

Would your teachers at Highgate Primary School be surprised that you became a significant artist?

No, from my earliest school days art and sport gave me esteem in an environment that was a struggle at times. I wasn't a mainstream learner in the classroom, though creativity and movement supported my intellectual growth and confidence. I achieved art awards and acknowledgement throughout my school years.

How did you fare in secondary school?

I experienced many happy years at Walford College and once again found my identity developing in the areas of creativity and sport. Due to my commitment in these subjects, I was recognised as a compassionate leader and was chosen as a school prefect, house captain and captain of my chosen sports of netball and softball.

Creativity seems to be your hallmark. What was your pathway after school?

Unfortunately, limited school support in art and my not understanding the nature of a portfolio, resulted in an unsuccessful application to art school.

I took this in my stride and applied for a government dental therapy position with the SA School Dental Service. My duties included examination and routine dental treatment and prevention work, such as fillings, fissure sealants and extractions of first teeth. My role included giving local anaesthetic, taking X-rays, and advising patients and their parents about dental hygiene and diet.

Later I continued this work in city school clinics. The role entailed significant responsibility and an empathetic approach working with clients' personal emotions and fears. As my experience in community work grew, my understanding of the importance of emotional well-being deepened.

And that led you to therapy work?

Increasingly interested in holistic well-being, I studied therapeutic massage and established a private practice affiliated with a chiropractic business. I continued my work from home until fulltime motherhood of three young children became my priority.

I continued, however, to follow my creative self in areas of millinery, sculpture, painting, basket



Tiny birds wrought large challenge the viewer to become involved with nature

weaving and many more. It was a very arty home life for my family. It's not surprising all my adult children have creative careers and lives.

About this time you contributed to the 2007 Leafy Sea Dragon Festival (now Festival Fleurieu).

Yes, I provided mosaic lessons and enabled locals to create colourful mosaic works for public places. That was a great community art project. I also studied part time at the Adelaide Central School of Art, one subject at a time, over a period of eight years! In spite of the expense, I persevered until I achieved a strong scaffolding for an art practice, art teaching and using art to support individuals in finding their visual voice.

Your life has a persistent thread of education.

Education has always been a strong constant, perhaps to challenge my school experience but also being aware of the importance of developing knowledge and skills for a sustainable and rewarding life. Through TAFE Women's Studies programs I gained skills to embrace new creative adventures. A particular interest was how creativity could support well-being and self-expression. When formal training in art therapy finally became available in SA I gained a Diploma in Transpersonal Art Therapy and Graduate Diploma in Art Psychotherapy at the IKON Institute then in Glenelg.

Is art therapy well understood?

Art Therapy is often confused with diversional therapy or art for relaxation, and I find myself regularly explaining the distinction. People wonder how an art therapy session differs from an art class. Where an art class is focused on teaching technique or creating a specific finished product, art therapy is more about letting clients focus on their inner experience to develop self-awareness and gain insight into their psychological issues and concerns.

Did change occur when you embarked on a career in this field?

My fifties were a transitional time. I found a rewarding career, and also made new personal choices. I left the suburbs and marriage to become the sole owner of the family shack in Second Valley which has been my home for the past ten years. Having grown happy and confident in myself, and embracing fluidity and change, I felt blessed to create a second lifestyle in such a beautiful environment.

With continuing studies, I developed significantly as a professional art therapist.

And this led to using art therapy in palliative care?

Indeed, twelve years ago I happily became Arts Psychotherapist for the Southern Adelaide Palliative Services funded by The Hospital Research Foundation. The role entailed working with individuals facing end of life, and with family members also experiencing grief and loss.

As a member of a multidisciplinary clinical team, I had patients referred to me as part of other professionals' assessments and treatments. I used the art process to support clients find



Jane dwarfed by her large canvases

expression, meaning and wellbeing. My work extended into the palliative community, and I also developed an art therapy-based education program for secondary students to explore death, grief and loss as part of life, development of compassion and resilience. I found working in palliative services extremely rewarding and life enhancing.

And now you've left employment to be a full-time artist?

Two years ago I challenged myself to make a living through art. Another leap of faith and it's going well with some current large commissions. I exhibit mainly through three galleries: Exanimo Gallery in Hyde Park, Adelaide, The Strand at Pt Elliot and Artworx at Goolwa.

Now taking time to create for myself, I work daily in my studio at Second Valley and am exploring how far I can take my creativity. I've always based my creative and therapeutic pursuits on nature and its cycles, and now I live and work amongst it all the time. I feel my heart sing and my creativity expand.

So we can expect more bird paintings?

Yes birds have been a common theme over many years. Often regarded as sacred messengers, they've become my important symbol of a life of living, loving, freedom and beauty.

I only paint birds which cross my path. Working from photographs I capture the details of many varieties though local wrens, galahs and sulphur-crested cockatoos are often featured. My nature-based paintings are created with watercolour, charcoal and oil pastels allowing the images to appear transparent, layered and fluid.

I choose large-scale canvases to capture attention and invite the viewer to cultivate wonder and appreciation for the natural world.

For an upcoming exhibition in Coral Street Gallery, Victor Harbor with artists Judith Sweetman and Jim Kumnick, however, I am experimenting with figurative paintings in oils on board. I use a variety of art mediums and methods depending on the subject.

I feel extremely blessed to be living a creative life in a magnificent part of the world.

Jane, your caring, creativity and zest for living are an inspiration. It has been very moving to talk with you. Readers can follow Jane on Instagram