

Amber's Update - Double Issue!



Tools for two different crafts I tried out. Can you guess what they are for?

The Art of Summer: Glass, Plants, Portraits

Welcome, I'm glad you are here, I've got a lot to talk to you about!

Many people I know go on vacation in the summer; hiking, drinking and strolling in some wonderful locations. I have not been on vacation. Summer is our busiest time of year in the vacation rental business, and it's not advisable to go on vacation when you are responsible for hosting other people's vacations!

Sticking close to home, I have added a new skill to my resume this summer: landscape designer. I was challenged by my husband to come up with two front yard landscapes quickly, on a limited budget, and during a heat wave, making sure the yard would look good immediately for the house going on the market. I enjoyed

the process more than I expected, doing research, visiting a local wholesale nursery multiple times, drawing out designs, looking around the neighborhoods, studying the pattern of the sunlight in the yards, and purchasing all the plants and trees for installation. It was essentially a big art project, using texture, shape, color, contrast, height, size and pattern to plan and create something beautiful where there was just an expanse of dirt. My hand-drawn colored plans resembled a simplistic David Hockney landscape more than a traditional landscape architect plan. That's ok, there is a freedom in not being trained in this medium and beholden to its rules. I learned a lot about local plants and put all my design skills to work. I had fun with the projects, bringing some personality and color to the yards. As an added bonus, I can drive by these art projects any time I want, and see what worked or not, and how the yards change when the plants grow. I also discovered that a plant and tree nursery is a lovely place to go early in the morning, before it gets too hot, with my dog. She wandered happily with me through all the rows of plants and trees, and when it started to get hot she laid down in the water puddles.





I love the tree section of the plant nursery, especially the espalier trees.

This project was especially satisfying to work on during a summer when I've had a couple of difficult losses. I said my official goodbyes to my best friend, who passed away last December, at her lovely service in June. I had an especially wonderful time with her family and an especially hard time helping clean out some of her stuff. I also said goodbye, although not as permanently, to my wonderful across-the-driveway neighbors and good friends who moved to Colorado. If you are a regular newsletter reader you will remember my sommelier friend Kristine. She is now hiking tall mountains in Fort Collins and I miss her being right next door. As Ross Gay says in his book *Inciting Joy: Essays*, "Grief is the metabolization of change."

The thing about grief and loss is that eventually, as we grow to accept the change, it opens space for something else. And whether that something else makes us happy or is hurtful and painful is up to us. What we put our energy into is our choice. I'm working to put my energy into things that make me happy. One thing I'm doing is flying my friend Lynely's daughter to spend a week with me. Honestly, it's something I probably wouldn't do if Lynley was still here. But now that my relationship with her daughter has fundamentally changed with her loss, I want to make sure we have the chance to spend some time together to steer our connection

toward fun and adventure, support and mentorship. I know for sure she will be teaching me subtleties of Taylor Swift that I have not appreciated quite yet.

Six-ish Things

1

I had all three sons home for a weekend in July, for the first time since Christmas. This certainly cheered me up. We don't really have enough room for everyone at our downtown condo, but we squished in, with friends and family, to spend some time together laughing, cooking and eating.

My youngest son Ronan spent over a week at home with us, recovering from ACL surgery. His recovery lined up nicely with the Olympics. He alternated between watching all the events, driving race cars (video game not real life), and orchestrating a job change. It was nice to have him home even if he couldn't walk or do much for himself. It's nice to be called upon for my mothering skills once in a while. He is a constantly active individual and it was challenging for him to lay around with his leg elevated. But, as he said repeatedly, "Morale is high." He is now back at his apartment in San Francisco, and will start physical therapy soon.



2

Another thing that cheered me up was signing up for a glass blowing class. It's something I've always wanted to try, and I was delighted to discover [Bay Area Glass Institute](#), a place that teaches classes in this traditional craft. I was even more delighted when a friend signed up to take it with me. I made a tumbler and I am so proud of how it turned out! I am also going to sign up for a glass bead-making class soon too. Learning a completely new medium like this is so interesting and makes me look at glass items in my everyday life in a different way.

Another thing I've always wanted to be able to do is portrait drawing. I've worked my way through *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* and I've been watching some portrait drawing tutorials on YouTube. It's a much more complex skill than I could have imagined, but I think with more practice it will start to click. Yes, this is a skill that can be taught, and learned, and for most people it takes some study and practice. I'm not one of those people that "gets it" instantly, like the ones that pump out portraits at amusement parks. I still have not made a portrait that actually looks

like someone specific. I'm practicing on photos of celebrities from the 80s before I move on to people I know. My art friend Nicole, who you will also remember from a past newsletter, is also working on portrait drawings, and luckily we are good enough friends to laugh at each other's efforts. Well, not laughing AT each other, maybe WITH each other. I attempted a self-portrait and although it doesn't look like me, it sure does depict the frustration of this learning process! I was quite unhappy with it at first, but now it does make me laugh. Meanwhile, Nicole attempted a portrait that unintentionally looked like Abraham Lincoln.

I am inspired to find more craft and art classes or groups near me because I find myself interested (and maybe even jealous of) what friends in other parts of the country find to participate in. I think, "I want to try that!" In some areas, these kinds of classes are available and easily accessible at libraries and community colleges. In my urban area, not so much. Where I live, there is more emphasis on what the people in my diverse community need to survive; English skills, tech assistance, and citizenship classes. I've had to get creative, so to speak, to seek out artistic learning opportunities. Yes, there is plenty online but I want to be with people in real life. As I write this though, I realize that I can certainly volunteer to help with the skills my community needs, or teach something I'm interested in at my local library. It's something I will have to explore.



Glass blowing (with a lot of help), glass color choices, a portrait of a young Bon Jovi for practice, and a self-portrait in which I am definitely not happy.

School starts for many teachers and students in August, but in my mind it's still summer. When raising children, my schedule was dictated by the school calendar. I am now free of it although it's always in my consciousness. Growing up in a rural agricultural area, my school always started in September after the busy harvest time when walnuts, apricots, and other late summer crops required children to help out. I see the next few weeks of August as a time to do some of the things I haven't had a chance to do yet this summer: go paddleboarding or kayaking, spend a day at the beach reading a book, go on a sunset sail on the Monterey Bay. Maybe even a U-pick farm for some seasonal fruit! In other words, spend more time relaxing or having fun outside instead of staying in the air conditioning.

4

Speaking of drawing and portraits, [Wendy MacNaughton](#) is an artist that I follow and have done quite a few of her lessons. She does this great project called DrawTogether Strangers. Here is a short YouTube video about it:

[DrawTogether Strangers](#)

If you feel nervous about trying to draw portraits, this is a great exercise! They don't actually have to be lifelike (trying to repeat this to myself).

5

I've enjoyed watching the Olympics set in Paris, a place that is special to me since I visited for the first time when I was fifteen years old. I fell in love with Paris. The trip was unusual and glamorous for a teen from my small rural town, so much so that I was in the newspaper - on the front page! I was interviewed about my journey and revealed something that was pretty embarrassing. I will post the article on my website, so please check back there in the next day or two (button below).

One Last Thing

If you read my last newsletter, you may be wondering about the former NBA player potential client. I decided not to work with him. It would have been an adventure, but when it came right down to it, I didn't think we were a good fit. He says he wants to write, but hasn't actually written anything. And he wants his book to make him rich.

It's like someone looking for a coach for the Tour de France when they've never ridden a bike. I don't see a way to be successful taking on this coaching job.

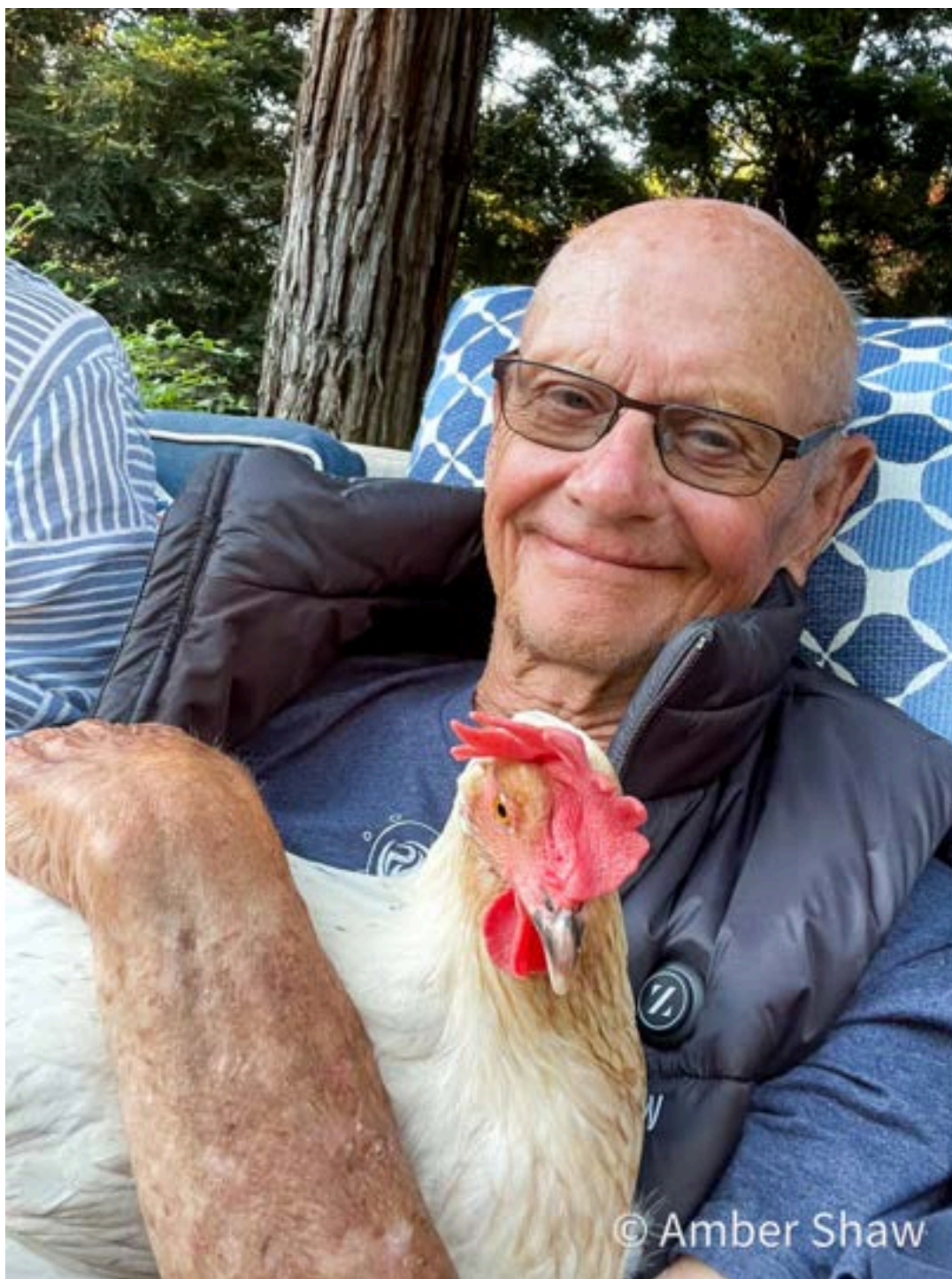
Do you have a book in you? Let's talk!

Oh, about those tools at the beginning of the newsletter:
on the left are tools for building a terrarium, and on the right are tools for making a glass tumbler.

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Cute Chicken Photo



My adorable dad and a chicken. You can just see how much he likes chickens!



Best regards

Amber McClain Shaw, writer/artist/ambivert

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