

Finding the Authentic Self



Peder Hegland
Minnesota, USA

Every person has the task from birth to learn what is genuine and real for them. There are points along the way where the issue comes more brightly into focus. While I have watched family and friends confront this issue, I think I can write best about this idea from my own personal experience.

The crisis came for me when I was in my 20's. I had been pursuing my college science studies with a growing uncertainty about the future direction they were taking me. A class in a completely new and unlikely subject, pottery. It opened up the new worlds of craft and art: a path that seemed to have promising qualities, possibilities that were more authentic.

There was a real sense of excitement, a passion that happened quickly and surprisingly. How could I pursue this passion in a realistic way? I really had no idea from past experience.

Joseph Campbell wrote somewhere that if one pursues their true passion, the universe will open doors for them and then one has only to choose to go through them. I can only say that in my case, doors did open and I found help in some very good teachers and mentors. Over a period of years, they gave me the courage to choose to be a potter. They gave me the real knowledge, tools and philosophy to pursue my passion and set out on my authentic journey. I have observed that everyone needs help in this process beyond teachers. For me, the support of family and friends has been vital.

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The craft of pottery contains many facts that must be learned to work with that marvelous material, clay. Learned by listening and reading. By trial and error. Many lessons have to be learned not in the head, but by the hands eyes, body and emotions. By years of work. Every pot requires decisions that must be made throughout the making process. Decisions about material function, form, decoration and firing. Individual studio potters reveal their authentic nature when they make these decisions. They can hardly avoid it. It is the language that the potter learns and tries to communicate to others. The best pots are made on those days when passion is present and the decisions are good ones. There is a shared authenticity with the potter when a person likes a handmade pot enough to appreciate it and even buy it.

Master potter, Marguerite Wildenhain, once said that she had learned more in the last ten years of her life than in all the years before. That should give hope to all of us.