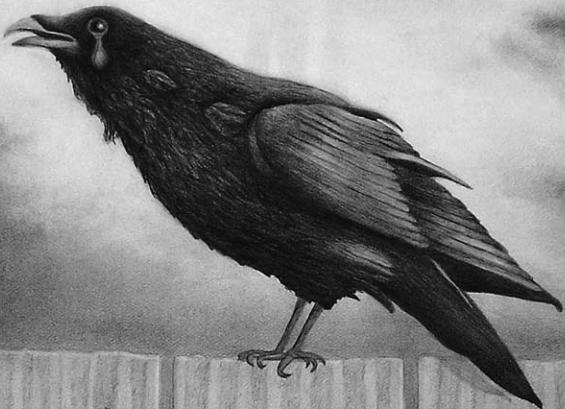


An Artist Novel

A Journey of Passion



The conditions of a solitary bird are five;
First, that it flies to the highest point;
Second, that it does not suffer for company,
not even of its own kind;
Third, that it aims its beak to the skies;
Fourth, that it does not have a definite color
Fifth, that it sings very softly

San Juan de la Cruz.



Darrell S. Ross

An Artist Novel

A Journey of Passion

By Darrell S. Ross

Book One

And the spirits whispered...soon...soon you will meet...

The night was clear. The moon was full, shining brightly and glimmering on the calm waters of the lake. I looked upon the wet sand and remembered a night that I made love to a woman much older than me. Our bodies met, leaving an imprint of our deed. Evidence that two people far different in temperament and thoughts could create such passion.

Now, as I reflect upon that spot, I remember she wasn't the only one. There were others to come. Who over the years would also leave such an impression, not necessarily in the sand, although that would happen again, but that none-the-less would shape and direct me to where I am now.

These are the portraits of the people that I remember so well. A sort of *who's who* that has been a part of my life and how passion shaped their world and mine. Can I say it's all of them? No. Just the ones that have left an impression as vivid as the one my older lover and I left on a cool summer night next to the lake. But instead of wet sand sticking to both my body and fingers...now it's grease, ink and markers.

These are my *portraits* of those various characters – left unnamed – in this novel.

Light My Fire:

It was the summer of 1968. Two friends and I went to a popular state park in northern Ohio. The Doors had just come out with the song "Light My Fire" during the winter of 1967. Little did I know how that song would remind me of my first introduction to love making.

She was blond with large blue eyes, a southern belle from southern Ohio. She was a Goddess (a subject I do today - a homage?) in my eyes. Whose southern twang would seduce me in more than one way.

We were at the clubhouse where a band was playing and most everyone was dancing. This perfection of a woman approached me. Being shy and young I didn't know what to make of it. She asked me to dance with her and that was the beginning of a night I'll never forget.

We decided to sneak off from the dance. Being with her family, we couldn't go to her place, but since my friends were still at the dance we decided to go to our campsite - where we could be alone. There no one would disturb us. No one would know how a young man would be charmed, transformed and made love to.

I looked into her eyes. A blue that I never saw before and never have again. She had asked me if I had ever been with anyone. I said no, just fooling around, but never actually *did* anything. She softly said with her southern accent – “weell you’re gonna doo it naw”. And with that we preceded to take our clothes off. It was slow, methodical and on my part, seemed like eternity.

The radio was on. The station was playing the most recent music. And as we climbed naked into the sleeping bag our bodies touched, and like a switch, I heard a song that would forever be etched into my mind. Until this day when I hear it, I am reminded of that naked southern goddess. And as she guided me into her, the song “Light My Fire” meant more than Jim Morrison knew. She was doing that to me. Us. And for the next couple of hours I was taught the lessons of love making.

I walked her back to her campsite. And for the next couple of days we would meet and new adventures awaited me. When our time was up we exchanged phone numbers and said we would see each other once again. That never happened. But each time I hear that song on the radio – I do see her. I am reminded that in a time of turmoil and unrest that there are some moments that seem magical. That at a time of war and riots there was a small glimpse of how life should be. Loving, warm, caring and with a small flicker of a fire how the word “*passion*” and the people associated with it would shape my life.

The High School Art Teacher:

In the last year of high school I was still trying to figure out what direction my schooling was going to take. I played golf and started to take art classes after a few private art lessons convinced me I was pretty good at it. Fortunately for me so did my art teacher.

This was the major turning point in my life. And he was the deciding factor. His direction and guidance was all I needed. The fact that he was also the tennis coach gave him an edge on how to coach me as well in doing artwork that was creative and strong. So strong, in fact, that at the end of the year I became the number one student in the High School Scholastic Art Competition. The first time the high school finished number one and three of the top five came from one school.

His enthusiasm was contagious. Here was a prime example of passion at work, both as a teacher and an artist. He knew how to fully engaged all your creative energy and put it into the work at hand. He explained that not only were you drawing or painting but expressing one’s unique vision of the world. If you saw ugly, but made it beautiful, then you accomplished something. If you sweated as you painted then you were involving yourself totally. Physically as well as mentally the way it should be. This was his description of being passionate about art and immersing yourself into it.

He often set up special projects for me to do. Watercolors of the dumpsters out back, school banners for football games and others to allow myself to play and explore different media and subjects.

But one project stood out. He set me in a room that was used as a supply closet. In it was this great looking skeleton. My project was to make a portrait of it. I could use anything in the room to drape over it, put on it and so on. And use the media of my choice.

I decided to use my favorite pen and ink with some marker for coloring. I learn doing this from my watercolor classes and drawing of nudes while taking classes at the Cleveland Institute of Art. I think I became fascinated with printmaking from this experience.

The drawing was completed in four days and was one of my most favorite projects. Probably because of the intense concentration, the skeleton had character and I was totally immersed in the creative process. And even though it was good, in fact it won a medal at the scholastic show - I knew I could do better. The concept of drawing as an obsession and passion flashed into my mind.

No wonder he always had a successful career as a tennis coach. The players he coached did the same thing. And I knew at that time that if I was to ever become an art teacher he was going to be the role model I would try to emulate.

I'm trying to uphold this promise now.

The Waitress: An Awakening.

I went to college in Utah. Majored in art and had some really good teachers. One eventually convinced me that my future as an artist could best be served by going to an art school on the west or east coast. He felt that this college would squelch my artistic spirit. And he was right.

But it sure didn't squelch my interest in the opposite sex. Here was a school with 25,000 students and 20,000 were women. Not just women but the most naturally beautiful girls in the world. That healthy Utah lifestyle did wonders.

I often hung out at a coffee shop off campus. Mostly to study, have coffee and a cigarette and wrote in my journal. Here was my first experience with a waitress. And maybe because of it there would be many more. None the less this one was special. She was gorgeous, nicely shaped, free spirited and another blond with blue eyes. And a superb lover that I will never forget.

I was always nice to her but never showed any interests in her. Every guy in the place tried to hit on her except me. I guess that's why she hit on me instead. As she put it I was the only one she was interested in and she figured she would have to make the first move since I wasn't. I laugh about it now – but as I look back I guess I always was that way. I never made the first move. The ones' with spirit and passion usually did. I just was the fortunate recipient of it.

It was late one evening and I was doing some studying. The place was rather quiet and she was working. It was close to the ending of her shift.

She asked how long I was going to keep studying. I asked why and she said she was getting off soon and would I be interested in doing something. I said sure – thinking that she wanted to go get a drink or something at a local bar. Little did I know she had something else in mind.

I asked where she wanted to go. Her answer was quick and to the point. She wanted to go to my place. So she followed me to my apartment that was situated on the side of the mountain where the school has its logo. A great view of the valley and school. And where I was to personally view one of the nicest female forms I was to know. I say that somewhat with a smile because as an art student figure drawing is always at hand. But with this school the models weren't nude but wore leotards. In Ohio they were mostly fat or real skinny – not what you ideally have dreams of being with.

The night turned into a day, then another night, through the weekend. And then into a somewhat turbulent relationship. But she was sexy and passionate. She made the blood flow and taught how love making was to be. I found out how passion, besides for art could also be expressed in sexual terms. I began thinking all waitresses were that way.

And most were.

The Theater Stagehand:

During the summer break from college I worked as a stagehand for a local college musical theater. Six weeks of building, running a show and breaking down the sets to do it all over again. Where the guys were into each other and the women were looking for some. Fortunately for the stagehands we were all straight.

There was this real cutie that was one of the crew. Even though there were 30 women looking for some enjoyment this young girl caught my eye and hers caught mine. She was from out of state and stayed at the dormitory that the girls were put up. The stage director, who was gay, was put in place as the "dorm mother". I laugh about it now but I guess it made sense.

Since we worked long hours and had to have these sets up in two days we spent lots of time together as well as lots of partying. It was usually at the dormitory. And I remember spending some grand evenings there.

She and I enjoyed the lobby couch often, discreetly of course, and felt sorry that the six weeks went by so fast. But the theater showed me another form of passion as well. Something about performing live in front of an audience made these actors and actresses take on a new life. During the day they were somewhat dull and placid. But when they were performing they became so animated and full of energy. I guess the connection was made - as I felt the same way when I did my artwork.

Before I left to go back to school, the Set Director offered me a job. He felt I could have a promising career as a set designer, but the war was going on and I still had a college deferment. I wasn't going anywhere but back to school.

The fates had a different plan for me and I was to listen to them.

The Mentor, his Wife and Santa Barbara:

I transferred to an art school in Santa Barbara. An art school with creative energy and teachers who practiced what they preached. This was my training ground that would set the standards and direction that I would follow for the rest of my life.

I could probably write a whole novel on the people I met and friends that I had there, but four people did leave an imprint. One of the teachers, a fellow student, a model and a girl I met in a bar one night.

The teacher that made the most impression on me was an elderly gentleman. And I mean a gentle man. In his 80's and his wife also, they took over a couple of us art students and personally put us under their wings. Their look on life itself set another example of passion.

Their passion for life showed in everything. They were like school children and we all had such fun with them. We would go to art shows, have dinner afterwards where the wine bottles would go from glass to glass never being tipped up, and enjoy good talk and conversation on what it means to be an artist.

I remember him saying that if you really wanted to know if you were an artist then do one thing. Stop doing it. He meant if we painted then stop. If we were doing sculptures, then stop. If we were doing printmaking, then stop. The key was to find out if that "passion" for it was there. If it was then sure enough you would return to it in no time at all. If it wasn't – then you knew something else was waiting for you down the line. All I knew was if this was how being an artist should be – then sign me up. I wanted that passion and joy for life. I wanted to dance like Zorba the Greek, I wanted to laugh heartily like them and I wanted him to sign my B.F.A. degree. Even though he wasn't my advisor the school made an exception and his name is on it. It's the most valuable piece of paper I own. Thank you sir for your input, laughter, and caring. I tip my bottle of wine to you.

A Fellow Art Student and Her Dog:

Now here was probably my first real love. Very pretty, smart, talented and not afraid to stand up to anybody, even my father at dinner one night. But that's another story.

She was the target of every guy at the art school. In fact one night they needed a model for one of the life drawing classes and she volunteered. I think every male student was at attendance that night, except me, I was waiting for her at my apartment.

We had quite an affair. And it lasted for some time but eventually she went back to her old boyfriend and dropped out of school. She also had this wonderful black lab. That dog stuck to her like glue. Fortunately for me he liked me. He made a great foot warmer too at the end of the bed.

She lived for a while at my apartment along with another student who often cooked meals. A mini art colony of sorts. And our apartment manager was my neighbor who

often smoked some weed that a couple guys down the hall grew. And who we often had to bail out of jail for being drunk. But the Sunday breakfast of banana and peach pancakes was well worth it along side the comradely we had. My dad referred to them as my live-in maid and cook.

As for her I remember her as a warm, passionate and gentle lover. There are still times I wonder how she is doing and if she is happy. And when I do...I smile...for it was good.

The Model, Seeking My Direction:

As I said before models in art class are not real good lookers. I guess the assumption is that they needed some form of character to make them interesting - that is thin, heavy set and so forth.

But one day at school as I was passing by the life drawing class here was a gorgeous girl modeling. Well since I was doing some figurative work I asked the teacher if it was ok to draw her and he said sure. I set myself in front of her and began doing the stuff I was made to do. DRAW! Damn intellectuals confusing me.

But as I was drawing her and she was watching me, I was really working hard and was pushing graphite all over the place. The figure was coming alive on the paper and I was making a connection to my inner spirit. The fates were helping me on this one.

The art teacher had come over to look at what I was doing. He just looked at the drawings and then at her and then at the drawings again. He sort of was speechless and then blurted out something like “you are really getting into this”.

Then I looked at him, at the drawings and I looked at her. I noticed she was listening to what we were saying. With out pausing for a second I said “Yes I would like to”. And then everyone started to laugh. Needless to say she came over to look at the drawings and asked if she could have one of them signed. I gladly wrote my name, date and a little note:

“There are moments when one finds themselves – today you helped me find myself – thank you”.

Making notations and dedications on my drawings and paintings became standard fare and a form of journal painting started to develop. Again...I need to thank her.

The Lobster House Girlfriend:

I was taking a speech writing class at the local community college and we decided to go celebrate the end of the class one night. It was at this great steak house on the beach.

As we were sitting around a fire pit I noticed this intriguing girl sitting at another pit. My room mate had joined us at the party and he mentioned to me that he noticed her looking at me. I just smiled and let it go at that.

I had gotten up and went to the restroom. When I came out of the door here was the girl waiting for me. She handed me a piece of paper and on it was her phone number. Again he mentioned something about her leaving when I did and I told him that she handed me her number. This time...he just smiled.

Well I found out she also had an available room mate and they both worked at a local lobster house eatery. They invited us both over for a fondue dinner. Those two were absolutely wild. We had some wonderful times and great moments and it was always very lively. Too bad it was at a time that school was finishing.

Speaking of school finishing. It was our graduate exhibition. And my roommate and I were going to meet the girls after words for dinner and drinks to celebrate. But needless to say my roommate and I started early.

As we waited to go to the show opening we deciding to celebrate beforehand with a few drinks. Or should I say finish off a bottle of Vodka. And then it struck me. It's a graduate exhibition there for it calls for being dressed as an exhibitionist. Well out came a pair of jeans I cut the legs off of and pulled out a trench coat that was used at a different kind of party and I was all set to go. He looked at me and said your not really going like that and I said why not. He had no answer and to be truthful I thought it was a neat idea.

Well I went in with the trench coat covering me, one pant leg down around my ankles and the other held by rubber band to make it look like I had pants on. It was way too funny to pass up on. And of course everyone wondered if I HAD any clothes on underneath, what was I doing and the message went out to keep me in the back in the kitchen to sober up.

Well as luck would have it I was perfectly fine doing that – but – then I noticed a gallery owner speaking to one of the teachers as they were looking at one of my paintings. As I tried to head back to the kitchen with coffee in hand they spotted me. And just like a movie scene I was motioned to meet them, I tried to give my coffee cup to someone and missed and as I watched it slowly go to the floor everyone just took it in. I looked up, glanced for help and then walked as if nothing happened and shook the dealers hand.

He wanted the painting that they were looking at, and another that was on display and I went back to my roommate and the girls, smiled and said dinners on me. The exhibitionist and exhibition was a success.

Oh did I forget to tell you – yes – she was also a blue-eyed blonde.

Another Waitress Not: The Angel with the Bowler Hat

After graduating I returned home and applied to a couple of grad schools. While waiting for replies I worked for my father and often went to this wonderful ice cream shop for lunch.

Well you guessed it another waitress. But this one would soon become more than that. She and I eventually got engaged. But we would never marry. One of the few regrets I ever have.

This was an important time in my life. I often wrote poems, filled my journals with ideas and projects to do and had a studio that I worked at in the evenings. This was the time that papermaking became important and my journal paintings were developed.

It was also a time that I learned “passion” could take hold of your life as you saw it and change it. That your heart would be pulled into doing what you felt important to do as opposed to what your body wanted to do. The pleasures of the flesh as opposed to the pleasure of your heart’s desire to create... art versus life - paint versus flesh - mind versus body.

The mantra of a studio drawing class – “nudity, desire, effort, failure and obsession” - A haunting experience for the mind and if you were in love.

There is a whole story in this relationship and it’s better left unsaid except for those involved. I loved her and she was an angel – and a theme I played with often and one that includes a particular image that I have yet done.

But this image is one I got her to pose for. I was doing a series of photos with a bowler hat as the main prop. I took photos in graveyards putting the hat on life size angels, on still lives as a representation of a presence and in this case as a way of hiding the identity of the person. I loved the glow of her hair surrounding her face as if a halo of sorts. The walls were marble and had a taste of eternity to them and I needed to add the blue birds and ribbons to her hair.

The ribbons are significant because if you notice all pictures of angels in paintings and icons have them. They represent the antennae that God speaks to them through. And the birds represent happiness. And it was a very happy time...that I cannot deny.

But our relationship came to a fork in the road. Her path led her to a new life – mine was a continuation to explore passion in different ways and new experiences. My art was a process – and that process was creating my art. I found out, like my art and lovers, never to fall in love with the result – only the process. I guess this keeps you from getting hurt.

Or at the least...from being disappointed.

Art School Secretary:

I went to graduate school in Texas. And was introduced to a new passion – teaching. I loved it and enjoyed being able to help the art students. I saw improvement and they sincerely seemed to be interested in learning. I think this was where I decided if I taught I wanted to do it on the college level.

The problem became when I found another passion in the form of photography. And I wanted to change majors. The art school dean said no and I ended up leaving the program. But not before I had this romance with the art school secretary.

She lived in the same complex I did, which happened to be mostly occupied by gays and lesbians. But which I never had problems with since I was around that sort of thing when I worked in the theater.

Each time I wanted to go to the swimming pool I would call her to meet me. That way I figured no one would bother me, but she always tried to stir up trouble anyway and laughed when she would get me into compromising positions. Believe me I did the same to her and we would laugh about it while in bed.

I liked her and our time together was nice. We had many adventures like Thanksgiving at the Sam Houston Monument or our shopping trip that I photographed and eventually made into a movie. Or while at the local mall when she bought me a rocking chair that she felt I needed when I was contemplating a new piece of artwork. I kept that baby for years until I gave it to my neighbor when we sold my parents house.

She started to date one of the photography teachers and later I saw an ad for a cigarette that had two girls laughing by a pool. Yep it was the same pool we frolicked in. And the other girl was one of the graduate students. It's moments like that that give you a sense of how small our world actually is.

But to this day I hold onto a poem that she wrote for me. About a spider and a butterfly. A web that he captured the spirit and passion of its prey and which the spider fed upon. She was right...and till this day it is still being weaved.

The Photo Clerk:

After returning home from graduate school and when my engagement ended I was working for my father. Again doing videos and photography for the marketing department.

It was at this time I started to see this cute photo clerk that worked at the store I bought supplies from. I was finding excuses to go get some film or something so that I could visit her. She also had a darkroom at home and she wanted to teach me how to make Cibachromes, pictures from slide film. And I agreed to the suggestion.

She was smart, funny and a great sense of humor. Enough to charm me silly and I fell for her. She felt the same way about me and then I understood something about me and the women I was attracted to.

While in Texas the secretary was the same way. And she had written a poem when I was leaving. She had felt that she was a butterfly being drawn into my spiders' web. She thought I needed to be a loner, an artist that should be in love with his art, put his passion in it and share it. And her time with me was just a moment in time to enjoy for awhile and then let the butterfly go.

I guess I fed off that charm, laughter, warmth and humor to give me strength to do my artwork. The photo clerk must have sensed the same thing, for she also wrote me a similar poem. The drawing at the beginning of the book of the Raven and poem might be my mantra. A spiders' web, a flower shaped into a star, and an understanding that sometimes what we do requires solace and being alone. An artist is always put into that position. And when that butterfly gets captured both become caught up in a passion of the heart. My heart has been filled up many times. May be too many or may be...not enough.

The Courthouse Clerk:

I use to visit a local bar that had music on the week ends and interesting friends that I would chat with and have fun. We laughed, we got drunk and we enjoyed the nights.

A neighbor came in one night with a friend of his. How he knew her I didn't really know. Then again I didn't care. She was hot. And even after our affair we still remained friends.

But she had a family, two boys and I wasn't quite ready to take that kind of responsibility on. There is some times that maybe the right woman comes along for you – but at the wrong time. This was one of them.

We dated for a while and even when I felt we should part she knew where I would go and made her presence known. She really liked me, and later when I was getting divorced she would come up from her job in the county building and see how I was doing.

I remember there was a Christmas Party at the neighbors, and she was invited. We were selling the house at the time and I went over to the party. She was there, still as radiant as ever, still laughing as always, still inviting as a woman can be. And I remember as we chatted how nice it was to be with her. The heart still skipped. The images of us in bed still played over in my head, and for a second, ok maybe more, I thought once again how it would be to enjoy her. Sometimes one wonders how cruel the fates can be or rather how they can make one remind you that things happen for a reason. How many times does it take? Evidently with me it would take many.

And I still hear the spirits whisper – soon...soon you will meet...

The Realtors Secretary:

When Dad and I would go to the Ice Cream Shop for lunch there was a realtor and her secretary that ate lunch at the same time. Now Dad knew her because she was prominent in the area. And I was introduced to both of them, with my eye on the secretary.

This was my first introduction to seeing someone that was going through a divorce or was thinking about it. But I wasn't as concerned about that fact and it did happen a few more times. I guess deep in my heart I felt safe in this kind of relationship.

We ran into each other at a local bar near where I lived. They were out partying and the secretary and I started to dance. We ended dancing elsewhere. Again a dance, again the spider and the butterfly, again a relationship where the passions were expelled and the artist was revived.

I can remember my neighbors downstairs remarking how cute my girlfriend was. Yes she was I said. And that kind of remark would always echo in my ears. To me they all were.

It still does to this day “Nudity, desire, effort, failure – obsession”.

The Girl in the Shiny Dress:

It was New Year's Eve. A friend of mine and I went to our local bar. We decided to sit at the counter. Now here we are two guys with nothing to do but get drunk and have a good time. Along comes a couple that decides to sit next to us. That was a mistake.

This girl had the deepest, darkest brown eyes I ever saw. And they were fighting. They had come from a party that wasn't fun and she was mad at him. Well my friend and I were pretty much on our way and the champagne bottle hadn't been opened yet. But it didn't matter. The spider was spinning his web.

Well I proceeded to chat them up and soon we were all partying. Meanwhile my buddy kept asking me what I was doing. I said I was just having fun and then one thing led to another. At about midnight she decided to kiss me first during ole Lang sign instead of her boyfriend. And did she know how to kiss! But that was it. Although she did give me her number I never did anything about it.

But as the evening worn on and we all were pretty drunk a girl I knew from the bar walks in. Drunk, laughing, and as always as she did looking like a million dollars in a shiny metallic dress, all eyes were set on her... and who did she decide to hit on? Yep you guessed it - me.

Well I had to hold her up and eventually I took her home with me. I can't really remember what went on but I do remember it must have been good. Cause she was always looking for me at the bar. The only problem was I knew she was married and I didn't want to get involved in that. Sometimes the spider draws a moth that is attracted to a light that they can never have or gets burned. I wasn't into watching someone go up in flames. Even though I might have been the light they were seeking.

I guess I always wanted to reserve that for my art. I wanted a viewer to have one of those Ah moments that happens when they become engrossed into what they were seeing. An image that says they understood what it meant...and it touched their soul. I guess we all want to have the same thing happen when we are in a relationship and few do. Passion is often missing and although I understood how I could do that with my art...I could not do it with a relationship. My mistress was not a person - but a piece of paper, a blank canvass or a block of clay and I was her butterfly captured in her web.

The Telephone Operator:

Now here was the turning point in my life.

I had just left my Dad's company which was sold and was moving to Wisconsin. I decided I didn't want to go and luckily a job opened up at a local hospital which was looking for a photographer.

Again it seemed the fates were playing with me, and as always I was their pawn.

During this time I was shooting photographs, partying and well just having a good time. I wasn't doing any artwork and sort of just moving along. I was content but I also knew something stirred inside me. My art, only I had no idea what to do.

There was a girl that worked as a telephone operator. Actually she was a neighbor and just lived down the street from me. But she was pretty and she tried to figure out how to introduce me to her self. Eventually she came up with a plan by having a camera that she wanted me to show her how it worked.

We started to date and then we ended up getting married. At the time I was ready for having a family and I had seen her with kids, and I said to myself that if there was anybody that I wanted to raise my children it was her. I was never wrong in that assumption.

Some years later, and two children as well, I lost my job at the hospital. It was time to do something else. I decided to be a graphic artist and at the same time it would be the end of our marriage. I was unhappy and she was unhappy, maybe because deep inside I needed my art and in hers she needed something else. She wanted a divorce and I felt that since she decided not to support me in my efforts I would grant it. That's when I learned that "passion" for resentment could be as powerful as for love. Till this day it still lingers and I am reminded of it everyday. Some can pour that into what they love and others into who they resent. The question is since it still is "passion" which is right and which is wrong or is it neither. Does passion for something make you happy? Or can it make one's life miserable...or can it do both at the same time?

What I would give to have had a conversation with Van Gogh and find out.

The Girl with the Crocodile Tree in Front Yard:

Maybe writing has always been in my blood. My Dad had always suggested I think about writing seriously. He looked forward to my letters when I was away at school and remarked how good they were. Well Dad I'm doing it now.

I had a habit of writing poems to girls I was interested in at a bar. Sometimes a simple rose's are red and violets are blue, but sometimes not. This was one of those that were not.

She was a pretty girl, rather quiet and I was interested. So out came the pen and a handful of napkins to write an introduction along with a drink. To my surprise came back a drink and a poem from her self. We exchanged a couple more, across from the bar, and with smiles as if it was a competition on who's was the best. Deep down hers were and I was hooked.

Well the bar was closing and yet we never directly talked to each other. We didn't need to, our poems were enough, and we had both said all that mattered at the moment. The last one from her just contained her name and phone number. Yes, I called her and picked her up from her house where she lived with her boyfriend. All she told me was that in the front yard was a tree shaped like a crocodile and sure enough it did look like one.

Another right woman, and yes at another wrong time and yes she was passionate. I knew it from the poems and I knew she was looking for the same thing. The fates were teasing me again. I think they were teasing us...and we both knew it.

She visited often, a solace from where she lived, but just that. A place where she knew she could come and just be herself. Not try to live to someone else's idea of who she should be. And believe me as the years went by I understood. Together we wrote little poems, made love, smiled and laughed.

Often, when we stopped seeing each other, I would drive by her house. I knew she felt she needed to be with the one who she was with and I knew the fates wanted me to follow a path they set for me. But I swear as I drove by that crocodile in the front yard was smiling. Was he smiling for her or was he smiling for me or was he smiling for both of us because we had both enjoyed the time we needed to or rather...could it be...the time we both had to.

I will always feel it was the latter.

The Neighbor and Her Beers:

Now here was a real character. I had grown up with her but never really got involved with her. And yet we would often get involved.

I'd run into her at a bar somewhere and when she had enough to drink she'd ask me to take her home. The only time we ever made out or anything was in the driveway. She'd bitch at me for not being more interested but I just never saw that happening.

She had a bad temperament and only seemed relaxed when she had a few beers. And when I was living down the street she'd call and invite me up to join her for a few. I usually did and we often ended up on the couch. I told my Mom she needed to have some project taken care of.

But I saw in her a fire that intrigued me. She had a spirit that needed to be let out and few were capable of doing it. I guess I looked at her as another canvass. The way it was explained to me as a young artist in school. That when one draws or paints you make a gesture and then wait for it to be returned and you make another one. The dance, again always the dance. I may be simplifying the reality of it but in a sense it's true.

Why is it some people can show passion, be spirited and so full of life and others keep it bottled up inside. Like a bottle of beer, someone else needs to open it...for it to be intoxicating and freeing.

The Hair Dresser:

This is one of the few women I wish things could have been different. Again one the fates thought I needed at the time, but not to be in my life forever.

I knew her from the bar. She and her sister would come in and sit in a corner and talk to just a few people. Her sister was a bartender at the bar, and she worked elsewhere and few seemed to talk to her.

Well in my case she made an exception. She approached me and asked me why I didn't talk to her. I said I understood that she wanted to be left alone. Yes she said, but she thought I'd be someone she needed to know. I guess the fates felt the same about her to me.

We never had a physical relationship. But we had a mutual respect and concern for each other. She'd often get drunk and call me to come get her and take her home. Or if she ran into me at a bar or someplace ask if I wanted to come and enjoy the evening. She eventually ended up doing my mom's hair and truly liked my mom as my mom did her. I know mom often would look at me and wonder what our relationship was all about.

The closest we got to a physical contact was at bar one evening during Christmas. She invited me over to be with her and her husband. He left early but she stayed. With the booze flowing one could sense the intoxication and passions burning. She kissed me and as if a firecracker lit up we knew we could be in trouble. Fortunately everyone else did too. Her girlfriends decided they should split us up before something happened. And as they dragged her out all she could say was something about the kiss and she wanted more. I agreed but also knew that it shouldn't happen. That move saved our relationship and what I valued the most – our friendship.

Sometimes the passion, the fires, the desires are better off left unburned.

A Waitress with an Angels Voice:

And the spirits whispered soon...soon...you will meet...

While freelancing as a graphic artist I would often visit my favorite – you guessed it - ice cream parlor. Usually this time to have coffee in the evenings and write in my journal.

There was this really cute waitress (of course) with the reddest hair I ever saw. She was young and had a wondrous voice. And she wrote poems as well. That's right I was smitten to say the least. The fates were playing with me again. By that I mean she was too young for me, she was just 17.

She sang solo in a high school choir and a group of us would go see her. She would come into the parlor in the evenings when she wasn't working just to sit and chat and show me her poems. I took a fancy to her and kept a safe distance. Until she turned 18. Then it changed.

I jokingly told her that I would take her out on her 18th birthday and celebrate. Never thinking that would happen, I never gave it much thought. Until the night that it was.

She saw my car at the parlor and walked in. Everyone wished her a happy birthday, including myself and then she said “where are we going?” Well I had promised her it would be a lobster dinner and it was.

We became close and often I took every chance to hear her golden voice – an angel's to be certain and enjoy her company. Maybe it took someone young, innocent and bright eyed to remind myself I was once that way too.

But this time I became the butterfly - caught in someone else's spider's web.

I remember writing her a long very long poem. For the life of me I never could find a copy of it but it really was enlightening for me. But I only can remember the ending of the poem. The most important part...

“...and the artist was sitting in his rocking chair,
Looking at the full moon shining through the window.
And slowly a smile crept upon his face...for he understood,
as the spirits whispered...soon, soon you will meet...the one that matters

Little did they know...that they all mattered.

And I like to think they smiled back.

