2005

Need to create and express | An intrapersonal journey

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The Need to Create and Express – An Intrapersonal Journey

by

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presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Fine Arts

in Integrated Arts and Education

The University of Montana

July 2005

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7-18-05

Date
The exploration of expressive arts is a journey into the personal creativity and skills of the being. The author worked on different arts and crafts, using poetry, paper, silk, cloth, thread, wool, different paints, glue, wood, stones, glass, and terracotta, to find a voice in artistic expression.

Every form of art became a study in itself through the brief exploration of the historical origin and family history. Understanding the history and family traditions gave the project a deeper understanding.

The author’s mother was diagnosed with cancer, underwent chemotherapy and lost her battle the middle of February 2005. The creative final project became a journey into the author’s mother’s life.

The author experienced the positive effect of using expressive arts in a therapeutic way. The arts helped the author cope with the death of her mother and the transition into a new stage of life. Expressive arts therapies are a trend to replace medications and counselling allowing one to deal with life’s demands on a being.

Special needs teachers have the responsibility to use expressive arts as a crucial way to reach all students in their quest to become able citizens of the society. Expressive Arts touch on the multiple intelligences and give individuals avenues to succeed and excel in the school setting.
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Intent of the Project

The intent of my creative final project encompassed my longing for an artistic talent. I wanted to find my voice in art expression. My main focus was on art through painting and drawing as well as writing poetry and stories. I always had a love for art and wanted to express myself through pictures.

The Actual Project

The Beginning with an Immediate End

I always considered myself a creative person, at least people always tell me how creative I am. For me creativity in art expression always meant drawing and painting. I began my journey into the arts with a self-instructed drawing course and followed daily lessons vigorously. It seemed like a chore but I could see some progress early on. The enjoyment soon changed into a struggle with the simplest assignments. When I started the chapter on drawing shadows, I was too overwhelmed. Nothing looked like it was supposed to and my patience couldn’t quite compensate the challenges. I quit “drawing”. The essence of all art was not for me, since I thought art starts with the ability to draw.

I took a workshop on acrylic painting and brought home my first painting. I had learned how to copy a picture with fine pencil lines and fill it in with paints. The shadows were the hard part but I learned a few tricks to get me by. Besides, I got the title of a book that had all the answers for me. I went home with my painted copy of a photograph and decided I was at last an artist. Strangely, I didn’t pursue acrylic painting any further. I had no drive, patience or time. Copying a photograph didn’t give me the satisfaction I was looking for.
My pursuit to write poetry went a little better. I wrote in my journal and used poetry as an outlet of my emotions in a very emotional time. I typed up and edited my poetry in the fall of 2004 and was pleased with the outcome. I decided to have my poetry published in a book.

My “big” ideas for my creative final project where at an end and I started to question myself as a being. Who am I, if I can’t even get an image I have in my head on paper? What makes an artist? What is creativity? Am I an artist?

The True Beginning of my Project

I started to look around to find an artist and suddenly saw myself surrounded by different kinds of artists. Everybody has talents and I believe that is a form of art. To prove my point, I looked up several words in the dictionary to find their true meaning. The synonyms of the term ‘art’ were the most significant:

Art Syn. Art, skill, cunning, artifice, craft mean the faculty of performing or executing that which is devised. Art is so variable in meaning that it is the synonym of each of the others which, on the other hand, are not always synonyms among themselves. Art is often used interchangeably with skill when both imply proficiency or expertness in the exercise or practical application of knowledge; art also comes close to cunning in the older underogatory sense of the second word when both imply inventive power, capacity for perfection in execution, etc.; it may also be used in place of artifice when mechanical skill in contriving, devising, etc., is connoted; art and craft may be used interchangeable only when they imply subtlety and ingenuity in workmanship. But art less often than craft suggests trickery or guile.

(From Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, Springfield:G.&C. Merriam Co., 1953)

The definition gave me another way of looking at art. Visual art therefore is not necessarily a painted picture but an object that displays talent, personality and is created with creative craftsmanship.
Creative and artistic expressions are works of art that communicate to diverse audiences through demonstrated understanding and fluency of expressive forms. Through these works of art you show your comprehension of the significance and expression of culture in a variety of ways. My mother was a good example of an artist. She learned new expressive arts all her life and surrounded herself, her family, and everyone she knew with artifacts created by her hands.

My Final Creative Project

I have explored the arts within me and discovered my ability to write poetry, as well as do different crafts involving my hands. By nature, I am a curious person who is interested in origins. I explored cross stitch, knitting, silk painting, candle making, book making, and mosaics and learned about the history and cultural meaning, as well as the meaning of some of the crafts in my family history. With the creative final project, I continued family traditions and found a vehicle for positive stress management.

1. Crosstitching and Embroidery

Brief Cultural History

The word “embroidery” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word for ‘edge’. The term was first applied to decoratively stitched borders on medieval church vestments. Over time it came to cover all stitched decoration on any textile fabric.

One of the most important and widespread functions of crosstitching has been to ornament peasant garments and household linens, often as a way of indicating family wealth and status in the community. Peasant embroidery is a purely domestic skill, which
is passed down through the generations from mother to daughter. Stitchers would record samples of their favorite stitches and patterns on long strips of narrow cloth, hence the name ‘sampler’. They became family assets. Early samplers were often completely covered, with examples of stitches and patterns crammed together, showing the stitchers need to make use of every square inch of her precious linen.

The art of embroidery came to America with the settlers. American women had little time for the making of beautiful things when just existing was a 24-hour a day job. Plain sewing was taught to young girls as early as they could hold a needle and thread, for everything had to be sewn by hand. Obviously, skills learned in the old country were brought to the new, and needle workers had to adapt as best they could. Most of the first ‘needlework’ was almost always a quilt or comforter of some kind. It was a practical necessity. Many of the samplers made at the time were biblically based and a practical lesson to the girls was to learn the alphabet and numbers in stitchery.

During the first half of the last century, hand embroidery was a popular leisure pastime for many women and the hobby occupied many hours of spare time in the days before television. Various types of embroidery were worked but one of the most popular techniques, particularly during the nineteen twenties, thirties and forties, was crosstitching.

Crosstitching as we recognize it today was re-discovered in the sixties, when increased leisure time was a factor in the revival of counted cross stitch for pleasure. In 1980, cross-stitch reappeared with new and fresh designs.
Family History

I don’t recall ever sitting at a table without an embroidered tablecloth. Only the dining tablecloth was plain, decorated with a crocheted table runner in the middle. Most of our table linens were handed down through the families of my father, since my mother’s family lost theirs through the toils of the Second World War as refugees from East Prussia. If my mom needed a tablecloth of a certain size, she would buy the linen and decorate it with needlework. She learned the skills from her mother, design books, and at a school for homemakers. I learned the craft as a young adult through little craft kits with tips from my mother.

My Projects

I began crosstitching at the end of December 2004, when I spent every day at the hospital with my mother. Sitting with my mother for hours, the cross-stitching was a wonderful pastime that allowed me to observe her well being, visit during the times she was awake, and helped me control my helplessness, fear and sadness. My first pattern I choose was a home. While cross-stitching, I reminisced about my family, childhood, and all the memories. The words ‘Joy’ and ‘Peace’ seem to summarize my feelings and thoughts about my home.

In great anticipation of my own little family arriving in Germany, I cross-stitched a picture, which includes my married family name ‘The Chandlers’. I completed the second project just in time for the arrival of my husband and two children. Since I wanted this project to have a special place, I sewed a pillowcase and stitched the cross-stitch project onto the case. I feel the pillow should have a place in our living room.
In October 2004, my sister purchased the thread and material for a Christmas tablecloth my mother wanted to work on. Her deteriorating health didn’t permit her to start on the project and my sister asked me to stitch the tablecloth. Working on the tablecloth after my mother passed away was an honor for me and I imagined how my mother would have been working on the project. (Appendix 1, page 24)

2. Knitting

Brief Cultural History

The art of hand knitting has been practiced since thousand of years. How ancient humans learned this art is still a mystery and so is the country and time of its origin. Knitted socks discovered in Egyptian tombs have been dated between the 3rd and 6th centuries AD. In the medieval Europe hand knitting was an important industry and had developed into an advanced craft by the 16th century.

From ancient times, the art of hand knitting remained an occupation for women folk. Originally knitting remained entirely confined to making socks and women’s stockings. Between 1880 to 1910 knitwear was mainly a female fashion, later knitted pullovers, cardigans, skirts, men’s underwear, sportswear and swimwear became popular. Developments in the 20th century increased the production speeds of the machines and offered a wider choice to pattern the knitted fabrics. Now computer controlled knitting machines have come along, which are highly versatile. Knitted garments have now become every day dress.
Family History

My siblings and I never owned a wool sweater that wasn’t hand-knitted until we earned our own money. My mother clothed us in hand-knitted sweaters every year. As we grew up, she would knit sweaters at our request. We picked the patterns and colors, or simply tell her what we had in mind. Later on, she started to knit socks. My mother learned the skill from her mother. After the Second World War, my grandmother knitted sweaters for ranch families in Denmark in trade for food for her family. In my memories, I see my grandmother sitting by her living room window, knitting cotton underwear for children in third world countries.

My paternal grandmother specialized in the art of knitting Norwegian sweaters. These sweaters are knitted in one piece with intricate patterns.

My Projects

I purchased wool to knit my children scarves. As my mother watched my sister knit a sweater, she requested to knit also. We gave her the wool and she started knitting a scarf for Hannes, my three-year-old son. Despite her illness that disabled her from most daily activities, my mother’s hands just knew what to do. As my mother’s cancer progressed and she could no longer knit, I took up the project and completed it a day after my mother had to leave us.

I learned to knit when I was a little girl, but never proceeded with the art past the level of knitting straight pieces. I decided it was time to go past the belief of not being able to knit. With my sister’s help, I overcame my fears and knitted a sweater jacket in only five weeks. I realized I truly enjoy the mathematical part of knitting. Adding and
losing stitches became a challenge rather than a fear of failing. I started knitting the sweater jacket a few days after my mom passed away and met the personal quest to complete the project before my mom was buried after cremation had taken place. Working on the project gave me something to do and made it easier on the mind to deal with the drastic change within the family.

With the mathematical aspect of knitting being such a positive challenge, I proceeded to teach myself how to knit socks. Knitting socks is a fashionable pastime of people in northern Germany. Working with a ‘needle play’ was rather challenging but the finished product was a reward that made up for the frustration along the way. I am looking forward to completing my next pair of handknit socks. (Appendix 2, page 24)

3. Silk painting

Cultural History

It’s a bit of mystery how silk painting found its way to Europe, but silk painters from France and Hungary believe their teachers learned the craft in France from members of the Russian czar’s family. In the 1920’s, hand-painted silk designs began to appear in haute couture of France. Upon the freeing of the colonies from King George the 3rd via the American Revolutionary War the prohibitive tariffs on silk were averted, thus allowing silk to become a new trend in Colonial American arts. Silk started showing up in samplers, stitched-and-painted pictures and such in the early 1800’s, but by the 1840’s there was a distinct preference among the few colonial fine artists there were, for painting on silk. The medium was still very expensive and it was of high art snobbery to behold or own a silk painting.
One may find that the abundance of silk painting waxed and waned with the activity of the silk mills in the New England states from 1840 on. When the mills closed their doors, people stopped painting on silk. It wasn’t until the 1970’s that silk painting really began to be popularized by artists in the United States and it has been gaining popularity as a textile art ever since!

Family History

I learned to work with silk and paints in the late eighties during my studies in Germany. My mother soon shared my interest and we decorated many scarves as gifts, using solely the technique with salt. With this technique, paint is applied to the silk and patterns derive by sprinkling salt on the drying paint.

My Projects

I expanded my silkpainting by using gutta to create pictures. I experimented with different designs and patterns from my sketchbook and came to the conclusion that mandala designs with large distinct components pleased me the most.

During the turmoil in my life, silk seemed to be such a clear and fine material to work with. By using designs, I was able to keep it simple and manageable; a manageable project in a time of confusion and helplessness. (Appendix 3, page 25)

4. Candle making

Brief Cultural History

For centuries, candles have cast a light on man’s progress. However, there is very little known about the origin of candles. Although it is often written that the Ancient
Egyptians who used torches made by soaking the pithy core of reeds in molten tallow developed the first candles, the torches had no wick like a candle. It is the Romans who are credited with developing the wick candle, using it to aid travelers at dark, and lighting homes and places of worship at night.

It was during the 19th century when most major developments affecting contemporary candlemaking occurred. In 1834, inventor Joseph Morgan introduced a machine, which allowed continuous production of molded candles by the use of a cylinder, which featured a movable piston that ejected candles as they solidified. Further developments in candlemaking occurred in 1850 with the production of paraffin wax made from oil and coal shale. With the introduction of the light bulb in 1879, candlemaking declined until the turn of the century when a renewed popularity for candles emerged.

Candle manufacturing was further enhanced during the first half of the 20th century through the growth of U.S. oil and meatpacking industries. With the increase of crude oil and meat production, also came an increase in the by-products that are the basic ingredients of contemporary candles — paraffin and stearic acid.

No longer man’s major source of light, candles continue to grow in popularity and use. Today, candles symbolize celebration, mark romance, define ceremony, and accent decor — continuing to cast a warm glow for all to enjoy.

Family History

The use of candles mark a big part of my family’s winter months. We always light candles while sitting together for coffee and cake in the afternoons. Christmas wouldn’t
be the same without the warm glow of candles lit on the advent wreath and our Christmas tree.

When my siblings and I were in grade school, my mother used to save all the candle stumps and we would melt the wax from time to time and make candles, using cans or yogurt containers and cotton strings as wicks.

My Project

During a weekend trip to Denmark, my 6-year-old daughter and I went to a store with a candlemaking shop. We watched the candlemakers work and were able to ‘pull’ our own candles. This candlemaking is a rather timely process, since we had to quickly dip the wick into hot wax, let the wax on the wick cool and continue dipping the wick over approximately an hour and a half. The result is a variety of tapered candles with our individual color designs. We went back to the shop in Denmark to pull candles with different color combinations. (Appendix 4, page 25)

This project was so meaningful to me since I explored this medium with my daughter. The shift of the dynamics in our family was a large part of my personal grieving.

5. Bookmaking

Brief Cultural History

Modern day bookbinding began with the change from the continuous roll, to the book made up from separate sheets. Early books were composed of single sheets of vellum, followed by paper, folded over and collected into sections of suitable size. The
leaves were held together in the correct order by sewing through the centerfold onto flexible bands held at right angles to the back.

As early as the 6th Century, Monks had taken the art of binding manuscripts to a very high standard. Between the 10th and 14th Century, English Monks having copied and improved the design of books brought from the East became the foremost binders of Europe.

It took a German printer in 1456 named Johann Gutenberg to come up with the idea of making each letter into a small block so that each line of text and page could be assembled from these little letters. These could then be broken down and reused time and time again. The introduction of printing in the 15th Century gave a great impetus to bookbinding. As the number of books increased so the occupation of printer and binder became separate.

Family History

The only bookbinding that happened in my family was the accumulation of papers we bound with two holes and string or a vast amount of staples. My mom would help us with the projects. A lot of times, I was copying my mom’s projects.

My Projects

I learned the art of bookmaking during a class through the Creative Pulse last summer. The class and the projects I completed surprised and pleased me so much, I decided to print and bind my poetry I had written.
Bookbinding, especially cutting and wrapping the covers is a challenge for me personally. Precision is not part of my impatient nature. My love of math compensate for the challenge and I prefer binding books the traditional way, leaving out complicated angles or shapes.

It took me quite a while to decide on how to display my poetry. The shape of the book, the type of print, and the paper I chose ... everything had to be just right.

(Appendix 7, page 27)

Later in the spring of 2005, I copied all of my mom’s recipes that she had collected and are so familiar to my siblings and myself. I compiled the recipes in triplicate for us three kids.

6. Mosaic Art

Brief Cultural History

The history of mosaic goes back some 4,000 years or more, with the use of terracotta cones pushed point-first into a background to give decoration. By the eighth century BC, there were pebble pavements, using different colored stones to create patterns, although these tended to be unstructured decoration. It was the Greeks, in the four centuries BC, who raised the pebble technique to an art form, with precise geometric patterns and detailed scenes of people and animals.

Family History

None
My Projects

While at the home of my brother’s girlfriend, I noticed a mosaic tabletop she had made. I was so intrigued by the art, I decided to try it myself. After inquiring about the art, I found a craft set for a picture frame, small enough to fit in my suitcase.

After completion of the first project, I felt I needed to create my own piece without following a pattern. Using the same little mosaic stones, I experimented decorating a little terracotta pot and designing a picture with meaning. I created a picture showing nature in its entity: sky, sun, earth, and grass, an artifact full of light, depicting the hope I have for the future. (Appendix 5, page 26)

7. Napkin Technique

Cultural History and Family History

None

My Projects

Napkin technique is a very common craft in Germany and has been around for approximately two years. The craft supposedly started in the Netherlands. I signed up for an adult education class but the class was cancelled. I was the only one that had signed up for the class. I decided to teach myself and found information on the Internet. At the same time, the director of the playgroup I attend with my three-year old brought all the materials to decorate flowerpots with said technique. I was thrilled and the fever caught me immediately. I spend every spare moment working on napkin technique projects. I
decorated plates, glasses, flowerpots, Easter eggs, greeting cards and just about anything that could be decorated.

The napkin technique is as close as I can come to creating a picture. Besides, I found a way to use up my acrylic paint I purchased for my original quest as an artist.

Using the napkin technique, the object needs to be painted in a very light acrylic paint in order for the napkin design to show up. After the paint has dried, the napkin is applied by brushing the object with a glue/lacquer mixture, covering it with the torn or cut picture from the napkin (only the very top layer of the napkin) and fastening it by carefully brushing the glue/lacquer mixture over the top. (Appendix 6, page 26)

8. Poetry

Family History

Writing poetry was always supported as a way to express wishes in a special way. My mother wrote poems to us, in cards to congratulate friends and family to milestones, and helped us write down our own thoughts. My mother received many works of written art from us throughout our childhood.

My Project

During the Creative Pulse and my three week stay in Germany last summer, I filled pages and pages with my thoughts and feelings. I studied the book ‘The Artist’s Way’ by Julia Cameron and received inspiration and guidance into the world of expressing myself with words.
Not being quite sure what to do with my written work, I typed the contents of the journal. Working with my written work by revising and editing it several times, I opted for choosing the poetry to hold on to my experiences, feelings, and impressions. By keeping the poetry in the timeline, I captured the development of happenings in my life. It was like working on a puzzle to put my feelings into just the right words and thoughts on paper. I would revise a piece many times before it spoke directly out of my heart.

(Appendix 7, page 27)

**Expected and Unexpected Results of my Final Creative Project**

I knew I had some creativity and artistic expression within me. Through the project, I finally explored my interest and skills.

Amazingly enough, my project became bigger than just the exploration of my own self. My mother’s diagnosis with cancer in July of 2004, her battle with the chemotherapy, and her death in February 2005 made my creative project end up being a journey into my mother’s life.

At the age of five and the oldest of then three children, my mother Regina was a refugee. My grandmother had to leave East Prussia during July of 1944, while my grandfather was serving as a soldier. The hardships my mother had to experience shaped her for life. Being able to create with your hands is a possession you own and cannot be taken away. I believe my mother learned this at a very young age, watching her mother feed her children by trading handmade goods for food and materials. Her whole life, she continued to create with her hands. She learned skills from her mother, at homemaker’s school, in adult education classes, and from books and friends. Her home and the homes
of her three children are filled with handmade crafts and household items. Every window in my home has a custom-made handcrochet curtain, created by her hands. I don’t recall my mother ever being without at least one project in progress.

When I wrote my proposal, I hadn’t the slightest idea where this year would take me. All I knew was my mother’s cancer diagnosis. I didn’t know I would leave my life behind and spend six months on the ranch in Germany where I grew up, taking care and supporting my mother as she left this world, and later helping my dad through his major surgery.

At the same time, I was given six months to be a stay at home mom, a gift I appreciated for my own sake and the sake of my two children (Hannes, 3 years and Emma, 6 years). I slipped into the life my mother lived. She was a stay home mom and rancher’s wife. Her days were dominated by household chores, being there for her three children, supporting her husband, and working on different arts. It was and is an important part of my mourning to step into her shoes. I went back in time and experienced her life. I was amazed how many different projects I was able to work on. By no means do I believe my pieces are perfect visual images but the work gave me confidence that I can create with my hands and have a voice. Art is no longer a chore rather than a pleasure and a pastime to choose after a long day of work.

Significance of the Project

Last fall, when I tried to work on my Final Creative Project, I was teaching full time, ranching with my husband, selling cosmetics, involved in waterstudies on the ranch we lease, and participating in a non-profit organization. Working on my creative final
project was an added stress. I was able to juggle all the demands by taking an anti-depressant. I was told the anti-depressant would help me deal with my life, since women never had to deal with so much before. My brother, a physician in Germany was appalled and urged me to slowly go off the medication. He claims I am not a candidate for psycho pharmaceuticals. I took his advice and went off the medication (Lexapro) over the course of six weeks starting the beginning of January 2005.

My arts exploration helped me deal with the stress of caring for yet loosing my mother. During every spare moment, I would use my hands to work on different forms of art expression. While I was alone in Germany (my children arrived two weeks later), I cross-stitched in the hospital and every night I’d work on the silk paintings. I was forced to sit down. Sitting quietly gave me a chance to reflect on the happenings around me yet slowly moving into focusing on the art and with it a media where I could discover, experience, and accept different aspects of myself.

Despite the incredible amount of demands on me, I didn’t miss the antidepressant. Accomplishing projects with my hands gave me emotional boosts that helped me deal with the reality around me.

As I was researching my creative final project, I ran across findings and articles about misdiagnosis of disorders and the over-medication happening around us. Interestingly enough a trend is evolving. Instead of seeking counseling or anti-depressants, people are urged to seek art expression to compensate for the life’s stress. Colleges offer degrees to become Expressive Arts Therapists. Expressive arts promote growth and healing. Especially during my life changing transition, art expression gave me a way to discover myself from deep within. I am not claiming my arts to be visual
beauties; I used them to let go, to express and to release. My silk pieces I created are a good showing of how the art was dominated by my inner feelings. One piece looks almost black with just a few shaded forms; others are very colorful, just the way I felt back in January 2005, when I came home every night, not knowing whether I would see my mother again. Later on during the spring of 2005, my art became more colorful and in my opinion happier.

I only support the use of expressive arts as a way to deal with the every day demands human beings face. A pill or counseling sessions cannot be the sole answer. Expressive arts include art, craft, writing, music, movement, and narrative arts. A person should choose an art form that interests them.

“The expressive arts have the power to transform the human being into what he or she was intended to become. Part of the fun of expressive arts is being involved in a community of explorers who dare to sing, move, paint, and celebrate from the soul ... from the most authentic part of what it means to be human.”

Brian Nichols, Instructor, Expressive Arts Program, Fleming College, Ontario, Canada

The Project and the Effect on me as a Teacher

Everything I discover, explore, and experience has an effect on my teaching. The whole Creative Pulse program has affected my teaching for the past two school years. As a teacher in Special Education, I teach every child very individually. Traditional ways of teaching are no longer feasible. Many of my students are faced with constant emotional instabilities in their life and I, their teacher, sometimes seem to be their sole stability. Likewise the other students with cognitive delays or learning disabilities have the same
struggles. These children are left behind by nature, refugees of our society who, at times, don’t have a place to go. As a special needs teacher, I need to give them skills to compensate and become able citizens.

Getting through life’s challenges and crossroads is often difficult. Traditional therapies and counseling are helpful and I have seen many good things evolve throughout my teaching career, yet sometimes it is more helpful to deal with our feelings and emotions. Many of my students ‘blow up’ and get in trouble due to unacceptable behavior, instead of being able to deal with their true emotions. As a teacher and therefore a ‘caring’ professional, I will benefit from my personal experience, knowing that I can facilitate the development and the transformation of the students in my care through expressive arts.

Some of the techniques I have worked on can be easily implemented immediately in my classroom. The napkin technique is very simple and has incredible “professional” results that will boost my student’s confidence in a very small amount of time. Working with mosaics has very calming effects on the mind and soul. The artist is completely involved in the process of creating possibly something unplanned. I have started with timed writing with my fourth through sixth graders and have seen an incredible growth over a short period of time in their confidence to put thoughts on paper. Bookbinding or making boxes will be a delicate craft to enhance and display the narrative arts.

My Final Project is an argument for the importance of using all intelligences in the classroom. Every student is using his/her intelligences at different levels and naturally needs to be challenged to perform at his/her best. Using more expressive arts in my
curriculum is a tool to include all intelligences and is just another step to become the master teacher my students deserve.
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Appendix 1 – Cross Stitch and Embroidery

Appendix 2 – Knitting
Appendix 3 – Silk painting

Appendix 4 – Candle Making
I am me because of you

I am me because of you

Papi, I share the love of Montana with you. I am eager to learn from others and their stories about history. I love this country and am sick like you about the war and how the rest of the world is viewing this country. I enjoy ranching and working outdoors. I appreciate manners and traditions. I desire candy and ice cream. I immigrated to the United States, without having to go back to Germany to take over the family ranch.

I am me because of you

Muti, I keep traditions, enjoy cooking and accomplishing things with my hands. I am an organizer, keeping lists around, taking care of our finances, and stocking up the pantry. I am a multi-tasker and able to bake cookies, do laundry, fix dinner, and talk on the phone all at the same time. I make decisions, argue with business representatives, and discipline my children. I am a teacher, working with children, just like you always wanted to.

I am me because of you
Everyday hero

I fight sharks in the night.
I lock dinosaurs in the closet.
I overwhelm monsters and put them in their place.

I heal cuts and scrapes.
I bake cookies.
I know where everything is.

I have surprises.
I keep secrets.
I can change tears to laughter.

I tell stories.
I go on adventures in the back yard.
I lead expeditions.

I am my kids’ hero.

Angels

Angels watch over us,
remembering our past, present, and perhaps the future.
Can they guide us?
How will we know which way to go?
Will something push us?
What makes an angel?
A good heart?
Presence?
Can we be an angel for someone?

They say “love” lost its meaning. Well, I don’t agree!

Linking
Ongoing
Voluntary
Emotion
Love – for the love of my life

To be passionately devoted
Adore
Care for
Hold dear
Choose
Fancy
Be enchanted by
Be passionately attached to
Have affection for
Dote on
Glorify
Idolize
Prize
Be fascinated by
Hold high
Think the world of
Treasure
Prefer
Yearn for
Be fond of
Admire
Long for
Flip over
Fall for
Be nuts or crazy about

7-13-04

no purpose
no destiny
no permission

unproductivity

7/14/2004

morning

beginning of the day
dawn
smell of coffee
alarm clock
first sunlight
fresh rolls
bacon
bad breath
toothpaste
daybreak
mug
sink
newspaper
shower
make-up
pills
kiss
smile
new day
new beginning
7-15-04

A light for Mutti
lit candle, randomly placed on the table
right in front of me by the rock, Kleenex, and a family picture
suddenly I note the flickering reflection of the flame
lifting my mother up and off the picture

Phone

Suddenly,
seemingly important things lose their meaning.
Untouched by surrounding emotions,
I sit in silence and don’t want to participate in life.

Suddenly,
my existence shatters with the diagnosis.
Normality turns into traumatized daze.
Sharp pain inhibits my chest and stomach.

Suddenly,
I don’t know how I got to places,
who is talking, and where I should go.

Suddenly,
life’s meaning turns into tears and survival,
as the black cloud surrounds me
and takes my breath away.

(after Mutti’s cancer diagnosis)

7/16/2004
End

at the end
everybody smiles
busy hands
not paying attention to others
alone again
anticipation
bursting out of the building
freedom
the end
or the beginning
7/22/2004

Sleep

looking in the rearview mirror
three sleeping children in the backseat
I am smiling.
Peaceful, protected, carefree childhood
I am heading home.
Innocent happiness
I am driving 80mph.
Soon to play in the sunshine
I am home.
Rested up for new adventures
I am sleepy.

7/24/2004 East Rosebud

“The mountains can touch the clouds.” That’s what Emma said this morning. I suppose the mountains have something heavenly about them – majestic like God.

7/27/2004

A new day

replacing vanishing dark blue earth covering
with light illuminating the new day
energizing, reddish, orange skyline
scented cool fresh morning
dew covered grass blades

opportunities to be extraordinary
a new chance to live life to the fullest
the enjoyment of every precious moment with the ones we care most about

8/1/2004

Sunday afternoon

Sitting on the porch in harmony, us – together
Feeling the breeze comfortably caressing our skin
Listening to occasional birds, sheep, cars, a horse

Watching seagulls glide through the air
Smelling the sweet summer blossoms and rejuvenating sea breeze
Tasting the meaning of us – love

Reality

I am me for ones. I found “me” under the covers of responsibility, work, and time – the meaning of adulthood?
Listen up!
If you are hopeless, losing hope, you will be helpless, not able to help yourself. Wherever life takes you, don’t lose your hope. You might end up helpless.

Holding
On to
Personal
Encouragement

Only he who hopes can pursue one’s dreams and live life to the fullest.

Spirituality means to live life from the silence within yourself.

A silent gaze at you gives my day meaning.

Your mind is a room filled with ideas you are comfortable with. The door to your room is slightly ajar. Pushing the door open a bit more makes for open-mindedness.

8/4/2004
What for a beautiful day – blue sky – white cotton clouds, fields of sunflowers, fluffy thistles, lush, green fields and yards, lazy turning windmills, energy generating silent white turbines – the train ride.

The letter – a journey
random thoughts about life
personalized with opinions
inter-personal feelings
expressed in black on white
poetic words
a piece of art
neatly handwritten

with longing for the receiver
confidentially sealed in an envelope
a little stamp
permits the letter to travel
the old-fashioned way

ripped open by my lover
eager for any word
from far away
Train

Silence amongst noise
Mutet private conversations
Interrupted by meaningless small talk with strangers

Anticipating the arrival
A day out of the ordinary
A time away
Thoughts fleeting past
Responsibilities
Resting
On what lies ahead today

Living in the moment
Rejuvenate the soul
Escaping from what is to come tomorrow

Fields of Sunflowers

Fields of sunflowers make the soul laugh.
Fields of sunflowers make me forget my fears for just a split second.
Fields of sunflowers make me fill up with happy thoughts.

8-6-04

yourself

to be yourself is not an unreachable task
make room to live in the moment and
discover your desires, hopes, and dreams
you become a content, calm being
the trick is to get there
despite the toils of life

8/7/2004

What does it take to raise competent, responsible, intelligent children?
“All we did was love you.” A profound statement Mutti made last night. There are so many layers in this statement; love as in acceptance, understanding, trust …

8-8-04

Breathe

Find a space in nature,
own the space for just a while,
for as long as it takes you to appreciate
the life you are allowed to live.
Familiarity

My brother and I are leaving.
For just two days, we will leave and indulge on what we mean to each other.

My sister and I went on a bike ride to the beach.
We didn’t talk much.
Being with each other and breathing the familiarity doesn’t need words.

I am sitting with my ill mother.
Desperation is mixed with deep thankfulness of being able to sit together and to be in the moment.

I am sitting across from my father.
He was never a man of many words.
The silence fills the room and we understand each other.

Conversation

I am talking to my small children on the phone. I can’t understand what they are saying but we are still in deep conversation until my son asks me what I was doing in the phone.

8-10-04

Longing for you

Sand
Families strolling
Surfers along the horizon
Wind cooling the rays of sun
Mist released by crashing waves
Happy voices
Bodies indulging water
I wish you could be here with me.

Confusion

I wish I could stay here
but this is not reality –
it is a time that will not last.
My reality awaits me at home.
I am needed.

8/14/2004

Time

With the loud ticking of the white porcelain kitchen clock, I sit in silence listening to the time go by. Every “tick tock” seemed important for years, and suddenly every beat gets long, slows down and I realize how powerful this room-filling sound controls everybody’s life.
8/16/2004

I sometimes feel so overwhelmed with all the things that are happening right now. I know I am strong enough to handle it but I sometimes sit and just want to be back in my carefree childhood when all that mattered was being able to go and play with friends. I just want to hold my mother and father and make everything better. Instead, I feel so distant and powerless. I am tired, tired of where life is taking us right now – what and how can I pull something positive out of this situation? How can I leave in another day and know everything will be o.k.
Hasn’t it been hard enough for Mutti and Papi as it is? How much more to handle is God going to give them? I don’t get it – I don’t want to get it – I don’t understand.

8-18-04

Moment

A white swan moves eloquently
down the water stream
that divides downtown Amsterdam
in half.

I am divided too.
I breathe the city life
yet I long to continue
my travel home
to my life I have missed for so long.

Sometimes our plans
just seem to dissolve
and the mind needs a while
to adjust and to accept.

To live in the moment means
to accept and enjoy change
without mourning
what was supposed to happen.

Three weeks can change a person’s outlook on life completely. What ones was accepted and anticipated becomes meaningless and unnecessary.
My heart discovered to write as a joy. My heart longs for an outlet of my mind – to be free from conventions. I need to accept that you don’t always have to do things for others or show off what you do. To do something you enjoy means to become yourself and find your center. To find your center means to become the person you really are.
8/19/2004

**Homecoming**

Arriving on time  
leaving the plane  
walking along, rushing  
standing at the top of the steps – looking  
discovering three beautiful people  
in the crowd  
smiling, laughing  
skipping down the stairs  
feeling little arms and kisses  
feeling the love of my life  
holding me tight  
home

58 minutes

58 minutes remaining  
as the captain announces  
until I am home

58 passengers sitting in silence  
allows the minds to wander  
58 clouds, fluffy and white,  
playfully filling the summer sky.

58 soldiers in Iraq  
waiting  
for another 58 peaceful minutes  
to pass by

Stretch yourself,  
discover your surroundings,  
explore new places  
within yourself.

Being centered means to be balanced within.

8-23-2004

I make myself stop and look a the beauty around me. I breathe deep. I stop and watch my beautiful children. I study their faces. Life is moving at such a great speed that I don’t want to miss out on any part of my beautiful children. I catch myself holding them and breathing their smell. Touching their little faces. Smiling at them and getting lost in their smiles.
9-5-2004

I feel guilty for sitting and enjoying the moment.  
Welcome back to my life!

9-19-2004

Date

Sitting close  
next to each other  
occasional exchange of smiles  
loving touches  
eating in silence  
enjoying the company  
you and me  
moments filled with happiness  
unconditional love  
my 3-year-old and me  
at Mc Donalds

9-23-2004

...it is all about removing blocks and layers and discovering the real me – sometimes I do so well getting to 
me and on other days, I just seem to dig myself in further.

10-5-04

Family

My family is very important to me. It is more important than anything in this world. This summer made me 
realize how fragile family really is. I guess death in families is common but hits you numbingly hard if it is 
your immediate family.

Being so busy at graduate school and gone from my children gave me a new perspective of being a mother 
too. And here I sit again, waiting, being separated from my family – radioactive iodine treatment. 
I hope Hannes makes it ok. Emma and Hannes always claim to have nightmares and crawl in bed with us. 
The closeness gives them safety I believe.

Holding on to somebody calms, offers security, lets loneliness vanish. Holding on to somebody is the 
physical sign of love and compassion. Holding on to somebody communicates “I am here for you, don’t 
worry.”