

Amber's Update



Big exhale. We made it through January.

Some time periods are just harder than others. Occasionally we know this ahead of time, and we can prepare for it. Things like a move, a new job or retirement. Things that we know are coming, and we know will disrupt our equilibrium or routine, well, we can plan for those. Other things like a sudden loss of a loved one, or an injury or illness, those can throw us off with little warning.

When I saw January looming, with cloudy cold darker days, grieving and lonely after the loss of a longtime friend, I knew I needed to do something kind for myself. I didn't want to spend January depressed and binging on french fries and red wine in a self-destructive attempt to feel better. I know from past experience it can feel

good momentarily but doesn't work for me. So I quickly made a plan that I knew would make me feel better, if I could stick to it. To help me stick to it, I took a risk that I hoped would make my plan fun and build in some accountability.

Here we are at the beginning of February and I'm not a total wreck. In fact, I had a fun and productive January. Not productive in the usual sense of getting lots of things checked off my to-do list. Productive in the sense that every single day, even when feeling sad, I was creative. I created something; I both wrote and made a drawing every single day. The only way I could achieve this was I had a supportive, accountability group for each, where I deepened some new friendships and a long-time one as well. It's been richly rewarding, adding light to this dark time of year.

As busy adults who have had a long career and/or given everything to raising a family, we can loose touch with what gives us joy and makes us laugh. How do we rediscover what gives us joy, and make time for it?

Try this: Imagine yourself as a 4th grader. What did you love to do? What were you interested in? What did you play with? Look at some old photos if you can, and spend some time thinking back to that part of your childhood. Make a list of these things, no matter how small they seem. Let them inspire you. This is where you start.

Three Things

1



In 4th grade, I was a 9 year old writer and an artist. That is how I saw myself. I had a wonderful teacher name Mr. Shaffer, who had a great sense of humor and fostered my imagination. It was a magical year of learning and exploration before the crushing duty of rote math and spelling memorization in 5th grade. If my memory serves me (and it's probably not so accurate), I spent 4th grade writing and illustrating stories, planning class parties, jumping around at recess with lemon twists, playing jacks, and taking turns carrying the attendance to the office in the mouth of Mr. Shaffer's Kermit the Frog puppet.

**No friendship is
an accident.**



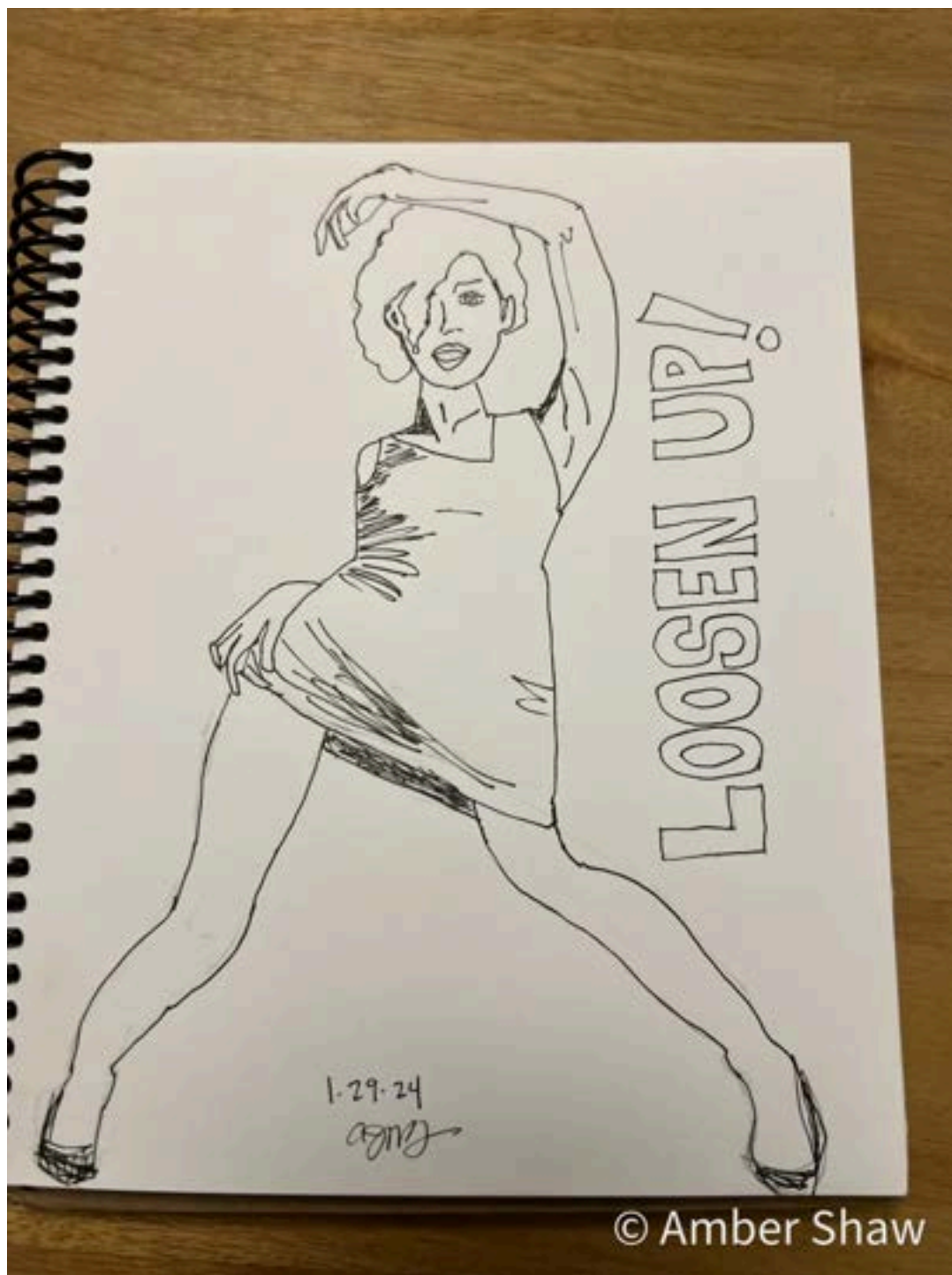
O. HENRY

I joined a 30 day Drawing Together group led by illustrator Wendy MacNaughton. And then because I wanted some accountability, signed up a new friend who is an amazing writer and artist, without even asking if she wanted to do it. She said yes! Another friend sent me a text telling me I'd like this group, that I had just joined. So the three of us spent 10 minutes a day drawing from the lesson or prompt, and then sent each other our drawings. Things got vulnerable and we all grew as artists. I looked forward to these daily conversations. I also joined a group led by another admired writer and artist, who provides a daily thought-provoking prompt to write on and share. Another 10 minutes a day, also with accountability, and a chance to learn and reflect on some important themes.

3

On the last day of the 30-day drawing challenge, one of my drawings was selected from among **thousands** to be included in Wendy's newsletter. I was so thrilled, and I felt like I got an A+ on a non-graded project. It's the same feeling I had when Mr. Shaffer taped up my crayon drawing of a flying banana in front of my 4th grade class.

Good thing I didn't draw this in 4th grade that would have been an issue.

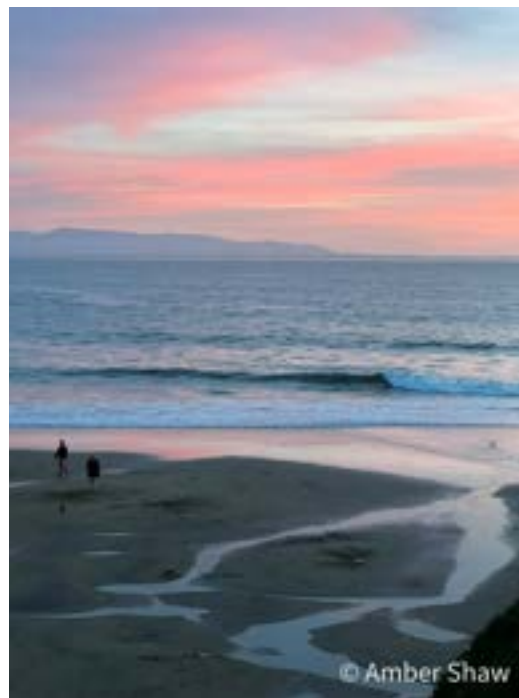


Drawing from the elbow because I loved how it taught me to loosen up. This is an image from an 80s Versace book I bought at a used bookstore. I could not have done this at the beginning of the month!

Do you like this newsletter? Share it with someone!

Extra Kindness





Flowers balance the moody sunset photos of clouds and the ocean. On the one month anniversary of my friend Lynley's passing, a friend sent me the most beautiful bouquet of flowers. It was such a kind and thoughtful gesture. A few days later I witnessed a man give a manicurist yellow long-stemmed roses because he had made a resolution to "do something kind and surprising for a stranger every day for the whole year, and today is your day." Receiving, or giving, flowers is a special treat in the middle of winter. I recommend.



Best regards

Amber McClain Shaw, writer/artist/ambivert

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