

Opinion: Finding your inner artist

By Robert Schimmel

What a phenomenal week(s) our nation experienced leading up to the 10th anniversary of 9/11. From celebrating our innumerable heroes and soothing our still tender hearts and seared memories to encouraging vigilance along with forgiveness, this was a period of mixed joy, catharsis and hand holding.

Though I didn't lose any immediate family members due to 9/11, I contributed heavily to Kleenex stock one afternoon as my heartfelt empathy for those less fortunate grabbed me by the tear ducts when I considered life without my beloved daughters or siblings. And now that the high-energy decompression process and emotional jet lag are constructively abating for everyone, I would like to share a few art-specific thoughts and encouraging suggestions with you.



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In my column last weekend I expressed feelings regarding the importance of art and artists to the overall healing and health (financial, spiritual and mental) of an individual and a community. My intention was not to elevate the artist because we all play a part in the success of our community in myriad ways, but rather to bring the artist's role to center stage for consideration. My point now is to suggest that the

artist is inadvertently, and possibly even reluctantly, the beneficiary of a self-medicating gift that allows for his creativity to not only participate in others ultimate emotional healing from times of crisis but also his own direct venting of deleterious, emotional steam or draining of a potentially poisoned pond of anger or guilt.

Yes, that was a mouthful, and I hope you get my point: the artist is very fortunate that creativity expunges negativity when reasonable care is taken in its expression. So, how do you engage?

Become creative, learn to express yourself, indulge in the sandbox of non-judgmental play and become excited about any manner of odd behaviors you once thought childish (or at the very least immature for an adult). Who knows, you might even establish a new medium or personal therapy that will benefit others and possibly reap financial as well as internal rewards.

Now you're going to rebut with the "I have no talent" routine, right? Look at the benefits of changing your habits and taking on some artistic behavior, like attending a watercolor or oil painting workshop for beginners, a dance class (yes, line dancing, hip hop, waltz, you name it), music (instrument or voice) lessons, a writing class, etc.

Just what are the bennies? Without becoming gooey or highly medical, they are a distracted and consumed mind seeking to either produce something for the pure joy of it and/or participate in an activity that opens up the heart and soul to possibilities beyond dwelling on deep and painful emotions to which we often become slaves. You know and have heard this one before: get a hobby. Well, why not? Hobbies are often in the creativity camp and, even more altruistically, in the healing one.

More important, if you are already creatively active and want

to share the joy of art's magical qualities, allow me this final plea from Nancy Libby of South Lake Tahoe who says in response to last week's column: "... (your point) about making people spiritually and emotionally healthy is a truth that goes far beyond understanding. ... our son, who is now 20 (and finds great pleasure in art)... is developmentally disabled. I have been trying to find outlets for (his) unknown gifts and talents in the art arena, but there are no teachers, no one at the college teaching to this population. ... There is little beauty in their lives because the opportunity for art and creative expression is absent. What would OUR lives be without art?"

Indeed, and though I know efforts have been made in the past to give classes locally for the developmentally disabled, they have needed help in funding, staging, and teaching.

So here we are in the "doctor, heal thyself" conundrum with "patients" in the wings. We need art as a source of enjoyment, life style, healing and giving (not to mention the ubiquitous economic sustainability), yet the very medication of which we abound is the very prescription we are struggling as individuals, community and governance to fill. We don't need more Kleenex.

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