Fall 2012

All That I Am or Hope to Be, I Owe to My Angel, My Mother

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All that I am or hope to be,
I owe to my angel,
my mother.
All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel, my mother.

A quote that binds the relationship my mother and I will always have, through life, death and the paths I choose for my future to fulfill a promise. A promise I intend to keep and fulfill until we meet again… on the other side…
All dilapidated architectural buildings of my series are considered symbolic spaces. They become tangible - representing a venue of dreams where we become deeply affected, by our behavior, our environment, our society and ourselves. Each venue spawned an identity - it’s own life - warped and then altered by its environment. Each space stimulates a sensation of ‘being-there” and suggests, “once upon a time is no more,” but creates a sense of belonging.
Introduction…

“Being able to capture the beauty in anything at any moment is a part of me that I want you to see.” Pamela Planera

I have been drawn to art and design since I was old enough to hold a crayon. I have never lost my fascination with color and design. A photograph to me is a painting of a specific moment in time. My brushes may be a camera and a computer, but a good photograph is the ultimate marriage of light, color, contrast, and composition. I approach every label, logo, or invitation that I design in the same manner. I sincerely believe that this is how it should always be, to be able to “push the boundaries.” These are my basic philosophies, not only in my business, but also in my personal life.

“The student who is never pushed to do all he can not do, never learns all he can.” Confucius

When I read Confucius statement, I feel it applies to me in many ways. Ever since I was a child, my parents would tell me that they could see me as an artist and becoming very successful. Deep down in the back of my mind I never really believed them. I felt I never really had the courage or strength to expand my horizons as an artist into making it become a career.
As I got older, I kept exploring my passions for art whether it was in sketching, drawing, painting, designing, or even taking a photograph. By the time I was ready to start college, I thought I had my mind all made up about what I wanted to pursue in the near future. I wanted to be a painter and that is all I wanted to do, because it consisted of my drawing skills, along with design elements, color and so forth. So, when I started college, I decided to take all the basic courses that had to deal with drawing and painting. Little did I know at this time that I was in for a big surprise. The college that I was attending (Prairie State College) required some computer courses along with the art program I was pursuing. So, not only was I drawing and painting, I was learning how to use a Macintosh computer. At that time, I didn’t even know that they existed; let alone how to use them.

As time passed, I decided to change my mind about painting. I started to enjoy designing on the computer, and using different design elements to express my interests in art. So, after my first semester at Prairie State College, I decided to earn my Associate’s Degree in Applied Science. This degree consisted of all basic art classes, computer courses and some general educations courses to be able to transfer to another college.

After a few years at Prairie State, I decided to apply to Columbia College of Chicago to pursue my career as an artist. When I started Columbia College, I didn’t know what I was in for because going from a small local college to a larger one in the city could be a very scary thing. I decided to apply for Bachelor’s of Fine Art in Graphic Design. So, in my mind I decided to go from being a painter to becoming a graphic designer. While, attending Columbia I felt like I was in another type of atmosphere compared to Prairie State.
My first day attending Columbia I will never forget for as long as I live. My first class was called ‘Sign, Symbol, and Image’ and the professor’s name was Isabelle McGuire. I have to admit that she frightened me and even made me cry when I got home. She was so strict and expected so much from us on the very first day. But, I told myself to hang in there and try to make it through. Over the course of the semester, she treated each of us as if we were really working in a design firm. We had to write down our hours for each project to make it seem like we were getting paid, always had to have our sketchbooks with us, we had to do thumbs, roughs and final comps for each of our projects and create actual mock-ups by hand for our final presentations. Towards the end of the semester, I started to realize she was not as bad as I thought; she was just trying to prepare us for the outside world.

Now I admit a lot of students hated Isabelle McGuire, but to me I grew very fond of her after my first semester. She opened my eyes to the world and pushed me in directions I thought I would never be able to accomplish. Over the few years I attended Columbia I was the only student to make a record for myself with her classes, she taught nine different courses. I decided to take every single one with her and each time I took a different course with her it just seem to become more and more difficult. But, in the end, I made it through and passed all of her courses with A+’s. Some of my classmates were amazed at my accomplishment with her because we called her the “Design Nazi.” Hardly, many students passed her course with an A or B at all.

After graduation, I tried my best to find a job and for two years, I went to one interview after the next and still no luck finding a job. So, I decided to start my own design and photography business and I named it ‘Farfalla Designs + Photo.’
'Farfalla' means butterfly in Italian, and my name Pamela means butterfly in English, so why not name my business after myself. Over the past few years, my business has become quite successful and expands more and more each day. But, then in 2009, my mother became severely ill and no matter what the doctors tried to do she just wasn’t getting better. I decided to give up looking for another job and I put my business on hold to take care of her. I spent almost a year taking care of my mother and I always knew in the back of my mind she was eventually going to pass. Yet, she always told me she wasn’t going anywhere, she was always going to be with me and to stop thinking the worst of things.

One day, my mom sat with me and told me to go to my photo shoot I had scheduled instead of sitting with her all day. I actually decided to go and that I would see her later. As I was leaving, she had the biggest smile on her face and I will never forget it until this day. The next day, I received a phone call from my father telling me to come to the hospital because my mom was getting worse. When I arrived, the doctors told me there is nothing they can do and that her heart will slowly shut down and she had slipped into a vegetable state. She passed away that morning on April 17, 2009 around 7:16 am.

It’s funny how people say that when you are dying, you just know when it is time. Maybe, by my mother sending me to go to that photo shoot, she knew it was her time. Right before she died, I made a few promises to her, even though she couldn’t speak or move, but I know in my heart she heard me. The number one promise I made to her was that I was going to make something of myself.

A few months, after she had passed, I started doing work and hiring a few employees for my freelance business. Yet, in the back of my mind I always felt there
was something missing. I admit I love my business, but yet I wanted more for myself and to fulfill the promise I made to my mom. I decided to go see Isabelle McGuire, and see what advice she could give me to help guide me in the right direction. She felt that I should try to go to graduate school for teaching, since I do like to help others and I used to be her assistant in some of her classes at Columbia.

So, this brings me back to asking myself “Why am I undertaking the MFA?” I want to fulfill my dream, this empty void that I carried within myself for so long. I want to keep my promise to my mom and to know that she would be proud of me. I will still continue on with my freelance business, but I want to expand my horizons as an artist and as a person. I feel by attending Governor’s State University and earning my Master’s in Fine Art: Independent Film and Digital Imaging will help expand my horizons and help evolve myself more as an artist.

As I look back on my childhood, I have explored so many different mediums as an artist, to where it led me to want to become a painter, graphic designer, photographer and now here I am expanding my horizons to become an instructor. For me, accomplishing all these goals over the years and to see where I have ended up so far is quite an amazing journey for me.

I don’t really have any reasons of why I am interested in being an artist. After my mom passed, my father told me some stories I never knew about my mom. He said when he first met her, she had this drive, this passion for art and designing.

She even worked for a newspaper downtown Chicago, and created layout templates for printing. He said she always like to draw and loved going to museums. My father on the other hand is more of a businessman, and he started his own business at a very young age. So, when I look at them, they seemed to have inspired
me over the years and I feel being an artist is in my blood. A trait I was born with, yet a gift from my mom that I am so ever grateful for. Even the traits of becoming a strong and successful businesswoman, another gift I feel was inspired by my father.

The one question, I do ask myself sometimes is, “Why didn’t my mom ever tell me about her passion for art?” She always showed interest in my work, but I felt she was just being that way because I’m her child and parents show interest in what there children are doing. As I look back on my time with her, maybe she didn’t tell me about her inner artist because she wanted me to find my own way, to make something of myself, to discover my dreams and to make them become a reality. I guess I will never know the answer to my question, but I know deep down she would be proud of me and I strive everyday to keep that promise I made to her alive.

Ever since I started the MFA program, I have thought a lot about my future. I do ask myself sometimes, “Where do I hope to be in the near future?” I think everyone asks himself or herself that question from time to time, but I have been asking myself this question ever since I graduated from Columbia. A few weeks after I started the program, my life started to go into a new direction. I was offered a fulltime adjunct faculty teaching position at Prairie State College and to also tutor in the Student Success Center. Then a few weeks later, I was offered another teaching position for an art class at Lincoln Elementary. I also tutor privately for students who are not always able to make it to the Student Success Center and I am still running my freelance business as well. Last, but not least I am also attending graduate school. So, right now I know for sure that I will continue with these positions, especially the fulltime position at Prairie State, which I was offered for the next few years. So as of right now, I am teaching four different jobs for art courses
within my field and running my own business all at the same time. I would have to
say I work almost sixty hours per week so far.

Now this brings me back to my question of, “Where do I hope to be in the
near future?” I don’t think I need to answer that anymore. After three weeks, of
being in the MFA program, my life has changed drastically and for the better.
Usually these jobs are not usually offered right away, but I guess everyone sees
something inside of me just like my mom, father and Isabelle have been telling me
for the past few years.

Now if you had known me a few years ago after I graduated from Columbia,
I would have answered “yes,” to this question “Am I in this for the money?” After
graduation, I was all about looking for a job and making those big bucks, but yet as I
said earlier that did not happen.

So, that leads me to be able to answer my next question, “How am I
realistically going to make a living in my field?” Well, before I decided to join the
MFA program, I started my own business freelancing. For the first year, I thought
that I should just give it all up and start fresh, but my dad was able to convince me
that these things take time. Nothing happens over night and his business took years
to develop as well. So, I made it through another year and after two years of running
my own business and now going on four, I guess my dad was right. I have
weddings, photo shoots, design work and so forth booked every weekend all the way
up to two years from now. A few months ago, I didn’t even know where I would be
in three years let alone being over booked and in the MFA program.

By being in the MFA program, I have accomplished so much for just starting
out as a new student. I am teaching fulltime at an elementary school as an art
teacher for children from the grades of kindergarten all the way through eighth grade. I also, teach computer art and I tutor at Prairie State college. I run my own business from home and I also privately tutor outside of Prairie State for students who need the extra time to get caught up with their assignments and to understand the curriculum better. Last but not least, I decided to accept teaching at Governor’s State University.

Part of me is doing all of these things because I am in it for the money, but lately I would have to say that I have found something I am truly passionate about. Each day as I move forward, I know I am getting closer and closer to accomplishing my goals. Not everyone can say that they work at their job and are truly passionate about it or doing something that they truly love.

“What am I going to do if I discover that I can’t find full-time work as an artist?” As I sit here and think about that question, I laugh in the back of my mind. I have and will always find work, no matter what I have to do and how long it takes. I am always finding ways to live and work outside the box. After graduation, I made sure I found a way to continue in my field as an artist and not go apply at another job that had absolutely nothing to do with my field. I have been going to school for almost ten years and I created a goal for myself. I did not spend all this money and time to give up what I have worked so hard for. Yet, here I am, continuing on towards my goal and I could not ask for anything more. Which leads me to my next question.

“If I had to choose a single greatest goal for myself as a human being, what would it be?” I would have to say what I have been saying all along is to keep the promise I made to my mom. She wanted me to make something of myself and I can
honestly say I am doing pretty well for myself. I wish she were here to talk to me and to tell me how she feels about what I am doing for myself and for my future. I know in the back of my mind she would be proud and part of her spirit lives on in me. I sometimes feel her presence or I always have the feeling of someone watching over me. I even catch myself doing things just like her and some of my friends say they see my smile, laugh and my overall personality as a resemblance of her.

Now, “If I had to choose a single greatest goal for myself as an artist, what would it be?” Honestly, I am not sure how to answer this question. I want to say that I would like to present my work to the world as something they have never seen before, to where everyone will be amazed and inspired by it. Inspired to want to do great things for themselves and to know that when you are an artist there are no limitations. Part of being an artist is being your own person and to be able to express yourself as an individual through your art.

In conclusion, I decided to write this thesis because I wanted to tell my story as an individual and as an artist. This thesis comes deeply from my heart and I hardly ever talk about my life as a child or let alone what happened with my mom. Not many people know about my mom or understand why I am the way I am. She inspired me and still does to this day. She is the main reason I am where I am today. She gave me the strength and the courage to be able to do great things for myself and for others. All I know is that my life has changed for the better and I know I will continue on as a successful individual, teacher and as an amazing artist.
The Process...

High Dynamic Range (HDR) Photography

When referring to High Dynamic Range I talk about the difference between extremes. As it relates to photography and exposure they refer to the difference between the lightest part of the scene and the darkest part.

Each print of my series is composed of 3 to 7 of the same image at different exposures. Each image is at perfect exposure for every level of brightness in a scene. How I adjust the exposures is critical for me in every piece of my series. I noticed if I kept the shutter speed constant and adjusted the aperture, this gave me a variation of depths of fields. I wanted all the shots to look the same, only varying in exposure. I could vary the ISO, but higher ISO’s add more noise and I wanted a noise-free image as possible. Since HDR is an additive process any noise will be multiplied. So, that leaves me with one choice: shutter speed.

During each of my HDR photo shoots, I would set my camera on a sturdy tripod. This ensured me each image in my sequence is exactly the same. For me, I always set my ISO for the lowest noise and set my aperture for f16. I know I could use a wider aperture, but in my images I wanted detail, since capturing extreme detail is part of the reason I photograph in HDR.

As far as varying the shutter speed, I know I have two choices. I can set my camera to AV mode and use the auto-bracketing feature most cameras have. I recommend a whole manual approach. I find it allows for a faster process, as I don’t have to go through any menus to set it up and will have more options at my disposal if I want to make a last minute change to how many exposures I will shoot,
and at what intervals. I like to shoot at least 5 shots and have them only 1 stop apart but I am going for a more realistic look.

I always start at 0 meter and that is my first shot, then I do one at -1, and then (if I have sun in the image) I also shoot one hard at -4 because I want to make sure that I have no blow-out in the brightest part of the image. Unfortunately, there is no meter reading for -4 so I need to figure out what that would be. The good thing is that since I am using shutter speed it is quite easy to figure out, as opposed to aperture which is logarithmic.

I know there are two methods to editing HDR Photography. One, is using Photomatrix Pro, it is the industry's most popular. I prefer using the second method, Photoshop CS5 or higher. For me with this process, it becomes your art and your vision and there is no one way or look that is correct. You have to play and enjoy. I think the one thing I enjoy most about this process is that I never know what I have until the end of the process when it all comes together. I can't see it in the LCD even if I do have an idea in my mind. I guess it's kind of like the days of the darkroom where you never knew what you really captured on film until you slipped the paper into the solution and saw what developed.
The Poetics of Space…

All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel, my mother.

My home in my mind remains a deeply symbolic space for me and it seems to be the same in The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard. I enjoy how it is a study of how space and our environment affect our understanding of our society and ourselves. He discusses many manifestations of the “home” as both a tangible place and a place of dreams (one which inhabits an imagined as well as actual existence). Each manifestation of the space affects our behavior and our understanding of both our environment and ourselves.

All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home. His theory acknowledges how the spaces in which we live begin to consume us, affect us, and help define who we are. He also addresses how different physical formations psychologically affect us as in regards to: the attic, cellar, corners, stairways, rooms and the small spaces contained within it: drawers, chests, wardrobes and so forth. We become deeply affected by our environment and how we encounter each other depends upon the space in which we consume.

To describe a place as a “home” is to acknowledge its relationship to ourselves, to create a mutual sense of belonging. The space of home is a sanctuary, a refuge from outside sources, but according to Bachelard, if that space is in some ways less then ideal the curved nature of the house will create a life that is warped or changed by its environment. A small physical living space can make us feel uncomfortable and stifled. Yet in the end, we are deeply influenced by our environment and we take on characteristics of the home and the space we occupy.
I started to document any dilapidated buildings I could find. The buildings that caught my attention the most were in Gary, Indiana. I started to discover my own theories about my surroundings and how each environment affects us.

I remember the first time I came across the Methodist Church in Gary, I would have say I felt a “sense of belonging,” a sense at the fact I had to photograph it. Yet, everyone photographs this building, but in my mind I try to be different. So, I started to photograph the church in my own way and style. Trying out different processes: HDR (High dynamic range imaging), anywhere from black and white, color, all natural lighting and especially the positioning of the camera for me seems to be the key in my work.

Over the years, every time I went to Gary, I just kept documenting each abandoned building as often as I could. But yet overtime, I realized I never really had a sense of why I was photographing these buildings. What was my purpose? Back then; I’m not sure, maybe because I felt a sense of belonging to photograph it, but in my own way. I have always strived to be different amongst everyone else. But, I could not just keep documenting these buildings without a purpose or to explain the “sense of belonging” for me to photograph them.

I was drawn to these buildings for a reason, I would always sit in them and it felt like maybe I was waiting for something to happen, which may not ever happen. Maybe that is where my sense of belonging came from, which applies back to The Poetics of Space. I admit it is hard for me to understand Bachelards theories in the book, but yet each time I have read it, I come across my own theory, which goes hand in hand with my favorite Chapter 9: The Dialectics of Outside and Inside.

The chapter reflects upon the terms “outside and inside” and either “here or
there.” I feel these terms reflect a lot upon my work. The inside is limited and concrete whereas the outside is vast and unlimited. This reflects the interior and exterior of each building that I have documented. I was also drawn to a poem in the book titled “Shade-Haunted Space,” by Henri Michaux:

“Space, but you cannot even conceive the horrible inside-outside that real space is. Certain (shades) especially, girding their loins one last time, make a desperate effort to “exist as a single unity.” But they rue the day. I met one of them. Destroyed by punishment, it was reduced to a noise, a thunderous noise. An immense world still heard it, but it no longer existed, having become simply and solely a noise, which was to rumble on for centuries longer, but was fated to die out completely, as though it had never existed.”

It’s about a spirit that has lost its sense of “being-there.” Outside and inside are both intimate, but in regards to this passage we absorb a mixture of being and nothingness. The poem’s main function is to give us back a state of daydreaming, which is something history, psychology and geography are incapable of.

“The center of “being-there” wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility.”

In regards, to an immense world (the abandoned buildings) still heard it, but it no longer existed, having become simply and solely a noise, which was to rumble on for centuries longer (they still stand as of today), but was fated to die out completely, as though it had never existed (the buildings may never be restored as if they existed as they once were).

The center of “being-there” wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity (the interior structure starts to decay) while exterior space loses its void (even though the outside still stands, each building loses its purposes to be restored), void being the raw
material of possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility (I feel it reflects on each of the models that I have chosen for each individual space). Each model that I have chosen, I try to dress them accordingly to the interior of each space, as if they are waiting for something that will never happen: banished from the realm of possibility.

For the first two spaces, I chose an abandoned train station and church of Gary, Indiana. I dressed up a model as a businessman waiting at the station for a train that may never come. I took another model and had her wear her wedding gown inside the church, as if she is waiting for a ceremony or marriage that will never happen. For the third space, I have been documenting a theatre, which has the stage still fully intact. I dressed up a model as a mime performing throughout the theatre different locations, as if he is waiting for a performance that will never happen.

The three locations that I have been documenting so far with the models was also inspired from Gaston Bachelard concept of “typoanalysis” which he defines as “the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives.” He also discusses “in the theatre of the past that is constituted by memory, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles. At times we think we know ourselves in spaces of being stability – a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to suspends its flight.”

Memories of the house and its various parts are not something remembered, but rather something, which is entwined with the present, a part of our ongoing current experience. The desire to stop time, the way to transcend history, to produce that space which suspends time, is through imaging and hallucination. History is
fossilized, to where memories stand, they do not move, and therefore it is space, not
time, which invokes memories.

His “typoanalysis” examines the intimacy of the house, room after room, space
after space. These are not actual material rooms or spaces, but rather the dreamed,
imagined, remembered and read places, which allow us to come closer to the core of
the mental experience. I would have to say *The Poetics of Space* has become a great
inspiration for me into developing further into my work.
A long time ago before I even owned a camera, I would drive around with my friends exploring different abandoned buildings. My favorite place to go explore was the Manteno State Hospital. From when I was a child up until now it has changed tremendously. When I finally purchased a camera, Manteno State Hospital became a beautiful place in my eyes. A place I could call a home, a home to photograph and show its beauty from within. I feel these four images, as a series, help me look past what may have happened here and reflect waiting for something that will never happen. The question is waiting for what…?

After photographing the theatre over the years, I feel it still plays tricks on me until this day. Every time I have gone there my imagination seems to take over. Maybe because it is a place I shared with my mother. I always like to sit on the edge of the stage and I hear the sound of a piano key, the audience applauds near the top of the balcony where the chairs stand no more. I see the sunlight reflect across the
stage getting ready for an actor to make an appearance. Since, my mother has been
gone this place has become my most cherished place to photograph. I admit she did
not like to go here with me all the time, but when she did it felt like a place that
bonded her and I together in our own way. I feel every time I go there since she
passed, I hear that piano key and in the end maybe she is there with me, playing that
one last and final note.

_Pillar of Strength_

_Melancholia_

_Broken Faith_

_Waiting_

I have been photographing weddings for a long time now and explored so
many different churches, but none of them come close to this one: City Methodist
Church located in Gary, Indiana. Ever since I was a child, my mother and I always
talked about the day I would be getting married. I feel she wanted that for me more
then anything in this world. I believe everyone woman that is good enough, smart
enough, beautiful enough, strong enough can and will surpass anything throughout a
marriage. Yet, on the other hand some women do not believe in faith, in marriage,
or in the end it just was not meant to be.

_Transitions_

When I look at this photograph, let alone sit in that exact same spot where
my camera was placed, it’s a place where I feel everyone should sit and explore. I
feel everyone has a time in their life where they go through some sort of change. Yet in the end, all everyone can do is keep moving forward because life is too short and you should not let it pass you by.

*Right This Way...*

*Relinquish Your Dreams*

*Saving Humanity*

*A Brief Intermission*

*Siloque*

These final five pieces, I would have to say are the final steps of documenting for my abandoned series. Even though I have documented so many theatres over the years, this one represents a place where artists strive to get to the top. With this model, I wanted him to show he is waiting for just that one chance, for a performance of a lifetime, which he feels may never come.

*Deserted*

I feel everyone has a time in their life where they go through some sort of change. I also feel everyone goes through a time of their life where they have to leave something behind. *Transitions* and *Deserted*, I feel compliment one another in regards to how life will always be a changing and learning experience. Everyone has to leave something or someone behind because in the end life just keeps moving forward.
Delayed

Longing for Departure

These two pieces have so much meaning and stories behind them. For me, both of them tie the day I started going to college, the day I started to document these buildings and the long journey I have overcome to get where I am today, together. The male model in these photographs became sort of a mentor to me almost ten years ago. I strongly believe he is part of the reason I am where I am today. He taught me so much and showed me how to master my skills to the best of my ability. He showed me these beautiful structures and started documenting them with me a long time ago.

He was there on the day I was accepted to graduate school and I decided to develop further into what we enjoyed photographing. He became the first model of my thesis and the two titles I chose for these pieces are very symbolic to him. Even though he has been a mentor to me, does not mean he was able to apply it to himself. I feel for him as a person he is waiting and longing to move forward. He has so many talents and yet he chooses to not be successful. He defiantly stimulates a sensation of “being-there” and suggests, “once upon a time is no more,” but in the end creates a sense of belonging.
In the end, this whole process over the years had an affect on my emotions and surroundings as well. I have been drawn to these buildings for as long as I can remember, which lead me to a venue of dreams where I became deeply affected and in the end helped me define who I am, a photographer.
Imagery

Empty Reflections  The Other Side  Indecent  Consume  Curtain Call

Standing Ovation  Epiphany  Pillar of Strength  Melancholia  Broken Faith

Waiting  Transitions  Right This Way...  Relinquished Dreams  Saving Humanity

A Brief Intermission  Silhouette  Deserted  Delayed  Longing for Departure
## Appendix of Works

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<thead>
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<th>Title</th>
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