

The Portrait of a Lady

Autumn invited itself into my conversations with Eve. In one of the sunniest states in America, we managed to meet exclusively on overcast days. My recordings of the conversations are muddled slightly by the sound of the wind. When I close my eyes the sting of the breeze reclaims its place on my cheeks as Eve and I laugh about her first art show. It was a limited viewing exhibition on the walls of her family's rented apartment in Crayon. Hyde Park, which housed the apartment, was home to same-sex couples, and people of different races and faiths. The atom bomb was perfected within walking distance of Eve's childhood home, education, innovation, and art surrounding her from a young age.

She was a teenager in the 1950s while her two older sisters spent their formative years in the 40s. When she was 17, she stayed in Chicago and attended the University of Illinois campus there; eventually finishing her bachelors in French at U of I's Champaign campus. In 1961, she got married in a small ceremony in November and honeymooned at a national park. Her sisters both had June weddings, identical honeymoons, haircuts, and China. Eve has the unique talent of being a rebel with a cause. A freedom coming from her independence, stubbornness, and age. Her sisters internalized traditional values that judged their importance based on their dress size. Eve moved in rejection of these ideals and prioritized her academic success over more superficial expectations.

Eve received her MA in French literature and began as a Ph.D. student and a TA at CU's French department. Despite her work and intellect, she didn't end up receiving this degree. The sacrifices that are expected of women have always been lofty, and as a wife and new mother, Eve was left with little choice but to prioritize her husband's academic career over her own.

“I regret that.”

It hung in the air for a moment like a leaf dancing slowly towards the cement below. She continued, explaining how the pressures from her mother-in-law and the unspoken expectations lead to her decision to step back from her doctorate, and how letting go was done at the expense of herself. In her eloquence, her intellect and education are clear, not expressing the absence of this degree, but regardless her regret is understandable. Opportunities that are taken from us often take closure with them. In the absence of this, we just sat for a second. The clouds above us remained unlined by silver sentiments; our regrets lay together, still, on the library table.

When she divorced her husband, she took the kids to her oldest sister's house. In my first conversation with Eve, *Little Women* came up. She and I both relate the most with Jo. As we began discussing her sisters, I started to make my predictions of which character they would each be. My suspicions were confirmed when Eve shared that her eldest sister is Meg, and her middle sister is Amy. Even though they were separated by decade-related superficial differences, Eve and her oldest sister always shared a similar moral foundation and understanding. Her sisters were always competing with each other, and even though Eve didn't partake in their games she was always more separated from her middle sister. Eve's oldest sister was an artist like her, a pianist rather than a painter, but a creator of beauty nonetheless. They both existed with an air of whimsy around them and even though she could be capricious at times, she was there when Eve and her three daughters needed a place to stay. They said goodbye a thousand miles apart. Eve sang to her through a phone that the nurse held to her sister's ear. After her middle sister told her she was sorry about the loss, she knew that Eve had loved her more.

After years, Eve needed a break from Boulder. She ended up moving to Glenwood Springs and spent much of her time engaging with art. Drop cloths transformed the living room

into a studio. Every day, they met to create. In the conservative town, the group made up of a gay priest, Eve, and two other democrats connected on their ideas, creating art and community within a hyper-traditional space. Art became a frequent visitor in our conversations, and Eve's pursuits. As a social worker, she often used informal art therapy to connect with the kids she encountered. They'd both pick a color and turn cardstock into technicolor creations. In the nursing home she spent time working, she would help residents with the mechanics of painting, allowing their mind to control their vision and not be limited by their physical challenges. With Eve you don't need to be perfect, or polished, or guarded, you can just be, and when she looks at you, as the sun begins to break through the clouds, and tells you that "everyone is an artist," you can't help but believe her.

In her current apartment building Eve was invited to put on an art show. In our talks she told me that she's never aligned with being called an "Artist", rather she's a creator of art, a painter. I've still not seen her paintings. In writing this, my mind finds itself walking into a gallery filled with possibilities; trying to find the most Eve-esque work. I can imagine the colors, the depth they must possess; placed with confidence, but never haste. I imagine there would be endless possibilities of interpretation and form within each image, creativity flowing directly from her to you. They would all be rebels in their own way, pulling from the contemporary while also reflecting the classics. A romantic and eclectic whimsy would fill each stroke. They would not be works you would want to look away from. They would be warm, full of heart and vulnerability. They would flow with grace, wisdom, humor and compassion in such a way that you would immediately know that they couldn't be anyone but Eve's.