job to make them beautiful. I've been trained to know what is visually appealing, and my work is all about the presentation. I guess the difference between me and a traditional artist is that I'm just enhancing the beauty that's already there. As cosmetologists we are trailblazers, innovators, and trend-setters. We utilize texture, facial symmetry, depth, and angles to our advantage, and we communicate through color.

It isn't just about the aesthetic, though. It isn't just about beauty. It's about sharing a particular style, a particular message, or a particular attitude. That's what makes me an artist. I can't tell you how many people come to me when they want some help turning over a new leaf, starting a new phase of life, or connecting to a new side of themselves. Lots of girls making the transition from high school to college come to me over the summer, looking for a more mature cut. Men and women come looking for something professional when they make a career change, and teenagers come looking for wild colors

and edgy styles to represent their newfound freedom and blossoming identities.

Cosmetology is art because it is self-expression. Well, self-expression of the client. It's like a painter getting a commission. My clients come to me and tell me who they are and what they want to be; they commission a style from me that suits them, and then I give my all to bringing it to fruition and helping them express their individuality. In a society that overemphasizes trends and beauty standards, I try to help my clients find a style that's uniquely them. And that's really what I do as a cosmetologist—I connect people to themselves. I help them share loud and proud with the world about who they are. I help them be their own kind of beautiful.

The Engineer

What happens when you give a kid some legos? They build stuff, naturally. And sure, they build some things based off of what they've seen. Sometimes they'll mimic the structure of their school, their house, or their church. But usually they're really innovative. They'll build a barn with a special corral for unicorns on the side of it or something. At least that's what my kids do. Or they'll make a tower and brainstorm how they could make the roof in a way that would allow for alien landings. They crack me up. But they're brilliant, innovative, creative. They make things that serve a certain purpose, meet a certain need, or promote a specific idea. They're little artists; little Frank Lloyd Wrights in the making. I noticed this one day as I watched them playing on the kitchen floor, and I started to think...that's not so different from my job as an engineer.

I never thought of myself as being an artist before that. The architects I work with have the more overtly artistic job. They do most of the designing, and I am the one who makes sure that design is feasible. I use a lot of math, physics, and analytical thought to make the design happen. But I realized that I am still a part of that collaborative,

art-producing process. The math and logic I rely upon as an engineer are just tools and techniques that help bring my art to fruition.

When I work on a building, a lot of thought goes into its functionality...but the aesthetic is also extremely important. Nobody is happy if you design a really ugly building for them—they want it to have a certain sensory appeal. They want it to say something on the outside about what they're doing on the inside. In order to come up with an appropriate solution, I have to get a sense of what the business is about, what kind of people they hope to attract, and what kind of services they provide, and then create something that caters to that intention. Just like when my daughter is trying to build a haunted mansion—she uses lots of angles, and lots of points and peaks on her structures. It's different than when she builds an animal hospital and makes it a cozier, more rounded and welcoming structure. It's really an instinctive process, but as an engineer I've spent years honing those innate skills. My structures are made to evoke certain feelings and set up certain expectations. They communicate certain ideas.

It makes sense when you consider it historically, too. I mean think about Da Vinci—what even was he? Artist, mathematician,

builder, designer, architect...but we think of all of his different kinds of works as art. We don't feel the need to categorize everything he did as either engineering, architecture, math, or art because they're all intertwined. Good engineers are artists, and good artists are engineers. My kids don't think of themselves as painters when they're painting, mathematicians when they do their math homework, and engineers when they're building with legos. In fact, they don't bother to label themselves at all. They just bring their art and creativity and all of themselves to whatever it is they happen to be doing. My kids get it so instinctively—why can't we?

The Tradesman

I'm a blacksmith. I've had my own business for oh, almost twenty years now. I'm sure blacksmiths aren't the first thing you think of when you think of artists. We're probably the farthest thing from your mind. That wasn't always how it was though—it actually was pretty different throughout history, especially in the Middle Ages. That seems like a random fact, but it's actually one of the first things they taught us in trade school. It's only recently that we've stopped popularly referring to many trades as the mechanical arts. Back in the Middle Ages, there were seven liberal arts: grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. There were also seven mechanical arts: weaving, blacksmithing, war, navigation, agriculture, hunting, medicine, and theatrics.

As college education becomes more popular, people see trades as being a last option. They think that if you're not smart enough for the university, you can work with your hands. But that's not really an accurate depiction. We're craftsmen; skilled artisans. We make beautiful pieces of art, just not the kind you'd put on a wall. We make the kind of art that you can use in real life—utensils, horseshoes, you name it. It's everyday art. Just

because we make this art with our hands doesn't mean our brains aren't involved—we use our whole being, really. Our minds, our hands, even our souls. There's something spiritual about creating and fixing things. We have to be problem solvers. We have to be able to see something working inefficiently and envision how it could work better. We see new problems every day, and each problem requires a new solution, so there's not one formula to getting it right. We create our own formula.

It makes sense when you consider mythology, too. Have you heard of the Greek god Hephaestus? He was the god of fire, metalworking, stone masonry, forges, and sculpture. He was the gods' personal blacksmith, and the one who created several notable pieces: Cupid's arrows, Achilles' armor, and Athena's shield, just to name a few. It's no coincidence that he's one of the patron gods of the arts—he represented the artists outside of the realm of the fine arts—those of us that create with our hands. Some people say that blacksmithing is a dying art, but that's okay. If it's a dying art, that just means more art for me.

The Librarian

Librarians really get a bad rap in the media. Strict, grumpy, and constantly shushing everybody. Stuck behind a desk all day, looking out at the world through a pair of thick and archaic spectacles, a pile of dusty manuscripts our only friends. When I see librarians stereotyped like that on TV or in books, I can't help but laugh. That couldn't be farther from the truth! What if I told you that librarians were guardians of knowledge? What if I told you that we were the great story-keepers of our civilization? Artists in our own right? I know that may sound dramatic, but I think any one of those depictions is closer to the truth.

I decided I wanted to be a librarian when I was five. My family had recently moved to a new town, and one of the first places my mom took me was to the library. I spent so many hours there, and was quickly befriended by the librarian in the children's room...her name was Miss Kate. You know how most kids idolize a Disney princess or a superhero or something, and really put them on a pedestal? Well, for me it was never Princess Aurora or Wonder Woman. For me it was Miss Kate. Miss Kate was the first one to introduce me to the idea of librarianship as an art form. At first I used to think

her whole job was just sitting behind the desk, stamping books and making sure nobody tried to steal anything. But she really was a teacher. She did her best to help every kid that came into that room learn something—how to research, how to find call numbers, how to know themselves as readers, and what genres resonated with them most. In order to perform her job well, she needed all the skills that the art of teaching requires: the ability to improvise, to communicate, to assist, to know her audience, to think innovatively and envision creative solutions to problems, and to read the room and respond in a flexible way that is adaptable to the current situation. And she performed her job well.

After I had finally gotten the hang of the Dewey Decimal system at age eight, I announced to Miss Kate that since I knew where to find all of the books, I was finally ready to become a librarian. She chuckled in her good natured way and told me that being a librarian is way more than just knowing all of the call numbers and databases. It's not something that can be learned from a book—it's something that has to be practiced and cultivated. It's something that you approach not as a call-number-regurgitating-robot, but as a person, with a unique personality, style, and flair.

Miss Kate continued to have an influence on me even when my childhood years were through. I remember going to the library to distract myself after my first break up—disillusioned with love at the age of 15. Miss Kate was there at the desk, with all-knowing eyes. She read me just like I was another one of her books, and pointed me in the direction of a volume entitled *Poetry for the Broken-Hearted*. It sounds just as melodramatic as it was, but at that moment in time, it was just what I needed. In it my bereaved teenaged heart found a little slice of healing, solidarity, and hope. In my practice as a librarian, I try to model Miss Kate in that way. She had the ability to use her intuition to perceive my feelings and empathize with me. Although she wasn't the artist who wrote those cathartic stories, she was the artist who gathered the stories and presented them so that they could provide emotional connection and healing. Just like an artist, she had a particular message that she wanted to share, and she used the tools at her disposal to share it with me. Marble is the tool of choice for the sculptor, clay is the tool of choice for the potter, and books are the tool of choice for the librarian.

I think that's the essence of what a good librarian is, they are an artist. We collect and share human stories. Just like an author or linguist plays with

words to express themselves to others, librarians do too. It's just that we play with words that others have already written down and put into books. A walk through the library should be an interactive art form, and that the entirety of the library is really my canvas: I am responsible for laying out the shelves and displays in a way that communicates the message I want to share with patrons. Is the library a welcoming place? A scary one? An informational one? The way we lay everything out has a huge effect on how patrons will experience it and interact with it.

I'm older now, and to me, Miss Kate still represents the ideal of the art a good librarian should bring to their work. Last month, I decided to stop by the library to pay her a visit and found out that dear old Miss Kate had died. But she continues to be an inspiration even now—she had no Gatsby funeral. It was the opposite, in fact. There were so many people there, lots of people who weren't even close with her but whose lives she'd still managed to touch. And everyone agreed that she had mastered the art of living. She knew that her calling in life was to be a librarian and she did it with skill, intuition, and individuality. She knew what she was meant to do in life, and she did it knowing that it mattered. I hope that one day, I am such a good artist.

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Till Death Do We Art

