



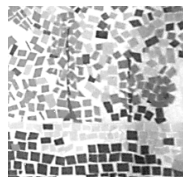
ARTIST BIOGRAPHY AND STATEMENT

Even though I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, I happened to live on a fairly rural road in Lockport. There were horses next door, cows down the street, and we even had chickens for a bit. I was lucky enough to also have a little patch of woods right behind my house. I spent many days exploring my little forest looking for animals or the next unknown wildflower. I would go down to the small spring that my great grandparents used to keep milk from their dairy farm cold and watch how the water moved around the rocks or how the scene changed with each season. These opportunities for unstructured time in nature helped shape my life and develop a lifelong appreciation of the natural world around us.

After high school, I attended Southern Illinois University and earned a degree in Forestry – I was going to be a park ranger. So where did the photography come in? When I was in 4th grade, I was given my first point and shoot camera. Like most kids, I took photos of my friends and places we went on vacation. But after college, a move to Seattle changed my focus. The big trees and even bigger mountains inspired my photography as I honed my skills. Another move across the country and a couple of kids changed my perspective again. I no longer had mountains out my backdoor, but I did have a garden and woods similar to those of my childhood. While my sons napped, I would frequently run out into the yard to photograph the little landscapes that so often get overlooked. I love that each picture gives me a snapshot of a season, a part of a life cycle, the light of a particular time of day – nature.

While I still enjoy grand landscapes and am dazzled at the ways Mother Nature has sculpted the surface of the earth, I am more often than not drawn to the small scenes. Just as in my childhood, I am frequently exploring the woods looking for the next wildflower or insect, watching leaves of a tree unfurl, or listening to the gurgling of water as it flows around rocks in a creek.

What happened to the park ranger dream? I have been lucky to find a park ranger job that lets me use my love of photography to promote natural beauty of the park. Occasionally, I get assignments that push my photographic comfort zones and force me to grow and learn as a photographer. For those assignments I am very grateful, but my heart will always be with my little forest.



OUR LESSON PLAN CONTRIBUTORS



Elementary Lesson: Heidi O'Hanley is a National Board Certified K-6 art teacher at Brodnicki Elementary in Justice, IL. She has been working for Indian Springs School District 109 since 2007. From her time traveling, she created the blog "Tales From the Traveling Art Teacher" and is a contributing author for *Arts & Activities Magazine*. Heidi was IAEA's Early Professional of the Year in 2012. Heidi lives in Mokena, Illinois with her husband and two daughters.



Middle School Lesson: Elizabeth Farnesi-Mitchell earned her undergraduate degree in Art Education at Northern Illinois University then went on to get a Master's degree in drawing and painting from Governors State University. Elizabeth is in her 14th year teaching art at Wilkins Jr. High in Justice, IL. Her love and enthusiasm for art is not only seen in the classroom but also how her students respond. She creates an open relaxed atmosphere for students to create and achieve more than they thought possible. Outside of school, Elizabeth creates large-scale pieces that bring out the natural raw beauty in the moment that is captured through the use of light and shadow.



High School Lesson: Debra Cleary lives in Dixon, IL with her husband, Terry. Together they raised three children. Deb has been the 5-12 grade art teacher in Amboy CUSD #272 for 22 years. She enjoys teaching students of all ages and helping them find their creative spirit and encouraging them toward self expression. Deb enjoys painting and creating abstract artworks that are inspired by nature's color and textures. She received her Bachelor of Science in Art Education from Northern Illinois University and her Master of Arts in Art Education from Eastern Illinois University.

