

Born with a twin (how else can they be born?), I was a visual child. In the backyard Mike churned trike pedals, listened for airplanes; I ate bright orange zinnia heads and followed violet ants under the fence to their green destiny. There was trouble.

Before diagnosis as nearsighted, I believed, by visual hierarchy, that the dust motes in sun shafts all around my crib were important. All this stuff was after me. Inescapable. Later I was to notice- through technological or eschatological extension- parents, sky, supernovas, The Future, Life, God. This larger view has not kept me from the preferred “on my knees” position with the zinnias.

In the foothills of childhood Carolina, I had Places To Go on this- The Day. The Woods. The Path. The Creek. The Ditch. Portals. They were exotic, vast, incomprehensibly wonder filled. I found things- saw things- drew things. I wanted to be alone. And now, twin, I want you to see too!

Trouble.

At East Carolina University (BFA '75/MFA '78) I met, on the first day of the Fall term (his first day there as well), I entered the design class of my life mentor Edward Arnold Reep (1918- 2013), who was the most ecstatic, angry being I had yet encountered. On That Day he burst into the studio classroom, late, and showed the color experiments of colleague Josef Albers who sought perfect harmony. But the school library had coldly and methodically rebound the richly hued, silkscreened pages in a new shuffle. Captain Reep (WW2 combat artist) was pissed. And elated! Heaven and Hell glimmered together. Obviously, the troublesome life of the artist was to be found by walking a slender thread between. He dared me.

Discovering American watercolor masters Charles Ephraim Burchfield (1893- 1967) and Walter Inglis Anderson (1903- 1965), I could see what they saw; the Portal through the color. In North Carolina I had a magazine clipped painting by each on my studio wall; no one else's. I taught at Nebraska Wesleyan University and then Mississippi State University. In the 'ssipp I was hired as a “Watercolor Painter”, the only time I've ever seen this job title advertised for a university position. I entered the world of Walter Anderson through a series of miracles. Ed Reep, Charles Burchfield, Walter Anderson- accident? I don't think so.

Measurable data: I've taught for 34+ years- drawing, oil and watercolor painting- won MSU's Burlington Northern and Grisham teaching honors, exhibited widely, shown in 30+ one person shows, curated exhibits, lectured in museums and universities on my work and my ilk (Anderson, Burchfield, Will Henry Stevens, etc.), and was named the official artist of the 2010 USA International Ballet Competition. My wife, Debby, is a dancer/choreographer who also teaches at Mississippi State University, a wild child with as much passion and extroversion/introversion issues as me. We undergird each other- my soul twin- female style.

On a more relevant note, last night I dreamed that my Dad (88) and I had to give three cats a bath. Oh, and they had antlers- beautiful antlers. We're not fond of cats. My son and I found a 65+ million year old Mosasaur tooth last week, a mile from home. Jackson said, "To think, it has been sitting there in the ground, waiting for me, for millions of years." Truth or myth? This is more what my art is about- holy trouble.

Trouble. In 2012 the light in my left eye "went out" while teaching. I joked that the huge floater I saw in its place was a dragon. Amusing, but my local eye doc rushed me to emergency surgery in Memphis for a detached retina. Future vision was in question (I'd already had cataracts and lens replacements as a young man), as I was commanded to keep face down for two months. Much precious time was spent considering what "precious time" meant, and, vowing to never watch television again (among other vows), I plied a Big Plan for my life beginning at 60.

Wyatt, our older son in Nashville, has a hit CD in "Novel and Profane", after the words of Henry David Thoreau. One of the lines in the lyrics of his song "If I Ever Wanted Easier (Then I Wouldn't Be With You)" is the philosophical gem, "I fooled around and shat my days away; but it's not too late to take it all the way."

Not too late, but...

Finally, as I enter my Golden Years, I can see that the Portal that leads to the Place of Harmony shimmers, dissipates utterly, and shimmers again. (Causes me to capitalize some words and leave others alone). For this, I cuss and pray (as I have learned from my mentors), work hard and rest hard, wonder and wander- but not very Far.

"New Solar Myths" celebrates the gift of my restored eye. Its ocular twin joins in the homecoming (there is actually a scientific term for this called "ocular empathy"), and, together, they have again led me to The Backyard with renewed interest in the taste of colored flowers and that shimmer beyond the fence. The Day has come.