

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 22 – Suzanne Fetscher – Art Inspired

Fragments of Memory

And now a personal word,

If I could recover deep data files in my brain, I'm sure there is a memory fragment of having met Suzanne Fetscher in Florida long before we met in North Carolina. Instructions to my subconscious and exploratory REM sleep just might uncover those files.

Here's what I do know. Between 1981 and 1985, I attended Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. Rollins is a small, selective liberal arts college known for interdisciplinary curriculum, its water skiing, tennis courts, and spectacularly beautiful Spanish Mediterranean architecture. At the time, it had a quite rigorous history department and students who were exceptional in theater, music, and the arts.

It's not every college that has its own fine arts museum, but Rollins did. Near the shores of Lake Virginia was the Cornell Fine Arts Museum, which housed one of the most distinguished art collections in Florida, from ancient objects to contemporary design. Beside the museum was the college art department, with studios and student exhibition spaces.

It's there that during the fall semester of my sophomore year in 1982 I took Introduction to Art & Artists. The perfect story line would be to report that Suzanne Fetscher was my teacher years ago while she was an adjunct instructor at Rollins. If only I had a photograph of me standing at an easel with Professor Fetscher watching me sketch lines in charcoal. But no, no such story to report.

Introduction to Art & Artists was an art history class, not studio art. Suzanne Fetscher was not my instructor years ago when she taught art at Rollins. But, gosh, I do think I must have said hello, that classmates of mine took classes with her, that she is in the recesses of my memory files somewhere.

I am sure if I had taken a class with her, she would have created a space for artists to flourish.

Seventeen years after my art history class, in the summer of 1999, I moved from Fort Lauderdale to Charlotte, about the same time, give or take, that Suzanne moved from

New Smyrna Beach to Charlotte. We were both half-backs, from the north to the south to half-way back to the Carolina piedmont. My guess is we both had the same sense about Charlotte, that it was an orderly, sensible, and future-oriented place in need of a good dash of artistic vitality.

In the photo album I have of my first few months in Charlotte is a series of photographs taken at an open house in the spring of the year 2000 at the newly opened McColl Center for Visual Art. In one photograph, my wife is creating a large bubble with a hula hoop for my two-year-old daughter. We were citizens of a new town participating in one of the city's newest cultural amenities. We had fun that day, checking out the studios and the large industrial arts and crafts machines in the beautiful converted church that is the McColl Center.

I don't remember it, but for all I know, I met Suzanne that day too. I am sure if I had met Suzanne that day, she would have told me all about the promise of the McColl Center and how artists would flourish and how the community would too.

It is now the winter of 2017. Suzanne and I are both a bit older than our days when we were both on the Rollins campus. During the thirty-five years that have gone by since that time, Suzanne has touched the lives of countless artists, giving them hope and the means and the opportunity to express themselves. She has supported initiatives and developed programs, prototyped and experimented, and led the McColl Center with the same innovative and creative spirit as the artists she champions. She has done the hard work of envisioning and collaborating and fundraising and allocating that makes an enterprise work. She has advocated and inspired. She has done what all true artists do: bring truth and beauty into the world.

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