

Motherhood as a work of art, creating a legacy of love

Painting is just tinted paste arranged on a blank surface.

If the artist is inspired, this ounce or two of gunk slathered on a rough piece of canvas can blast a jagged shard of knowing into our gibbering little monkey minds, or make tangible the hidden wishes and visions invisibly imprinted within the fabric of our dreams. Show me a person's favorite paintings and you've revealed their depths, if they have any.



Matt Winters

When we met, my wife, Donna Marie Magnuson, told me of her love for the lush beauty and brushwork and accessibility of impressionism — one of her first significant trips as an adult was to an impressionist exhibit in Washington, D.C. Encountering post-impressionist wallpaper like Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* in her home might have doomed our romance — art snobbery and male-pattern baldness run pretty strong on my mom's side of the family.

Instead, a mother and daughter reading together in summer garden surrounded by sun-illuminated leaves: A pretty aspiration made visible. It isn't great art, but it is a window into a great heart, a humble imagining of that most immeasurably world-shaking of all relationships, between mother and child. A terrifically bright, handsome and funny son she already had, but no little girl to teach and read and talk with while wearing cool linen dresses on a comfortable piazza patrolled by kindly bumblebees.

Modern people suffer from debilitating misconceptions about power — what to truly value and what to pass by. From the 20th century, a conventional image that comes to mind is of FDR, Stalin and Churchill laughingly divvying up post-war Europe at the Yalta Conference. Earlier centuries had a far better concept. Though the difficult realities of life could horribly diverge from ideal, the most cherished "power relationship" during most of Western Civilization has been that between the Madonna and child. Setting aside religious dogma, innumerable images of mother and baby are for some the most enduring attraction of Christianity — echoing foundational human themes traceable back beyond the last ice age.

Deep within, we understand the love we get from Mom supplies the fortitude, virtue and grace that propel us along the perplexing path from cradle to grave. Laughter and compassion exist because they were woven



A painting captures an idyllic interaction between mother and child.

MATT WINTERS — For The Daily Astorian



Elizabeth Winters examines her surroundings for potential adventures while mama Donna Magnuson keeps watch.

MATT WINTERS — For The Daily Astorian

into us by generations of mothers.

So when we got the call that our newborn niece needed a mom and dad, there never was any doubt we would say yes. The answer had already been painted.

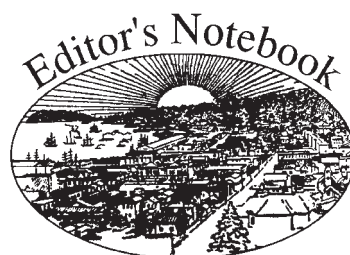
Donna held her, babbled back at her, found her the funniest picture books, coaxed our tiny girl into swallowing hypoallergenic formula drop by tortuously recorded drop. Light as a kite,

Elizabeth's life might have been a string that slipped through our fingers if her mom had been any less artful in crafting a world around her. A superstitious terror grips me at the very imagining of her innocent little spirit being borne away from us into the storm-torn sky of unbeing.

But she stayed, and this week turned a lovely 18.

In the beginning, I often wrote of Elizabeth Saria Winters, how fascinated and unafraid she was. I've only ever had the one, so

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claim little expertise, but I picture babies turned inward and most comfortable when shielded from the oncoming experiential explosions of first-time sights and sensations. However, from the start Elizabeth made it clear she wanted to face the world. Enfolded in my arms, she watchful as a huntress, we strode together through enchanted days when miracles were freshly created just for us — mud puddles made for sitting in, riverside roads to practice toddling, red-bellied newts to rescue from the rain, roly-poly caterpillars to tickle daddy and bug mama.

The times she scared us to death are outweighed a thousand to one by all the ways in which she brought us to life. Even newspaper editors have a little sense and so these stories mostly went unreported. But I am grateful for all the ways in which she lured me into true existence.

Consciously and deliberately setting about creating a safe place for this child and husband to each grow up is an act of incalculable generosity.

The romanticized fantasy of creating a bond with a daughter is no idle fiction, but there aspects to it that strike me as

almost unimaginably scary and hard. The mother that lives under my roof is, by far, her own harshest critic, determined to alter the course of destiny by doing everything right that her own sad, beautiful, sometimes cruel and addled mom got wrong.

Donna is an artist working with living beings precious to her. There is no scraping the paint off the canvas and starting from scratch. This is her one chance to live up to her own expectations.

And to do so with ever-worsening health must feel like trying to keep your loved ones on a life raft while you yourself silently sink ever deeper into bottomless icy water. What astounding courage.

Donna wonders, as perhaps all good mothers do, what her legacy will be. *If I die now, will my kids be all right? If I slip away, will they stay afloat and find their way to a safe and sunny shore?*

Yes. Please stay with us, but you've achieved what you set out to do. Good job. Your mothers back to the dawn of humanity applaud you. Your daughter will be a great mother. She will tell her granddaughters of you and your sweet tooth and sweeter soul. There is no higher legacy.

Happy Mother's Day.

—M.S.W.

Matt Winters is editor of the *Chinook Observer and Coast River Business Journal*. He lives in Ilwaco, Wash., with his wife and daughter.

Open forum

CCC values art

I appreciate Rhonda Grudenic's letter concerning the role of art in our lives, and her criticism of Clatsop Community College's art offerings and staff changes ("Art changes lives," *The Daily Astorian*, May 1).

Except for the drop in offerings between the 2011-12 and

2012-13 years occasioned by the fiscal cliff the college was facing — and which affected most other offerings at the college — our art offerings have generally remained constant or slightly increased.

Before state funding was cut by 70 percent, CCC had more than one full-time art faculty member. Unfortunately, as is true in the

vast majority of disciplines at the college, we have had to reduce sections and even eliminate, or not fill, positions that have become vacant.

Nevertheless, CCC maintains a strong and vital Art Department, and we remain an important player in the North Coast art community with our gallery showings, excel-

lent full- and part-time faculty, and the myriad of art credit and noncredit courses.

At the most recent art auction put on by the CCC Foundation that she mentioned in her letter, 20 artists will receive commissions that total \$4,064.50.

Should state and other funding permit CCC to reinvest in core

programs and offerings, including art, that would be fantastic. Until that time, we will continue to work diligently to identify alternative revenues to support the Art Department and the arts in our service area/district.

LARRY GALIZIO
President, Clatsop Community College



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