

## Inside the Artist - Heidi Hill January 2017



### Tell us about your journey in art / as an artist.

For me, I started loving and connecting with writing in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, in elementary school in Concord, NH. We had an overnight hiking trip where we got paired with classmates in tents and we did this awesome hike to a rocky summit above treeline, where we watched for hawks. Back at school we had to write about the hike. While I was writing, I was able to reconnect and relive the experience more vividly. It was kind of a surprise! I loved the essay writing then. I left it, as I got older because it didn't seem as practical. I thought, "Who writes essays outside of school?" I've come back to it in my 40's and it's been amazing.

All through school, I loved English class best. I liked all kinds of writing. I got into the more practical forms of writing in communications and marketing, eventually taking a position at UVM (University of Vermont) Communications. I loved the research piece of press releases and articles, but the promotional writing did not feel like it had much heart. I felt like I wanted to come back to connecting to heart, soul, and personal growth.

I left UVM when I had my second child and started editing for the small, local publisher Vitesse Press run by Dick Mansfield. I edited a book called *Fit and Pregnant* and the last chapter of that book was titled "Fit Family." Dick knew my writing background and that my husband and I were active with our young daughter so he asked if I would write a book entitled, *Fit Family*. This happened a year or so after I had left UVM to be a stay-at-home mom. I started writing the book in 2007 and I felt like I had lucked out. It came to me. I didn't have to seek it out. It took two years to write and, at the time, that felt like a long time. The kids were little, so I would write late at night. It felt like an achievement, which is not something you often have as a stay-at-home mom with little ones. Each chapter that I completed was an accomplishment. It was something my mother-in-law had shared; she would sew late at night so that she could see something tangible completed. Now that I look back at the process of working on the book, two years doesn't really seem quite as long a time to complete a book!

After publishing *Fit Family*, the publisher of *Cross Country Skier* magazine contacted me about writing a Nordic Family column and I did so for about seven years. I wrote about my family's experiences Nordic skiing and also interviewed elite coaches and skiers. I made some good ski-community connections and had found a real niche with the articles and the *Fit Family* book. But again, I missed the heart and soul that I felt with the essay writing. When *Cross Country Skier* magazine changed ownership this past year, I felt like the column had lived its life and that was just about the time I started my Everyday Essays blog.

In 2014, I attended a talk by Cheryl Strayed, author of *Wild*, at Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier. People asked lots of questions about her writing and one of her answers stuck with me. She said she's always been a writer. She's always been writing.

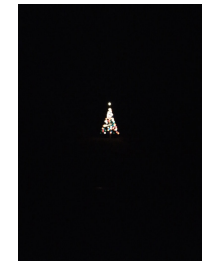
Off and on I have always kept journals or just done free writing and I've been more disciplined at some times than at others. I've battled with writing goals and may have been slower achieving them than I had anticipated. I'd be hard on myself. Over the last few years I've recognized and come to realize that the practice itself is important. I've grown to appreciate the practice of writing, not just the product. I've learned about letting go of that fear factor and committing to the art of writing.

The funny thing about the Cheryl Strayed talk was that I told a friend that I was loving reading the book *Wild* (about Strayed's hike along the Pacific Crest Trail) and my friend said, "I think that author is coming to Montpelier soon." I went online and saw that the talk was the next day. I stayed up and finished the book. It was one of those coincidences that you know is meant to be and I paid attention and came back to writing about my personal experiences in the form of my [Everyday Essays](#) blog. Most recently, I have become a contributor to the [Thrive Global Journal](#), which Arianna Huffington launched on November 30, 2016. The Thrive platform encourages well-being and wisdom, which is a perfect match for my writing. I also get to be part of a community of writers and receive tips on growing as a writer and I feel very fortunate for this opportunity.

### What is the medium you most like to work with/in? What draws you to this medium? What do you like about your materials?

Definitely non-fiction. I'm not really interested in writing fiction. I'll read both fiction and non-fiction, but I am drawn to writing non-fiction. Right now, it is essays and personal narrative. I feel drawn to share my stories, to get personal and detailed, but on a topic or challenge that is a universal experience so that readers can grow and discover alongside me.

Lately, I've been getting these slight pulls to incorporate verse. I don't call it poetry. Calling it verse means that I can experiment with it, making it feel less frightening/intimidating than poetry. My oldest daughter, Ava, was reading verse books for young adult readers. I read them after her and loved seeing the story in this format. I am currently into exploring physical space and light versus dark. I loved the visual way the words in the verse broke with the lines. It is definitely something I want to experiment with as a form and I'm looking forward to it. It's liberating to play with something new, to be able to start something and not [have to be] be good at it.



Dark December – Heidi Hill

I recently read *In Other Words* by Jhumpa Lahiri, a writer who didn't fully connect to the languages she learned as a child: Bengali, her first language taught to her by her parents, and English, which she learned at school in London. As a young adult, she was drawn to the Italian language, even though it wasn't part of her heritage. She later moved to Italy and studied the language, eventually writing *In Other Words* in Italian. Writing in Italian liberated her because she could be a beginner at the language and not have her own expectations or her parents. She was drawn to the beauty of Italian. When it came time to translate the book into English, she opted to have someone else do the translation because she felt like it would lose its origin for her. This trying something new as a way to settle our identity; I believe it is part of our challenge as artists.

**What most inspires your work - Has there been anything that has been life changing or that has influenced your practice?**

Right now my writing is really personal and has been life changing in the last year. Honesty and wisdom have been inspiring and I've used writing to help me grow into the person I want to be. It gives me the opportunity to rise above all the drama in my head. When I am writing, I get to a pure and honest place. I've realized that I give a gift to myself when I am writing. Right now, I want to use my writing as a way to share and inspire others, not just entertainment, education or information. It is where I am right now.

I am looking to make connections through my writing, to toss out ideas for the reader to contemplate how it connects to his or her own life. I don't expect feedback and I am not looking for validation through my writing. I write hoping to share my thoughts so the readers can ponder it in their own life.

Over the last year, I've been connected to some local women who are artists in our community. We meet for lunch and share our successes and challenges. It's been powerful to be connected to other artists. Most of my friends aren't artists and I haven't necessarily thought of my writing as work in the same context as their work so I haven't often shared my experiences with them. Writing can be lonely and there are times that the voices in my head have been challenging. I didn't realize how long I was alone. Talking with other artists in similar situations, sharing the same challenges helps. I finally feel like I belong and it encourages me when others share a success. It lifts me up.



**What blogs or books are you reading or would recommend?**

*Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg is one I would recommend for all artists. It was super popular a while ago. As an artist and stay-at-home mom, I didn't think I'd be able to relate to the corporate

mom depicted in her story. But I was able to relate broadly regarding the whole idea of looking at all life situations and seeing the most potential for growth, even when you are not ready. As artists, we may not always take risks, but when we do, we can grow. This book is a lens for me to see that message again and again.

My nightstand books are dusty, but always there. *Simple Abundance* (Sarah Ban Breathnach) is a focus for me on gratitude. I have several Eckhart Tolle books to remind myself what ego is. And *Conversations with God* (Neale Donald Walsch) provides spiritual pick-me-ups before bed.

I think we all have certain books we re-read and keep coming back to over the years. It gives us the chance to find something different or confirm our truths or go back and re-learn.

We can get our reminders and encouragement from different places and books are one of these places. Books carry the wisdom and truth that repeats itself through the ages. All we need to do is slow down and pay attention!