

## Dean Trisko, essays



### But...What Is It? or The Spaghetti Story

This is the story of a child about 5 years old, a boy in a small Midwestern town. The boy was the oldest child and much was expected of him. He had opportunities. The great journeys of life begin in school. Learning the lessons of education is a path toward future success.

Kindergarten is full of unknowns. There is leaving home, finding the room, finding your mittens, finding your way home. New people, strange rules, strange smells, naps on mats with a wand to wake you up. He did not understand all of it and often missed bits of what the teacher said.

There was play, there were stories, and there were songs. One day a new activity was revealed. In the room was a large object, a two sided paint easel. Shaped like a triangle, like the letter A. On selected days, two students names were announced as that day's painters. The easel would have a piece of paper attached to each side by the teacher. The students wore aprons. The teacher dispensed a glob or two of jelly like color—finger paint. The paint was plopped on to the paper. Students smeared the paint with their fingers and hands. The selected students seemed to know what to do in this moment of special glory. All the other students had to find their own activities. The painters worked diligently. When time was up, the paper with paint on it was hung to dry.

The boy dreamed, "oh to be a selected painter." But only two were selected per day. Days passed and new pairs of student were selected to step up to the easel. The waiting to have your name called seemed torturous. Why were so many others chosen first? Who understands the concept of alphabetical order when you barely know the alphabet or your name?

At last the awaited day arrived. It arrived without warning, without fanfare but it arrived. It had come as prophesized, the boy was summoned to the easel. The boy thought, "I shall have my time. I shall stand at the easel. I shall see the color. I shall feel the paint." And it began.

The scratch of the smock, the smell of the pasty paint, the gel-like consistency, the cool contact as the first finger probed into the paint, the slickness as fingers glide over the paper. He had two colors, red and yellow. The paint was interesting but when the two colors mixed together... wow. It was not yellow, it was not red it was... fun...it was wow!

His little fingers frantically squished and whirled. Lines, shapes and oranges unfolded. Color went into color over and over until paint and paper were worked to the fullest. It all went so quick. Time was up. The paper was hung to dry. The moment of infamy had been achieved!

At school day's end, the painting is taken home. Home to the people he knew so well. Let the masses revel in the wonder of what he has made.

Dinner is being prepared. The master, the boy's father, has returned home. Home—in his evening leisure—he surveys the domestic state of affairs.

*"Son... what did you learn today in school?"*

Presenting the finger painting, *"This, I did this."* Beaming!

*"What is this?"*

*"It's this!"*

*"But what is it?"*

*"You wear the apron and go to the spot and do the paint with your hands..."*

*"Yes, but what is it?"*

*"It's the thing you do with your fingers and it's fun." The boy thinks—it was my day! I did it! I was finally selected. I got my day, it was so great and I was...I did...I was there... the fingers, the color, the gushy, the squiggly wiggles—I made that!*

His father asks again *"But what is it, what's it supposed to be?"*

The boy is confused— supposed to be? What is it? It is the paint thing— and I got to do it! It is supposed to be the paint thing we do in kindergarten.

After a pause the father says, “It looks like spaghetti. Look, your mother is making spaghetti—all these orange wiggles and lines in your painting look like spaghetti. It’s spaghetti!”

The boy is still confused. Look at what I made. It is what it is! At five years old there aren’t words to explain. Yet there are feelings. The confusion builds to include disappointment and anger as well. It’s not spaghetti! You eat spaghetti. This is my thing, the thing you do in school, with the paint. The paint is fun and I finally got to do it. Who says what it is supposed to be? He felt bad like he made a mistake. He felt let down and that he let others down. He had waited so long, this was so anticipated. And now an additional requirement had been added. Why?

Up to that point the boy had no concept (or at least never heard) that the painting could or should be something. This began a long journey trying to understand art. So many questions. The boy went on to make abstract paintings. He still questions why. He still eats spaghetti.

P.S. As a child, a lot went on in my mind. Like most children, I really had no way to express what I was feeling or thinking. Sometimes early moments shed light on adult directions. This early art experience may have been the seed for adult questions—questions I continue to ask myself.

My persistent questions are the bases for these art essays. Is art a thing? Is it something you do? Does it need to mean something? Does it need to be recognized by others?