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AUTHENTIC WOMAN PROFILE: CATLIN WISE, FINE ARTIST – PART I

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CINDY CRAWFORD APRIL 17, 2013 0



GROWING UP

Catlin Wise, affectionately known as “Cat” to many, is a fine artist who hails from Cleveland, Ohio and has always shown some semblance of creativity since she was a child. She spent the first seven years of her life in Maple Heights, a suburb on the east side that has an amazing cultural passion for the arts: PlayHouse Square with six glorious theaters adjacent to each other; Art, Natural History and Crawford Auto museums and the Cleveland Institute of Art; a botanical garden that is open year round as well as other natural gardens, and sculptures that represent the diverse ethnicities that make up the city’s populace. And Emerald Necklace, a succession of Metro Parks, far reaching the outskirts of the city, including Solon where she was raised.

We played cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians ...”

The third born of four children, Cat is a self-described “in-between child,” a spot in birth order that left her feeling “odd” and “off-center.” Having two older brothers meant there would be days of torment and innocent bantering, which her dad lovingly approved of. Not old enough to run with her brothers and play, she adored her little sister, but had no interest in games girls play like house, school or with dolls, Cat blazed her own path to adventure and recruited boys her own age to play and hang out with. “We played cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, or undercover spies. We played army or made up escapades of our own outdoors. Tomboy? Yep.”

You may think that feeling odd and off-center would incite a young girl to pull off all sorts of antics to get attention, but not Cat. She wasn’t a trouble maker and she didn’t require much attention. However, she did take education seriously. She and her siblings were expected to do well, and they did.

Education was taken serious in the family, and Cat adopted a healthy competition with her brothers. Whatever they attempted to do, she attempted as well—and succeeded. “In elementary school when my brother took four books out of the library each week, so did I, and read them. When he graduated from high school a half year early, and I found out that

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you could do so, I accelerated and graduated a year ahead of my class. I told none of my friends beforehand in case I failed the attempt."



Her family's move to the newly expanding suburb of Solon infused Cat's creativity with its endless pastures, woods, and farm country. Their house sat on land that had 31 trees in the front yard. Deer, fox, and pheasant wandered freely through the yard. "I spent as much time as I could running wild out there. Fields behind the woods led to a swamp and another field then the railroad tracks. Following the tracks led to an old shooting range with broken clay pigeons lying about, and further on, a train trestle over water. Yeah, we jumped. We

also taught the dog to walk the railroad ties without falling through. It was an outdoor education filled with sunshine and some trespassing."

Home life was normal for this close-knit family. "Dad was always busy, working hard to make sure the family did not want, but budgeted tight with nothing just handed to us. Mom was exhausted... four kids running in four different directions, breakfast—full breakfasts—in three shifts each morning according to bus schedules. I didn't realize that was unique until much later in life. Then she made full dinners with four courses and tried to get us all sitting down together at 7:00 or 7:30 p.m., a time which might be late in most families, but we waited on Dad to get home. On weekends, my dad worked around the house, doing all the jobs to keep and maintain the place. He had a full workbench in the basement with organized tools for every kind of job, electrical, plumbing, woodworking... and a darkroom he built himself for developing film."

Watching her dad do all these things sparked her first creative "aha" moment. "If he had spare time, he built models, ships, cars, planes. I think my genetic pattern was there. Artist. It's in the blood."

SIGNS

Cat tuned into her creativity at a young age. She always wanted to improve her surroundings with a line, a thread, or a splash of color. One time, she drew on the wall with a purple crayon and was spanked for it. Another time, when her mother taught her to knit for a project for a school fair, Cat knitted a painting. And yet another time, she made plain statues into painted ones. Everything she did was grandiose, like the time she drew full-sized posters of half-inch cartoon character pictures in the backs of magazines for her friends.



Her imagination kept on expanding and her natural eye for design and construction was evident by then, and she and her neighborhood friends built tree and ground forts complete with windows, electricity, and running water. Imagine that. Witnessing her father's handy work around the house paid off. She loved to saw and hammer and decorate after she built something, and she enjoyed rummaging for supplies, making something from nothing.



"Whatever someone wanted I'd just think up – images from album covers, portraits of pets, cool stuff. When the fort came down later, the artwork was actually saved by my friends. I just got one of them back a couple of years ago... a painting of my friend's cockatiel, Spike. He may still have the Led Zeppelin cover picture that I did, too."

In elementary school, art classes always landed Cat an easy A grade. She grasped art techniques well. But she produced her best work when she was able to work at home, uninterrupted for hours on end. Her teachers noticed her talent, and when she was in the

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eighth grade, she was chosen to help paint a mural on the concrete block wall in the Spanish classroom. In her junior year of high school, teachers tapped her to try out for a job at Geauga Lake, a local amusement park. "The concession group that handled that effort was independent of the park itself. We did training to bring our skills literally up to speed. The portraits which took over a half hour at first were brought to completion in five minutes. I made the team and had my first summer job. Most important to me, I used some of the money to fly to Michigan to visit one of my childhood friends who had moved there after fifth grade."

With signs of artistic talent prevalent in every aspect of her life, one would think that Cat attended a performing arts college. Not so. While art is her passion, Cat took the practical approach and studied "real world courses" and left the art for her personal escape, like personal Christmas cards to co-workers using animals that they secretly reminded her of. She received many praises for her work and was constantly asked, "What are you doing working here?"

"I didn't plan on starving for a living and you always hear about starving artist sales. Yet, no matter where I worked, somehow I would do some form of artwork."



After 22 years of working in the tough and demanding field of real estate as a rendering artist, Cat began to feel unfulfilled with the sales situation and the lack of appreciation. Little did she know that freedom was literally steps away. "I had a wonderful couple who wanted a specific style of house. They were great to work with and I wanted to give them a really personal housewarming gift. I did a portrait of the home they'd bought through me,

took it into my office for a little touch-up work before I gave it to them, and walked out with orders for eight other homes. The realtors loved them! My prices went up the next week."

Word spread about Cat and the wonderful works she created. Realtors began using her services instead of services previously provided by marketing departments. Her work was so good that people insisted on getting in touch with her to produce artwork for them. Soon she was on her way to establishing Residential Renderings, a creative consulting company, although she is known mostly by her name as an artist.

She continued to work in real estate, but her success as an independent contractor proved fruitful and she considered running her art business full time and leaving real estate for good. And she did. "It was the first time I'd left a job for a reason other than moving. Part of me felt like a failure, like I couldn't cut it as a realtor. But as I walked out to my car with my box of stuff, I actually whooped and kicked up my heels. I felt free!"



Stay tuned for Part II to hear how Cat fulfilled her art career!

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About the author **Cindy Crawford**

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Cindy is a writer and an advocate of personal growth and development who delights in self-discovery and helping others realize their personal power. She is a member of Homewood Writers Group and Toastmasters International. Cindy resides in Chicago.