

PERSONAL HISTORY STATEMENT

The thread that ties all of my experience together is education- the needle is my Practice of Art. I express my experiences through art. I overcome pain through my art. It grounds me. I expose my vulnerability, my relationships, my naked body- sharing myself completely. The practice of art is a part of me, it is my process, my ritual.

I am 33. The Practice of Art is my religion. And I am ready to go to church.

I'm a latch-key kid from a single parent family. We didn't have much money. I lived with my workaholic mother, a nurse practitioner and devout Catholic, who suffers from severe depression and my little sister who is a drug addict and has significant emotional issues. My father was an incredible painter and craftsman that died from alcoholism when I was six.

We moved to Bath, Maine after he passed away in 1990. Three years later we moved back to Fairlington, a little village in South Arlington, just outside of Washington DC. Fairlington was a community. I built an extended family out of my best friends and their families; made up of highly educated strong women, diplomats, and feminists. I attended public school where I was the minority in a newly diversified school system. The community was a cultural melting pot, a mini-united nation, made up of immigrants, refugees, first generation Americans from Central America, West Africa, and the Middle East.

I grew up fast, my mother was mostly absent consumed with work and church. I had a lot of time alone to create and imagine. I had a sense of freedom to be and do and dream. My first business was a handmade greeting card stand, where I also sold handmade confetti.

My mother remarried when I was 15, moving us out of the Fairlington cocoon and into a house on the other side of town with a new step-dad and a step-brother. It wasn't until I was in college that I learned I also had two step-sisters from my step-father's previous marriages.

I am self-made. I have worked extremely hard for everything that I have.

I applied early decision to *one* school - VCU's School of the Arts for Photography, a highly competitive program. I got one of the 30 slots they offered. My family always placed a premium on education, particularly my maternal grandfather, who very much wanted me in a job "that would actually pay a salary." In my third year at VCU I changed my major to Art Education, intrigued because of the variety of mediums I'd be able to explore. Rather than a career in K-12 education, I saw it as a path teaching art at the college level or into Art Therapy. I began taking as many Psychology courses as I could around my required curriculum.

In my last two years of college my sister ran away, came back six-months pregnant and gave the baby up for adoption. A friend hung himself. Another friend was raped and murdered, all in the

span of three weeks. My academics became secondary and my grades suffered. Yet, I rebounded, graduating cum laude.

After graduating I got hired just as the recession hit. I went into project management, not ready to teach. I felt there was nothing more I could achieve in my role at NRECA and decided once again to follow my calling into the Arts for an MFA, allowing me to teach at the college level. I applied to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). At the urging of my grandfather to consider a business degree, which he said “would be applicable to any field,” I found a program that would combine Art and Business. I became one of 21 students chosen for the first-year cohort of Maryland Institute College of Art’s (MICA) 14-month intensive MPS in the Business of Art and Design, this time graduating summa cum laude.

In 2012 I started my own organizing business specializing in artist studios. Soon after, I got very sick and was diagnosed with multiple food allergies. I had to move home to learn how to live with Food Allergies. I did a lot of soul searching. A year later, I accepted a one-year AmeriCorps VISTA position in California. A job putting creativity back in the classroom, working with a diverse population at Lighthouse Community Charter School, of low-income students from East Oakland. I lived at the poverty level while teaching K-12 students Making. I documented everything, wrote curriculum and best practices, blogged for several organizations, all while designing and facilitating workshops for Bay Area educators. I compiled all of this into a 200+ page book, designed to be a resource friendly to both kids and educators.

Lighthouse hired me after my one-year contract ended. I built and fundraised the first yearbook program through grant writing. I began teaching Yearbook, Programming, and Technology, while coaching robotics for the annual Pioneers in Engineering competition sponsored by UC Berkeley.

Mostly self-taught as a result of my own curiosity, I realized I can teach anything. I coached my robotics team by organizing them and encouraging their process. I didn’t need to know how to work the robot, I just needed to know how to motivate the kids. Through the practice of art, the process of learning and persistence becomes innate, you learn how to get up when you fail.

My time in K-12 education changed me. It changed my art practice. That is what I love about education. We can always learn. After about five years, I was burnt out. With a little money saved up, I left last August to self-publish a cookbook and lifestyle guide I’d written in my summers off for people like me, living with multiple food allergies- and the people who love them, called #AllergicToEverything®. I decided to use crowdfunding to bring the book to life. It took nine months to plan, research, and execute the campaign. I launched it this past May, during Food Allergy Awareness Week, where I raised over \$31K - just 4% short of my goal.

One month before I launched the book on Kickstarter my partner of four years left me, my sister relapsed, and I found out my step-dad and step-brother were in the process of transitioning.

I came to a crossroad in my life. I gave myself the gift of time to re-envision my future. I painted daily, practiced yoga, got into the rooms of Al-Anon (a 12-step program for the friends and families of addicts). I remembered the dream I'd had for myself a decade earlier: the MFA, to teach at the college level, to work in Academia.

My life has been a process of overcoming family pressure and accepting life on life's terms. This application process has pushed me to share my work, and reflect on myself. It's forced me to step back and recognize my accomplishments despite all I have been through. My life experiences brought me here. This time *with a unique toolbox*, built from my scenic route and life experience.

I believe life gives us what we can handle and that everything happens for a reason. All the time dancing around my dream gave me the time to build my portfolio. Time to develop as an artist.

In the words of Hattie White, "I had my ups and downs, but I always find the inner strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons, but I made lemonade."

After coming within four percent of my goal, I know if I lay my cards right they will illustrate to you that I am worthy of one of the six spaces you have available. People keep asking me my backup plan, Berkeley is my forward plan.

Art, like life, is a process of practice, perseverance, observation, and chance.