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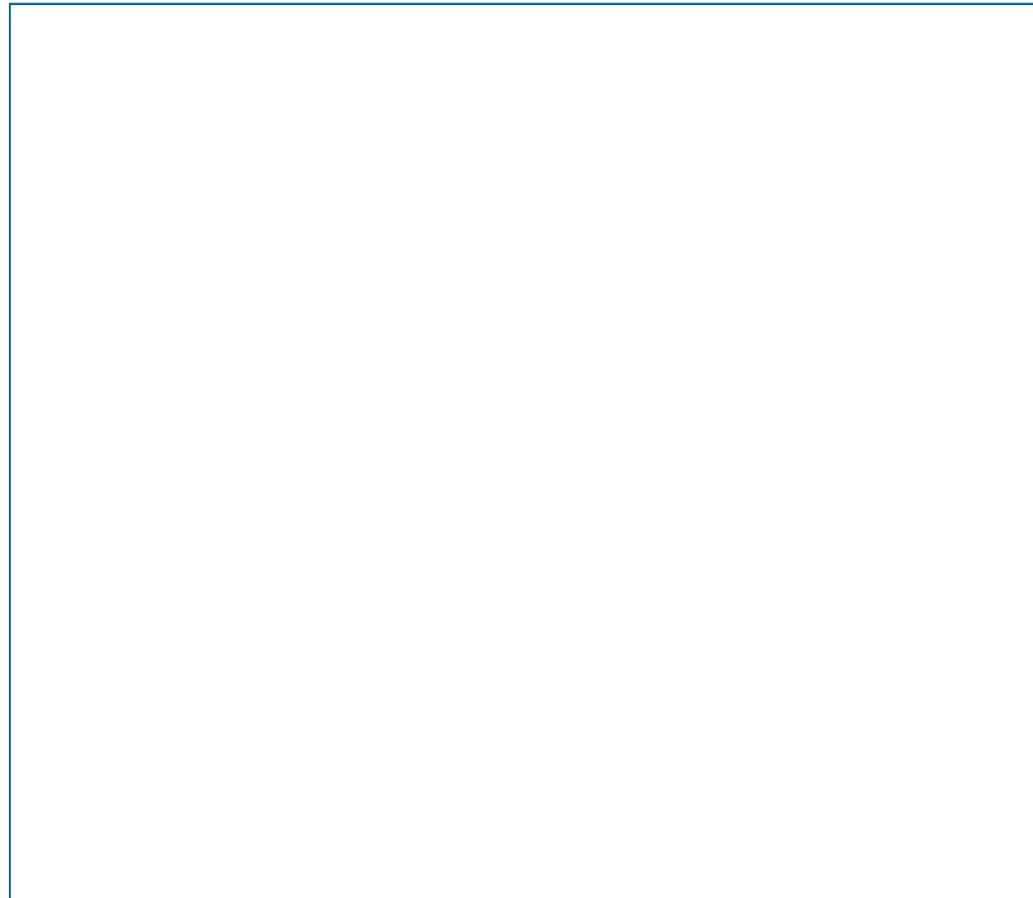
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### *Daring and Dreams*





Author photo of Don Wallace (image credit Mindy Pennybacker); [www.don-wallace.com/](http://www.don-wallace.com/)

*Sometimes the best things don't happen on purpose. In fact, sometimes, they almost don't happen at all—but a narrow path appears through a road of obstacles and we get through to find that which is better than what we were originally searching for. Such is the story of how I found my way into [The French House](#).*

*I'd planned a last minute overnight trip down the Cape because I was going to be a movie star. Not quite. Much of this misadventure is a tale for*

*another time, but in brief, I'd answered a casting call on a lark. A film adaption was being made of a book I'd loved, by an author our magazine had interviewed. I sent in a basic bio and photo with no expectations. I got summoned. I planned to make a weekend out of it at a B&B. I rehearsed. I bought a new ensemble for the audition. I got terribly sick the day before with a cold that will live in infamy. I thought I'd never make it and that in my state, it was ridiculous to try. Yet something implored me to get down there.*

*My Cape Cod was calling and it is a place that has always affected the course of my life. A weekend filled with serendipity and signs, including the gift of a helm necklace with the quote, "I am the master of my fate/ I am the captain of my soul," a single stream of guiding light in a dark, sleeping town to help me find the fateful beach across from the lighthouse, a bird I'd been writing about landing by my feet when I exited the car upon arriving, told me, 'You should be here.' The real purpose was revealed as I was leaving on the second day.*

*I had entered this bookshop on Old Cape Cod and discovered treasures I'd sought before. This was different. I wasn't seeking; I felt I was being sought. The large front wooden table supporting many stories, voices, dreams, quests doesn't typically call out to me with its recent releases. In this store, I'm after the 50, 60, 70 and over lovelies, the books where I can see and smell the history. This time, however, one cover caught my eye. Fingers clutching my helm necklace, I stopped next to the book that spoke of travel across the Atlantic. A book about writers feeling the impulse to change their lives, find a place of belonging. It could've spoken my name aloud. Also, given my brief infatuation with acting, I noted, particularly impressed, that Meryl Streep lauded this memoir.*

*I danced around it, wondering if it could really be all I wanted it to be. I was still quite ill and needed to start the long ride home; but I couldn't leave. My gallant accomplice on this weekend adventure grabbed the book. Decision made. Reading from bed the first night back, The French House was all I wanted for this time in my life and more. I think there could have been no better way to begin this personal, engaging tome than with the "Instructions" on opening the house—addressing the reader in second person, as though we too have signed an agreement to own part of the adventure. Implicit cohorts along for the rollicking ride, meant to receive this tale and be affected by it, we readers become a part of the story.*

*It is an odyssey from California to New York to Paris to Santorini to a wild island off the coast of Brittany apart from time and modern conventions. It is an epic journey toward 'home' in Belle Île where it is the journey itself that counts as the author and his family live their dream of restoring a French ruin, living by love and their pens.*

*This had to be my interview for the daring and dreams issue. The sheer perseverance of their quest come what may, the way life acted as an amused co-conspirator in making the dream possible, the customs and personalities of the villagers that you come to love, all charm the spirit. I filled notebook pages not only with notes for the interview, but notes for myself about passages and descriptions I loved. An old woman popping out of an armoire to greet guests, or, touchingly illustrating how our dreams “deliver” us, the passage where the author, in trying different things to help support his wife through the delivery of their son, used a visualization of a walk through Belle Île to ultimate success. And this description imprinted in my mind:*

*"Then came one morning toward the end of our stay. A rising sun cut slowly through the salt-laden haze. I stood in the doorway watching the gray dissolve to blue, the dull walls turn to white, the many-petaled hydrangeas shift to brighter hues, like a black-and-white photograph being hand-tinted."*

*May we all be so fortunate to live out a story to tell, so incredible, that instead, it tells us.*

*As gracious and engaging as his book, the author expounds on moments of discovery, protecting our dreams, a Tao of life which involves water as an artistic medium, what remains most out of all that was learned and exchanged with the villagers, taking up one's passion to avoid the unlived life and how staying true to what we really want, living one's truth, is the key to all doors.*

Don Wallace's latest book is *The French House* (Sourcebooks, 2014). His fiction includes the novel, *Hot Water* (Soho, 1991) and *A Tide in Time* (Kindle, 2014). He is also the author of *One Great Game* (Atria, 2003). Don has written for *The New York Times*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Fast Company*, *Kirkus Reviews* and many other publications. Along the way he has won awards such as the James Michener Copernicus Prize for a novel; the Pluma de Plata Mexicana for reporting about Mexico; the New York Times' Eagle Award; a MacDowell Colony Fellowship; and contest selection in *Next Stop Hollywood: Short Stories Bound for the Screen* (St. Martin's, 2007). Don has worked as Executive editor at

Time Inc. and at New York Times Magazine Group; as senior editor at Conde Nast and Hearst.

He was most recently Film Editor at *The Honolulu Weekly*. From Long Beach, California, he attended Long Beach Poly, UC Santa Cruz, and the Iowa Writers' Workshop with his wife Mindy Pennybacker (*The Green Guide, Do One Green Thing*). He lived in New York City for 27 years before returning to Mindy's native Honolulu in 2009. Their son Rory Wallace lives in Manhattan. Don is a featured subject in and contributor to *We Wanted to Be Writers: Life, Love, and Literature at the Iowa Writers' Workshop* (Skyhorse, 2011). Click on the author photo to visit his site for more info.

Interview with Don Wallace by Nicole M. Bouchard for *The Write Place At the Write Time*

1) In sharing the epic journey toward finding what you were looking for—home on an island of belonging—you often, aptly, reference the *Odyssey*. Fitting the playful spirit of your adventure, the name 'Odysseus' means 'the giving and receiving of trouble' in Greek. With evolving “personal mythology” about the isle that beckoned, you invoke archetypes of place and personages, mentions of fairy godmothers, goddesses and witches, Brothers Grimm, and Shakespeare's Prospero conjuring air and sea. It would seem the ideal fashion in which to tell this story wrought with dynamic figures, dramatic locales and dare we say it, a serendipitous sort of magic.

Following this journey that began before you knew the destination—California to New York to Paris to Santorini to Belle Île with pit stops and back and forths—up to the completion of your home in France, what were a few of your favorite “mythic” moments getting there? You'd said that happiness is almost always best enjoyed in retrospect. If it is better to travel than to arrive, what did you love most about the unknown, the process, the struggle, the triumphs along the way? Best laugh-out-loud 'giving and receiving of trouble' moment?

***As my wife and I were reeling across Europe (and before that, the U.S.) trying to find our place, I can remember one bleak night in Nottingham sitting atop one of the old Celtic watch-towers which were carved out of rock on the hills above the city. Our hosts were a louche group of English types, out of an updated Waugh or Powell novel: a dark and brooding actor and a bright chirpy actress, a couple of wastrels down from Oxford, and our hosts, a terribly thin and evidently wealthy couple***

*whose heroin use left them strung out and attenuated, like El Grecos.*

*We were staying up late to see the watch-tower bonfires lit in a chain across Britain, but instead of feeling magical or at least an occasion for excitement, there was this blasé attitude, this 'I can hardly be bothered' mood. Probably the heroin, but I know we felt that this scene was a warning to us—this could happen to you, it seemed to say—beware the wandering ex-pat life.*

*A second occasion followed months later, after our stay in Paris had gone all wrong—we'd moved into a Moufflard flat not knowing our neighbors upstairs and down were Nazi collaborators and still quite feisty (and kinky). That was when we grabbed our bags and fled to Greece. Within a couple of weeks we'd drifted down to Crete and to the Hippie Coast of Matala and Irapetra. We got off the bus late one night and the town was still and empty, yet there were candles in windows and on walls—votive candles everywhere. We'd gotten the address of a youth hostel, more of a commune of rude cinderblock huts, and it was full of silent raggedy tribes of what was then called "international youth culture"—and the grounds were filled with candles and people sitting in front of circles of them, not speaking, passing joints.*

*Well. We'd been in San Francisco in the 60s and were no strangers to the scene, but that was over 10 years ago and this felt creepy. We actually spent the night in an unfinished house with a plastic sheet for a roof and got on the bus back to Agios Nikolaos on the northeastern coast and the next day ended up hiking up to Knossos. We had the road to ourselves. There were cave-side grottos open all around, with skeletons and even skulls exposed. It was like climbing Golgotha. And in a field, a burro or donkey with a load on his back, and atop that a transistor radio playing "Imagine"—over and over and over, the same song on the radio.*

*Of course: John Lennon had died.*

*There were several other moments like this, ones where it seemed we were being taken on a path of instruction by a Virgil*

*or maybe a Fool. By the time we reached the dark quiet winter of the village on Belle Île, we were happy to shed the company of our contemporaries.*

*This gave us the feeling that we really were intended for something that was just down the road. We talked this stuff over as we walked, having a lot of time on our hands, being without basic transportation except for our feet. "It's still a ways, but we're in no hurry," the sort of whistling-in-the-dark Dorothy does on the Road to Oz.*

*And the funny thing was, it was all funny, after the dread and sheer exhaustion had passed. But for sheer lunacy, my favorite moment came one night in an empty restaurant in the countryside near Tours, where we were staying in a 14th century stone hut by the Petit Loire as a kind of warm-up for Belle Île. We'd gone late to the restaurant and it was all alone in a little valley, no other houses. We were the last customers—until a van pulled up and out piled an eleven-member rock 'n' roll band, so many of them and so wildly dressed, they felt like a circus. The husband-and-wife owners of the restaurant were beside themselves to have so much business so late in the day.*

*So it's us and the circus and the leader—Jean-Philippe, of Les Eklektiks—looks over at Mindy and begins making smoochy faces and eyebrow waggles. He's got to be kidding, we think. But no, he comes over and invites Mindy to come sit with him. She declines. He ascertains that I'm basically illiterate in French and begins piling on the charm, telling her how she can slip out and join him tonight. Which Mindy totally translates under her breath for me.*

*It's an impasse, so he asks a band member to bring him up a woven basket. With a flourish he pulls up a boa constrictor that must be eight or nine feet long and quite thick, muscular. And he drapes it over my head and around my neck.*

*The owner pleads with the roly-poly rock star, this Jean-Philippe, to release me from the snake. But actually, I raised a gopher snake as a child, one I'd caught in the woods. I wasn't*

*afraid. I sort of pried the snake off and was petting its nose when in walks the restaurant owner's wife. I think I was cuddling the snake to my breast at that point. She sees me, screams and faints on the floor.*

*Now the owner is enraged and I seem to see him grabbing a big knife and jabbing it at the snake before we could calm him down. We finish our meal and leave the band to it. Late that night we wake in our dark stone hut to the dance of bright circus lights on the horizon and the sound of cheap rock 'n' roll thumping in the distance. When we go to the window we see packs of people walking toward the pulsing lights and music like French Country Zombies.*

*Belle Île does seem, as I write in one place, to be “one of those Helen of Troy islands”—always being fought over, or treated like a trophy to be handed over in reward for some royal service. For me, there were multiple moments of discovery of these unique, implausible, or fantastical incarnations of what is after all, a ten-mile-long chunk of blue-green granite and schist.*

*My first year on the island, in the winter of 1981, we were traveling blind. We didn't even have an official map, as we walked to towns for food on footpaths across moors (I should say “rumors of food,” as in winter you never knew if a boulangerie or creperie would be open when you arrived). I remember coming across a squat cross at the side of Rue de Bangor, near the turning to Herlin. In the middle of nowhere it was garlanded with flowers on a cold drizzly winter's day. We came back to our village and asked the village matriarch about it, and Madame muttered something enigmatic; her best friend, the cowherd Suzanne, was slightly more forthcoming.*

*It was a menhir, or standing stone, hacked down to size and carved into a Christian cross. A common enough occurrence, yes, but it was the fresh flowers, daily, that fed our curiosity. This led us to years of talking to islanders, comparing stories, gaining confidences—and observing things, like Suzanne going into a small brushy defile and after a few days of hacking and clearing, revealing a small stone shrine that was also a spring. Soon she had uncovered three of these in the approaches to our*

***village. A few years later I suddenly recalled a passage from the earliest scholarly book about Belle Île (from 1851) that mentioned in an aside that there was one village on the island known to be the haunt of the Devil, and that was ours.***

2) They say to nurture and protect your dreams; plant them, feed them, care for them, expose them to the light, but don't share them until they've grown tall and strong. Yet at one point or another, nearly all of us will go approval-seeking in the vulnerable stages, particularly when these dreams or passions reach the phase of their growth where their care requires us to break rules, reprioritize with a focus on heart's desires and expand beyond the comforts of what we're used to. We start to worry about consequences, impracticalities, obligations, the onset of rational repression.

Any scrutiny or lack of understanding from sought after approval sources condemns these thriving passions and dreams as destructive weeds in the garden. Surreptitious, guilty, impeding their growth, we almost seem to stifle them as though we believe it's the right, selfless thing to do. Why do you think people in general seek permission and seem to struggle so much with the concept of pursuing what would personally fulfill them? How do you feel they should reframe their perception of doing so?

***Dreams were all we had for nourishment at times, back when Mindy and I were struggling to do pretty much everything—hold down jobs, pay the rent, take care of the baby, write our fiction, and somehow scrape up extra income to try to get the house on Belle Île into habitable shape. And people, some very close to us, were brutal in their casual denial of what their comments and actions put us through.***

***For my parents, I think their crushing contempt for what we were doing with our lives came out of that desire to have us stop being an embarrassment. They were small-town California Republicans, not extreme, but most of their social circle were very right-wing, John Birch Society types. My father's put-downs came from trying to get me to get back on track as a good citizen and someone he could take to lunch and show off.***

***My wife's Korean-American mother was furious at her, and us, chiefly because as a single mother of five children by three***

***husbands she viewed Mindy as a source of income. Her barbs and worse were like the cattle prods of modern ranchers.***

***My friends who made cringe-worthy suggestions were simply deluding themselves into thinking that they were helping, even though that “help” sometimes looked a lot like taking advantage—I’m thinking of the ones who offered to buy the house.***

***Today I think we are in a different psychological space in the West, particularly the industrialized West, when it comes to our dreams. The pendulum has almost swung in the opposite direction: we tell people to go for it, to follow their bliss, to live with passion. This comes with its own set of problems.***

***My feeling about granting yourself permission is that it’s curious but defensible. Do we ask permission to breathe? To walk? Yet I’ve seen people wither away creativity because they feel unworthy of continuing their work. If the notion that clears the blockage is called permission, I’m all for it.***

***As far as how to regard other people’s dreams—and yes, their passions—I think it’s wise to slow down the process. Ask if they’re really asking your advice, or just want confirmation that they’re overworked or underwhelmed. If they do ask your advice, try prefacing anything you say with some mild questions. And remember: Do unto others as they would do unto you.***

3) Though I could infer metaphors of it earlier in the book, I came to believe that I’d discovered your Tao of life in Chapter 22. Surfing. In your explanation of what it means to you, it seemed to fit the larger story so well that I regarded it as the manual, that which equipped you to take on the incredible. Lessons of perseverance, dedication, daring, endurance and durability abound.

“You train body and mind to cope with conditions. The rules are up to you, and to make them, you learn to live with fear.”

“That’s what this is about. . . About exploration, risk, testing ourselves, redefining . . .”

And once you accept the dangerous invitation of the big waves, “you never truly go home.”

Another dynamic surfer I know who comes to mind, is one of our writers whose piece in this issue’s non-fiction section, tells of his return to the waves following a battle with cancer, a stem-cell transplant and subsequent back-fusion surgery. It seems no coincidence that there is strength and wisdom in the water.

Distilling and sharing some of the erudition of this element, what would you give the land-locked who wish to catch the wave of their life, to dare to ride out their dreams? What are a few ways in which you feel this particular passion shaped your path? Finally, for fun, give us three literal pointers for wanna-be beginning surfers.

***The French House is a record of daring in many ways. But it is a kind of “finely calculated recklessness,” as I write elsewhere. We take risks when the odds favor us. We bought the ruin when we were broke because we knew the dollar was high. That seems like a cold calculation, but believe me, we were no financial experts. We did grasp that for people of our means—quite limited—this was a wave that came once in a lifetime.***

***When it comes to the sea, we don’t go out when in doubt—except, yes, for those moments when we both did let a gorgeous swell lure us out “just to watch” and then... You’d find yourself scratching up a dark green wall and hoping to get over it before it broke. Again and again and...***

***To apply that to one’s life: I imagine that each one of us will face a choice that carries a possibility of disaster with it. The crisis of 2009 taught many of us caution, if we were lucky enough to get through it with our jobs and savings intact. (We didn’t.) It’s important not to let our hearts be ruled only by caution—right? But you’ve got to make a sober assessment of your abilities and the conditions before you paddle out.***

***In the end, knowing how to stoke the fires of hope, to feed the dream that nourishes you, is as important as knowing how to pay the rent or mortgage. And knowing that if you do happen to***

***not make it over the next green wall you can make it up to the surface and breathe again, and live again—that's important too.***

***What did surfing teach me, or give me? I had my reasons for testing myself in larger surf, one of which was a desire to see what could be done with a wave as a canvas and the surfer, moi, as the brush or palette knife. For that I needed a bigger wave. This translated to the writing I wanted to do, and to the kind of life I wanted to lead with my wife and my son. We tried to reach for the bigger wave, bigger canvas.***

***For others who don't choose the water as their medium, it's not that hard to live parts of your life in an artistic way—which is what this is. Finding intensity, finding a job that challenges you, finding meaning in helping people build something, helping hold a community together: that's your larger canvas, your larger wave.***

***If you want to learn to surf, take a few lessons with a professional. One or two is all you need; the rest is a matter of repetition and overcoming the fatigue that accompanies each paddle-out to the lineup, where the waves form. That's the real tip: treat it as a set of stretches and physical exertions, as you regard going to the gym or doing yoga or gardening.***

***To preserve your skin and ego, don't go into large crowds of surfers during your beginning sessions. You wouldn't learn to drive in rush hour, would you?***

***If you are unused to ocean surf, the first thing you must learn—and learn to love—is to get your head under water. Many don't understand that. Spend time in a pool underwater, swimming, turning somersaults. Then go into the ocean and do the same. If you don't like that sensation, maybe find a dry land sport.***

4) The described social graces of French culture in the book struck me as a sort of elegant dance, a choreographed give and take, dancers knowing when to step forward or step back in a synergistic collaboration of connection. Everyone seemed to know what their moves were supposed to

be, from the hosting and paying of calls via apéros, to the three refusal system with a final acquiescence. What was most beautiful about this dance, however, was how your family became a part of it, adding your customs, learning theirs. You needing the village, the village needing you. Having your needs understood, understanding the needs of those around you (ex. Madame Morgane and Suzanne—Bellilois and tradition, friendship and history, sitting to chat in your house in the off season as in their childhood).

Of all that was learned and exchanged, what traditions and customs are the most meaningful, now assimilated into your lives on and off Belle Île?

***What comes to mind in the wash of gratitude that comes over us when we look back on all we went through was how much we were forgiven by the villagers, by our neighbors, by our contractors and especially our architect, real name Jacques Le Mestique—Denis Le Reveur in the book. They carried us. And we try to return the favor to those we encounter in our lives off the island, trying to be less judgmental, trying to help people get over the bad patches in their lives.***

5) In later chapters, you write of the fabled Ankou, a personification of death. The author's note begins with the quote:

“And if you see him, pick up a tool, not a weapon. A shovel, a plow, a spinning wheel. Ankou only fears honest work by patient men and women.”

It occurs to me one would pick up the symbol of their passion or dream not only to ward off death, but for fear of the unlived life. We ask ourselves how we are going to live that dash between our start and end date. It is by living out our stories that we attain a kind of immortality.

Your declaration is that you picked up a pen. In doing so, telling your story of *The French House*, giving voice to the stories of others through journalism (ex. internees of the Honouliuli Internment Camp) and other book length non-fiction (*One Great Game*), as well as voicing fictional characters reflecting American concerns/ideals (*Hot Water*), your passion paved the way for your dream and vice versa. Life seemed to reward the risks taken on its behalf. Writing made life on the island possible and life on the island opened up doors in the writing world. A mix of hard work,

dedication, chance and a heap of serendipity seemed to make the path you chose a fated one.

Do you feel that staying true to what you really want, living one's truth, is the key to all doors (luck, longevity, etc.)?

***God, do I believe that. Full stop.***

***Let me add, that in writing The French House I came to a point about a third-way in when I found myself teetering on the brink and holding hands with Old Ankou. One day fine, the next my life was quite possibly about to end. The doctors were actually as baffled as anyone. When you read the chapters about life in the village, like Far Breton, or La Fontaine Wallace, know that they were written by someone who did not know whether he would be there to complete the book, the book which you now hold in your hands.***

No one would have known in those chapters what you were facing; the uncertainty, the myriad of emotions you must have felt. Those chapters you mention not only convey someone so filled to the brim with vitality, but someone who gets what life is about—or rather, what it should be about. From the small things to the major things. You saw it, you got it, you conveyed it, we felt it. Powerful. To know you could be so giving of yourself at such a time, makes it all the more significant. I'm only glad that you are where you are now.

Here, again, I wish to express gratitude for this interview. *Je vous remercie de tout coeur*. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you put into these answers. The rapport between the questions and answers is the pulse to the heart of an interview. Thank you for something our readers' lives will be touched by. Gratitude to you and your lovely family. Wouldn't it be grand to all have a stateside apéro someday...

A P.S. from recent correspondence with the author:

"We got a letter from Belle Île last week. One of our younger island friends wrote in fractured English that matches my French. She attended a thing they do in France called a cousinade—a meeting up of all the people who are related to each other—where information is traded and shared about members of the family and histories. And in hers she discovered that her

great-grandmother lived in our house—that we have returned it to the family, so to speak (they use it on occasion, and their friends stay there). We're all terribly tickled by it. Like completing a 100-year ellipse."

### ***Special Edition Art Feature Q&A with John Bramblitt***



"Boat on the Coast" by John Bramblitt; <http://bramblitt.myshopify.com/>

*I first came across the work of artist of John Bramblitt by chance via a shared link on a Facebook feed. I was immediately struck by the vibrant image. It shocked me to discover that John had created this brilliant world of color for viewers to inhabit only after his own had permanently darkened. Following a series of severe epileptic seizures affecting his sight, he lost his vision completely in 2001. His remarkable story of battling literal and metaphoric darkness with creativity and color is one to inspire us all. Despite whatever adversity arises, it shows there is a way and it's*

*up to us to find it. His way was through painting; an outlet providing him catharsis and connection.*

*Fascinated by what methods—including haptic visualization (using tactile and kinesthetic feedback), memory and adaptive techniques with raised paints and textured perception—as well as what muses, such as music and emotion, helped him to create, I was compelled to learn more.*

*A May 2011 article from The Journal of Neuroscience entitled "Tactile-Auditory Shape Learning Engages the Lateral Occipital Complex" as well as an excerpt from the book Visualization: Theory and Practice in Science Education, suggest basically that the visual part of the brain can be activated by auditory and tactile stimuli. It can be trained to create new neural pathways and connectivity to communicate with other parts of the brain and construct a more meaningful, complete image. Further studies indicate that the visual part of the brain can also be activated by emotional stimuli and memory. These findings create more powerful capacities for perception in both sighted and non-sighted individuals.*

*Although it might be true that when we view these vivid paintings, 'seeing is believing,' the work of this artist teaches us that there is so much more; many more layers to discover beyond surface perception. Through his work and the sharing of his experiences, we are taught to look, feel, listen and process more deeply. We refer you to the FAQ page of his site where, with courageous candor and insight, he tells his story in his own words, sharing his enlightening views. We've also included a video below where he shows the emotive layers of a painting through UV light.*

*Traveling for much of the past two months, John was kind enough to take the time to discuss the meaning of color, multisensory exhibits, his work as a consultant for museums developing programs accessible to all (regardless of "ability or disability"), the impetus for creation and inspiration behind a subject.*

John Bramblitt is an artist living in Denton, Texas. His art has been displayed in over thirty countries and sold in over twenty countries. He has been featured internationally in print (*The New York Times*, *Psychology Today*), TV (*CBS Evening News with Katie Couric*, ABC) and radio (BBC Radio). He is the subject of two award-winning documentary shorts ("Line of Sight" and "Bramblitt"). His work has received much recognition including three Presidential Service Awards for his innovative art workshops.

Bramblitt is also the author of the award-winning book, *Shouting in the Dark*. He is the current selectee for the Texas Governor's Disability Employment Awareness poster and

works as a consultant for museums in developing programs that are designed to include everyone—no matter their ability or disability. *Shouting in the Dark* is the story of Bramblitt's life, his journey navigating through this new territory of blindness, and how he ultimately rekindles his joy, passion, and relationships through his art.

Read more of his bio in our Artists' Gallery.

Link to artist's website FAQ page:  
<http://bramblitt.myshopify.com/pages/faq>

Feature Q&A with John Bramblitt by Nicole M. Bouchard

~ Your video on painting with UV light (\*featured below) including the visual evolution of the image as well as the anecdote of Monet, instructs on how to perceive the world around us more fully, from layers of emotion to light spectrums to mediums inspiring mediums (music and art in this case). Your discussion of perception on your website reinforces the point of processing surroundings in a way that exceeds sight alone.

Do you feel that in addition to painting incredibly vibrant works, it is also a part of your calling to teach others how to more richly experience art, life by delving deeper with mind, spirit and senses?

***I don't know if I would say it is part of a calling, but after going blind I felt like I needed to connect with people and prove that I was still here—that I myself hadn't disappeared into the darkness that people associate blindness with. I was still picturing colors in my mind and I wanted to share them. Now that my work has progressed and people can see how vibrant the colors have gotten, I want to share that even more. Color means everything to me; it represents feelings, emotion, personalities, and music.***

You'd mentioned having had an interest in being a creative writing instructor in college. Interestingly, one of the most important things a writer can learn is to observe with such depth and detail, in much the same manner your unique art advocates.

In keeping with the notion of showing perception through different senses, have you or might you incorporate multi-sensory exhibits to go with your paintings at exhibitions? (A basic example might be a recording of the ocean with a nautical scene and the sensation of water.)

***I would love to do this—in fact, I am working on an exhibit now that will feature a multisensory experience that includes music that is synchronized with colored lights that represent what I see in my head when different notes of music play. I am also incorporating touch with walls that expand and contract. I want the viewer to be fully entrenched in a sensory experience and feel fully involved.***

Does your work as a consultant for museums developing programs designed to be accessible to all, regardless of “ability or disability,” involve such concepts of sensory experience and different avenues of processing information?

***Yes, my work with different museums such as the Dallas Museum of Art and Meadows involves doing programming that features multisensory experiences. We will usually have patrons paint blindfolded, or concentrate on a specific painting of a certain time period and pass around fabric from the time for people to feel or we have food for people to eat that is popular for the time of that particular painting. We have had great success with this. It initially started out as a way to accommodate the museum experience for people with disabilities but has evolved into something all museum patrons are attending and is frequently sold out.***

~ We are directing readers to your FAQ page because there is no better way to learn of your story than what is written there with such insight and candor. One of the most striking components of the story is your description of the point at which you, in essence, began again and found a different way back to art following complete vision loss. Passage from despair to determination.

“[T]his state of mind was also a liberating one. You see being at zero goes two ways—while all of the positive aspects of life I had looked forward to had seemingly disappeared, similarly, the negative aspects lost their hold on me as well. It is amazing how much stress is released when you no longer worry about what people think about you, or agonize over decisions, both large and small, considering how they might affect you far down the road.”

The baseline of zero, the idea of letting go to start over, freedom from expectation or external opinion—do you think that this equates the point of creation in the same way that a blank page or a blank canvas does?

***That is a very interesting question. Yes, when I first lost my sight, there was that point of feeling like I had nothing else to lose. Things couldn't possibly get worse and so when I first approached painting, it was with the same attitude. Although, I wouldn't call the blank canvas a baseline of zero. When I approach a canvas, I know exactly what I want to paint—it may change over the course of painting it, but I go in with a clear idea of the composition in my head. I feel like this is necessary to translate my message to the viewer. I want them to take away their own experience—but I also want to make sure my message of color and emotion is clear.***

~ What are your personal favorite subjects to paint and why; also, how does the process differ based on subject (ex. a portrait of a live model, a landscape, a reproduction, a portrayal of an iconic/historic figure)?

***It is hard to narrow in on a favorite subject matter I like to paint. The music and people I encounter on a daily basis influence so much of my work. I feel as long as something moves me and makes me feel or think, it could end up in a painting; that is probably why so many of my family and friends end up in paintings. The process of painting my subject matter is usually influenced by how I am feeling at the time or the energy I am getting from the subject, a song or the environment.***



\*Here we would like to thank featured past and present subjects for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss life, literature and art with them.

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