

Spontaneous Art With Donna Estabrooks

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The class was to help us find a place to creatively emerge within ourselves, to free up our anxieties around the idea of making art, and experience new ways to do it.

Our teacher was Donna Estabrooks, known for her whimsical mixed-media paintings. Donna is a master at spontaneously creating prolific bodies of work, drawing from how she feels at any given moment. She led us on a creative journey that was fast, furious, fabulous and fun. For our first exercise we were given pencils and a small paper book. We chose a noun and a verb, "house" and "fly." We were to draw a house that could fly on every page (there were 12), and then write something appropriate on each page, all in a very short time (she brought a clock!). Donna called it an exercise to "get loosened up." Guess what? It worked!! As I look at that little book today, I see that I wrote things like, "My heart sings today because I'm happy and I know it," "On other days I feel big and fat and no creative juices flow at all...I am surrounded in muck and my heart does not sing; but only for a little while," and "If I had wings on my heart, I would fly to you." WOW! I wrote those things?

The next exercise was a bit more serious and we were given a little more time. The result was we each

had a special gift for ourselves or someone in our life. Again, we were given small books, only they were larger with nice paper, covers and an attractive cord holding it all together. We had magazines at our disposal from which we tore photos. Gluing them down, we created images on each page. We chose the words "run," "sunny," "trees," "beautiful," "box," "key," "love" and others. To the words, we added more of our own, doing so in any way we wished, all coordinating with whatever photos we chose. We were like children making picture books, and yet we weren't children at all. From a deep well of experience as well as from a dreamlike place, words and ideas flowed from us. Each page was transformed into a message with pictures to go with it.

I dedicated my book to my son, presenting him with it as he was leaving on a journey west. On one page using the word "box," I wrote, "As you travel, how about keeping all of your experiences in an imaginary box? And when you get home, we can open it together and I can do what you did, see what you saw and hear what you heard!" The picture was of a young man mountain climbing. Below him was a mile of rock, above him a vast blue sky, and behind him an ocean that appeared to be endless. *ir DM*