

The Glue That Kept This Future Star Teacher in School

Learning to Make a Difference through Creativity

Gina Humphreys Booth 9-1-12

Although it was only a brief time in my young life, from '72 - '74, Ann McGee and the Experimental Arts Program at Southern Methodist University were instrumental in changing my life. I was only nineteen at the time. Every semester I had wanted to drop out of college. Had I done so, I'm pretty sure I would have never made it back to college.

By the second semester of my sophomore year I still had no major. I happened to be enrolled in a class which consisted of guest speakers talking about their careers. It was held in that windowless basement room where we all had to take art history ("Art in the Dark" with slides - the original Power Point

Presentations!). It just so happened that Ann McGee was a speaker. Once she spoke that was it. Finally, I could pick a major and tell my parents I would stay in college. In my job as an art teacher I have always mentored students to find a great person to

work under because that sure worked for me.



Junior High & Senior High School
Teacher of the Year
State of Arkansas



I loved the E.A.P. approach which was definitely not about drawing realistically. It was about teachers showing students that creativity is important to education. It was about showing students that art is like the real world where there are often several correct approaches to solve a problem.

I especially appreciated that E.A.P. art majors were actually allowed to be the master teacher in charge of a team that taught a class of youngsters. We got to take full responsibility for the curriculum and materials and supplies. I remember I re-titled "my" class "*Exploring Isn't Boring.*" (Oops, the ordering person ordered drawing compasses instead of cheap plastic Explorers compasses

when I got the class supplies.)

Many of the high school students I teach in Art Level One assume school is about tests, participating in group discussions, and "looking busy." I tell them art is like the real world in that there is a portfolio and one must use time wisely to finish a product.

I note that for Bloom's Taxonomy, in the last decade they moved Creativity to the top, as opposed to Evaluation being the highest level, followed by synthesis, analysis, application, and then comprehension. One would almost wonder if our Ann, with her belief in exposing students to creative and critical thinking, was a forerunner for educational visionaries

Due to the economic recession, it was twelve years until I got my job teaching K - 12 art at a small rural school, the same job I still have today. Along the way I worked at a pre-school, taught children's creativity classes during summers, and did night time data entry work and finally real estate sales.

When I applied for my state teachers certification I was required to take the national art tests. Thanks to S.M.U.'s art-in-the-dark and a hurried week of brushing up at the public library, I passed my tests with high scores. Most of all, I felt confident in my ability to order supplies and develop a curriculum, even though I was barely out of my teens when I was a "master teacher." (Wow, we were really called that!) A big thanks is due to the state of Texas for giving us K-12 life time art teacher certificates. Mine easily transferred over to the state where I now teach. This sort of break doesn't happen often these days.

I also remember the psychedelic light shows we did, using an overhead projector and two glass pie pans to show how to make secondary colors using food dye of primary colors, cooking oil, and water. "*Fancy Colours*" (1970 by Chicago) was the background music. My high school art students presented these "audio-visual light shows" for years to the elementary students at my school.

Since I teach at both the elementary school and the high school levels I often find myself using my handy E.A.P. creative dramatics skills. When we have (dreaded) extra time with little ones, then I shout out something like, "Hey kids, let's hold hands to form a circle and half of you get inside and jump." *What are you?* (Answer: popcorn or fleas or grasshoppers or???) I still have the original "handout" from those lessons in my file cabinet at work.



Face painting was newly popular back then. We mixed a bit of hand lotion and tearless baby shampoo into some tempera paint. I annually use this recipe in my high school classes. Recently we art teachers had to submit a "showing" of our own recent art. I submitted a series of



portrait photos of the students doing their face painting. The portraits were stunning and thoughtful. I always have my own camera active on face painting day and as a gift, often give the students the photo of themselves in their face paint. We've had butterflies, avatars, clowns, and more. The process, as they hold up the mirror to watch the magic happen, is just as important as the product. Gorgeous pictures!

Of course we all remember how beautiful, energetic, and fashionable our Ann was, while being the mother of a young son as well. That may seem odd to mention, but in those days mothers who worked were not the norm. Today such women are everywhere. Other fashion recollections; I remember Karen Crocombe wearing the first polyester pants suit I'd ever seen. Why, she even had the matching vest. Her extra-long pants highlighted her tall platform



Karen Crocombe Guerin
Dressed as a Centipede

shoes. She looked so cool!

Believe it or not, for my senior year presentation in the art ed. department - while everyone else was showcasing a media or process or a lesson in the style of some famous artist - Ann supported my interest to do a study on "time management and organization of the art room." I titled it "*As Organized as a Brick Wall.*" (Ann, are you sure you didn't plagiarize some of the ideas I presented when you later wrote your wonderful book "*Time Management for Unmanageable People?*" Just joking.) This topic came full circle as I covered some of the same sorts of information when I presented "*Materials, Equipment, Supplies and Storage - M.E.S.S.*" at my state's art teacher conference this past year. I was honored that my presentation was chosen as one of the large-room presentation choices following the opening speaker.

I would like to thank S.M.U. for giving me part time work, which gave me much needed personal spending money. Students back in those days didn't have part-time off campus jobs as they do now. I did slide photography for the art history department and office work for art education. And you can ask Wally Linebarger about his talking to me when I was doing my *other* paid job in the art department. Also, I so much appreciated Aledra Braddell, who to me appeared so much older and mature. She befriended me even though I felt so much younger, immature and personally troubled as compared to others in the E.A.P. circle.

A begrudging thank you to Adjunct Professor, Dorothy Pierce. While she was great supervising us student teachers, I note that a teacher from the education department at S.M.U. had told us about a new law. One could have access to our own records that would be put on file at the school for potential employers to read. *When I got a copy of my file there was a comment about inappropriate dress during my student teaching. While there was only so much I could do with clothes from the Salvation Army (which I still love today) I admit I could have made better fashion choices. Somehow I managed to choose things like purple knee socks.* Teaching inner city high school students in purple knee socks - whatever was I thinking? On my job I still dress in a colorful and creative manner, and take care to have a certain Ann-like pizzazz about it. Dorothy was right about my inappropriate attire.

And then Ann, of course Ann. Too many compliments to list! Why I even get compliments that arrive in a letter or email at least once a year - and it's been *37 years since I graduated!* I'd have to say that one of the best things she did was to actually buy some of my student art ! Twenty years later she told me it had been auctioned off when grown up son, Rayo (who she'd given it to - and by the way, what was that little fellow's *real* name anyway?) needed extra wall space. She claimed my art got the highest sale bid at an auction of art for an abused women's shelter. How honored I felt !

One other student teaching memory: with my unique E.A.P. style approach to what constitutes art, the high school level supervising teacher, after making it through my purple socks, was probably dumbfounded yet again when I told her my topic for the one original unit I would get to design. It was, "Design Your Ideal Floor Plan." But you know, that lesson was "right on."

Within a decade I went on to use features of the lesson to design my own small, cozy, and original home. It is surrounded by forest and overlooks a bubbling creek. We still live there



today. With my love for home design, in our county I founded an annual rural Home Tour fundraiser which features owner built homes. I did the photography of the homes and wrote up the articles for many years. The tour, now in its fifteenth year, is a benefit for the local single parent scholarship fund. I still create the tour maps every year for them using computer art. Also, over the years I've enjoyed traveling to many historic homes throughout our nation. So, to this day I just love architecture!

I remember at our first reunion back at S.M.U. in the old Art Ed. room, many years after E.A.P. had ended, someone asked the group *"Why didn't more people major in Art Education since it was so fun?"* Another person said, *"Maybe the amount of work required was where we lost people."* I've thought about that comment a lot in ensuing years. We did put in a lot of hours. There were always team meetings to assess successes and supply suggestions. Those poor elementary ed. majors who were on the teams we directed, I can't imagine what they must of thought of us!



Through E.A.P. I found a unique approach to teaching art, one that has served me well in twenty five years of teaching. I've had a total of ten articles printed in *Arts & Activities*, *School Arts* and *Instructor Magazine*. I have been the Art Educator of the Year for both the High School and Junior High Level in my state. And guess what? Some of my articles even refer to a pre-skill called a "fool proofer." Now doesn't *that* sound familiar? One year the state assigned me to the committee for writing state frameworks. When I saw that creative problem solving was not a part of the skills I quickly had it written in. Even today it remains as one of our state art frameworks.

One more thing, my memories wouldn't be complete without mentioning my wedding to my husband Matt Booth at Turtle Creek Park in 1975, the park nearest campus. I was married the year after I graduated. It was a hippie-style wedding, with me in a long flowered dress and long straight hair, Matt with his long pony tail and wearing jeans. We were wed under a weeping willow tree next to the creek, with an S.M.U. photography major taking the pictures. (He managed the tricky dappled shade perfectly.) The ceremony was followed by a pot luck breakfast spread on quilts. When I show the wedding pictures today no one blinks an eye. But for all who were there, they say that wedding was so special. Basically, for that day and time it was totally shocking. "You can do *that*?"

The minister was Professor Bob Harloff, one of the teachers of the *countless* Nature of Man courses we all had to take in our freshman and sophomore years. We only had a few family members and a few friends and past graduates who were still around in Dallas to attend. It was very small, but I recall the



Huntings and Wally L. being there and I so appreciated that. It was a simple, cheap and gorgeous wedding (we had no plans in case it rained) and you'll be glad to know we're still married. Last week we celebrated our thirty seventh anniversary.

I'm still teaching art. I was lucky to be hired as the first art teacher this county has ever had. But wouldn't you know it, I was also the only certified person to apply for the job! In 1986, with the recession finally over, our state decided to come out of the dark ages and rural schools had to hire their first counselors, librarians, and art, music and foreign language teachers. So there were many, many of us who got jobs that year. *In the first three years of the job I was required to travel to three schools daily, a one hundred mile round trip. That was a fun memory as well. I loved the rural students and enjoyed the peaceful beautiful mountain drive between schools.*

Over the years I'm pretty sure the other art teachers in my area, and my administrators, have always considered my approach to teaching art a bit odd. But I still preach the E.A.P. mantra that art class is a chance for young students to learn creativity and craftsmanship, two skills that businesses say they want. See, here I go again, now I'm preaching to the choir. In summary, art at our small rural school is akin to how the band is not so much about the skilled playing of instruments and a music career; it's actually about practice and teamwork as well as the joy of music.

I've certainly had an amazing career as an art teacher all due to E.A. P. Writing these memories has been a great chance to relive many treasured memories and give honor to a great program and great people. It was a real shame the program ended a year or so after I left. However, that allowed Ann to move on to greater pursuits such as providing creativity training for business executives and even for astronauts. Who knows, perhaps that's where the Apollo 13 astronauts got the idea to use electric tape to save their mission!

Closing note: E.A.P. lives on in my spirit of teaching, changing the lives of thousands of students in my art classes over the years. I'm sure that we can all agree, Ann and the entire E.A.P. team created a very special time in our lives. Hugs to everyone.