

YELLOW

A love story

a passion

and the drive for life

A true story between two artists at the end of their lives.

By Norris Evans in memory of Barbara Strong

This paper is about Barbara Strong.....an artist.....and Bud Evans.....an artist.....this is a true story.

We lost Barbara on the eighteenth of July 2012. On the seventh of August 2012, I gave our friends copies of a paper I wrote about our beautiful relationship, how I loved her.....the special times we shared, and, especially, of our shared passions that we would later meld together to produce a very special collaboration.....a collaboration of “no speak”. Yes, no interchange of thought or intent, none. Barbara would produce a piece, usually ceramic, and I would complete her thoughts, with my thoughts. Our creative passions were so close together that discussion was not necessary.....nor wanted.

Over the years we would share in five “no speak” collaborations, each labeled G-S 1, G-S 2 through G-S 5. And today, it was not until several weeks later, after producing the seven August draft of this paper, that I came to realize that Barbara had actually given me one last gift....a gift for one last “no speak”. It would be our last G-S collaboration....but this time, it wasn't ceramicit was a word.

And so, I write this piece, an expanded version of the seventh August paper, but this time our effort includes my personal life ... joined with Barbara's life ... my thoughts with her thoughts ... so I open our world in memory of my most beloved. I label this piece, G-S 6 it follows

Dr. OZ and staff:

I recently noticed the ending of one of your shows. It referred to the topic of “near death experiences”. I have one that might be of interest to you and, maybe, to your viewers. It’s not “near death”, it’s an actual death experience. It happened about 6 years ago. My doctor had no answer.

Six years later, I still have trouble reading or talking about our relationship. As artists, Barbara represented everything good --- as we freely immersed ourselves into our shared “drive for life”.

“YELLOW” starts off on page 3 and my explanation for “YELLOW” occurs on page 16 --- However, I wish you would read all 17 pages. It’s from my heart.

Thank you very much,

Norris (bud) Martin Evans
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Barbara my beautiful Barbara the love of my life

Two strong men, male nurses, rolled Barbara's hospital bed down the hallway toward the CT Scanner. I said my good-byes minutes before and left ICU 14 for the privacy of the hallway. I pushed the elevator button, just to get away. But I could hear the word ... "yellow". Not loudly, just a soft, beautiful voice. It was automatic, every few seconds, never stopping. Barbara's organs, her body, must have collapsed. Weeks ago, Barbara was the victim of a stroke, and now, on entering the hospital for a second time, she was enduring additional heart events. We knew the end was near, I'm sure her subconscious knew, she knew---her life stopped at that one word.

I tried to rid it from my mind....but the thought kept banging into my head...it was humorous (I'm sorry). My brain would simply not let it go. I was ashamed of the thought...but it was true. My Barbara was so tough, so determined, so dedicated, that she would not let go of the talent that drove her to the art world and so strongly held us together. The nurses rolled Barbara's bed down the hallway...all the time the word..."yellow". The nurses turned the corner, knocked open staff-only doors and made another right turn and entered the CT Scan apparatus room. The doors closed, I waited. Twenty minutes later the doors opened, and this powerful lady would not quit. I still heard the wordit was automatic....it was "yellow"...I visualized the CT Scanner revolving around her body...and it was still..."yellow"...and it was ... "yellow" ...all the way down the hall as the nurses returned her to ICU. I followed and waited.

The nurses reinstated Barbara and her bed into ICU 14 and reconnected her hoses and wires. Family and friends were waiting. I never reentered the room. I don't know what happened to "our" word ... I just stood outside, turned for the hallway, and found the car in the hot parking lot and melted into the driver's seat. I found my way home the best that I could.

My love was gone, I knew it, and thoughts of joining her entered my mind but I really knew that that was untrue and foolish...but the thoughts were still racing. It's a good thing that I didn't have a gun. Thoughts are sometimes frightening in times like these

..... as I remember those beautiful times we had together.

Have you ever wondered about life? Barbara and I did, many times. We would speak of these things while driving to our favorite places. The peripheral activity of driving would free our minds. We would talk of our past, our mothers, our fathers, our desires. It was relaxed talk ... relaxed thought. Ramblings, absolutely, but like handfuls of sand through a funnel the finale was always the same. It was about love, our passion for love, and our passion for the fulfillment of self and truth. It was about the drive for life. But it was also the way things really are. We are human. We have our wants, our needs, and we have our own desires. One of these is a fulfillment of our biological selves. As a woman we need to fulfill the need of family and reproduction. As a man we need masculine fulfillment and the comforting partnership with another. But what do we do to accomplish these needs?

We look for partners. Where? At civic groups such as churches, bars, neighbors, workplaces. This is really stupid, but this is what we do. You really have to be lucky to find a partner that fulfills your needs as well as your desire....or willingness.....to fulfill your partner's needs. It's luck. I don't know what else to say. Most of us are guilty, as me.

Barbara was married to Norm. I don't know too much about this relationship, other than this marriage resulted in the birth of three sons. Only two survived the growing up years. One son died in a swimming accident while camping in the mountains. I can't imagine worse. The remaining sons have grown up to be outstanding citizens of our earth. Both charming, talkative, creative, and a joy to befriend. Both as pleasant to be with as their mother.

Barbara and Norm separated and later divorced. Norm seemed to have been looking for something he couldn't find in their marriage. I can identify with these needs. I, too, was married and this relationship also resulted in divorce and, like Barbara's, my marriage resulted in two outstanding boys who are now happily married with two daughters each --- who would have guessed. It's luck. It's the roll of the dice. I wish I had answers.

Let it be known that both Barbara and I are both artists...like it or not...we were just born that way. Both of us resisted this fact. In my case, and I believe also, with Barbara, that, while still young, we relished in what we loved to do---to draw and paint and create fantasizes that would be alive and live in our own imaginations. We both are children coming out of the '29 depression. Both of us were born in the early thirty's and familiar with the hard times of that era. It's like "tuna on toast" for dinner, not to mention "bread and milk". As for myself, Santa Claus always brought and decorated the tree Christmas Eve night...as trees were always "giveaways" on Christmas Eve. I'm not complaining, as the site of the Christmas tree all decorated with presents on Christmas morning was breathtaking.

As time went on, both Barbara and I would eventually give away to our in-born desires. We are products of our DNA ... and no matter what...given time...it will present itself. I wish that I had known Barbara in the early sixty's.

I first met Barbara Saturday morning. The year was 1972 ... I think it was, or, maybe the early 80's. Really, I'm not sure of the year but it really doesn't matter. What does matter was that it was Saturday, as sidewalk art shows are usually held on Saturdays, not Sundays. It was the Town and Country Shopping Center in Sacramento, Ca.. Yes, I see it today ... just like yesterday ... my beautiful Barbara was there.

She was sitting in a foldout canvas chair, on the sidewalk, drawing portraits of walk-by customers. She smiles, she's pleasant, she was in heaven and I knew I was in love. I write this, and I cry with every word.

Back home (my home), I was reeling from my family troubles. Some troubles I did myself. My own frustrations of non-fulfillment plus the equal frustrations of my chosen partner in life, my wife of several years. We had problems. No fault of our own, we just grasp at our society norms and try to establish ourselves as that "norm". We are man and we are woman and, like it or not, that's the way it is. Period ... But not period. Some of us fight back. We will not accept the "being" of "non-being". Fulfillment is the meaning of life. My wife and I did separate, and, in time, we did legally divide. No fault, no fault ... I (We) just stopped. I gave the house to my used-to-be-partner in life and our two beautiful boys. I bought them a new car and put a new roof on the house. It was time. I loved my boys

and I remained good friends with my x-wife and was her close confidant for the rest of her life (she later remarried and lived in a house of her dreams, something I could not have given her).

Barbara turned out to be my neighbor. Remember what I said about finding life partners?...like finding someone special in civic groups, such as churches, bars ... neighbors ... ? Well ... she was ... she was my neighbor. But Barbara was more than a neighbor. She shared life's experiences; she had an artistic talent that was blooming. I, the same. But maybe mine was exploding. I managed to suppress my DNA genes while I went to school....studying nothing that resembled painterly art. It was physics, mathematics and, "OK" ... an art history class that I devoured like a Neanderthal.

The Neanderthal

It was UCLA and it must have been in the early 1960's. I sat in the middle of hundreds of students who might have elected to take Art History 101 to fulfill grade requirements....as I'm sure that I was one also. I remember this like yesterday. The art history professor stood on one side of the auditorium and stage-center was a white pull-down reflector panel. The professor would make comments and click for the next slide. This would happen frequently and consistently, maybe every thirty seconds or so....or just enough time to keep college students extremely occupied and not falling asleep. It was automatic.

At first sight, I would attempt to memorize the content of each slide, this, while jotting quick penciled notes on a note pad. This lasted for only a few slides. I was obsessed in the midst of this unfamiliar setting. There were no graphs, no mantissas, no spectroscopic diagrams, just the biological output of thousands of years of people trying to answer why we are here ... the visual interpretation of life and self ... and all of this was done by the artist, a biological being, a person, who possessed the drive to create these magnificent works of art.

Before the invention of the camera, this was it. Artists were the recorders of history. After the camera, it was an entirely different interpretation of life and self. So, you can see where I was...and I loved it. My muscles were driven. I quickly repositioned the pencil between my fingers and began to sketch those 30 second masterpieces. It was frantic, yes. Certainly, I must have been a little embarrassed, I'm sure, but I was too busy to care. The people sitting next to me may have been amazed, or maybe amused. I don't know ... but I would assume so ... since my pencil sketching soon drifted into finger smudging and then into palm rubbing and then into finger wetting with spit ... anything to move the carbon on the paper in 30 seconds

The bell rings and 200 students slap-close note pads and march for the exit ... except for me. I was new at this part of the campus, but I knew that the UCLA Art Department had their own library, so I found it, sat down, and tried to figure out what had just happened.

No question, I was happy it was a revolution and I was in it.

Continuing the semester, it was back to the math and physics world ... which I enjoyed also. It was the "new" that enticed me ... in a word ... it was creativity ... the new things in life. From a small child I had always been interested in all sorts of new adventures ... inventions of anything ... as long as it had never been done before, or it had no answer, I was happy.

Barbara was on campus, somewhere, I wish I had known.

The world was boiling. It was the Cold War, the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War and the Selective Service Draft. I was still clinging onto the Dean's List, but I was fading fast. I was confused. My world was turning upside down and around. I was struggling. I needed time out. I dropped out. I enlisted in the Army. I wanted to learn something useful, so I chose the Radar Electronics School and remained there, in Texas, for the next three years. Today, I am labeled a veteran. Years later I have finally accepted this label with pride and now include my dog tags with my car keys.

It was an Honorable Discharge, and life started once again. I bounced around. I just did not know what to do, but the decision became obvious, I went fishing up State Hwy 395, had waffles at Jacks, fell in love, once again, with my lifelong companion the Sierra Nevada Wilderness.

And Sacramento wasn't far away.

Sacramento, the Land of Two Rivers. I loved it. I chose to live between two beautiful rivers and two more beauties ... San Francisco and the Sierra Nevada Wilderness. Life couldn't be better for a young man, but I needed work. Aerojet-General hired me (over the phone) and I worked in the aerospace industry as a typical cost-plus employee. The best job I ever had. Aerojet engineers loved me, and I loved Aerojet. Creativity abounded ... BUT, this is only if you make it so. I was a cross between the art world and the engineering world. Not too many of us are around. I was the only one in the company who could fathom the outcome of a rocket blast as it rebounded from concrete abutments that surrounded rocket test facilities. I was lucky. All that was needed was the use and understanding of descriptive geometry, which is an intense pencil on paper joining of solid geometry, mathematics and an abundance of visualization. Having said this, and I remind you, this was done during the "slide-rule" days of engineering. The only computers existing where the IBM 360's of the world, and these existed primarily for business use, not for the solving of complicated engineering problems

It was Sacramento ... I lived here.

So, like most young men, testosterone ruled the day. My personal life became my social life. I met a charming lady. She was working at Aerojet as a secretary. We married and had a family. What I wasn't aware of was the unfolding of Barbara's life.

This was Barbara.

After graduating with a master's degree in studio art from UCLA, Barbara moved to the Bay Area. Her mother, sister, and brother lived in or around the San Francisco-Marine County area. During this episode of her life, Barbara signed on with the California State Parks Department and worked in the back country of the Sequoia National Park. She loved this experience. Many times, we talked about revisiting those same Sequoia campgrounds. Barbara loved those beautiful gigantic trees that smelled of sugar and vanilla. We talked about this beautiful part of her life, many times. She loved this. I'm sorry. I regret never having visited this cherished part of her life ... I regret never having the opportunity of holding her in my arms ... in this beautiful wilderness.

Our lives would slowly wind together. Similarities were many. Yes, we go back to the rockets of Aerojet. Barbara became acquainted with a young man working in the hiring section of Aerojet. His name was Norman Strong (isn't this interesting, I could have talked to Norm on the phone when I was

hired at Aerojet). As our lives developed, both Barbara and I would experience the highs and lows of life. We both tried to hold onto the better parts of our lives and we both tried to regain our balance while trying to make a living. Barbara taught art. She managed to maintain “law and order” in the classroom, while wafting the imagination of her class into great images of imagination. She was good at that. That was her life.

The art world was never too far away from either one of us. Barbara and I were getting closer. We drifted towards the sidewalk shows of the 70's and 80's. Time is not too clear for me here. It is true that I first met Barbara as she sketched portraits at the Town and Country Village Show. And it is true that I fell in love with her pleasant and soft personality, her good looks...and her artistic talent that she freely and willingly presented to the world. I was not willing to do the same. This is difficult for me to describe. I kept my gifts close to my heart ... unwilling to share ... except with Barbara ... my trust was with her.

This strange behavior of mine most likely relates to my childhood. I was unsure of myself. As a child, I was overwhelmed by a stuttering problem. As a little kid, this condition was frightful. As a young man, it was career ending. Both were devastating. I tried my best to stop this problem. Nothing worked.

It wasn't until a number of events dropped into my life ... life changing. These events were several missed contracts at Aerojet which resulted in layoffs. This happened several times. I was always finding new jobs. It was always the mortgage payments. It was living expenses, marriage problems, bills and others. In desperation, I turned to collecting unemployment insurance plus the income from the G.I. Bill. But the G.I. Bill was only good if I kept a full load of units. In a desperate move, I abandon my computer engineering courses that I was taking at Sacramento State College and diverted my sole concentration into studio art. This would really be easy for me, and it was. My marriage was shaken because of this change ... but I found that I was in haven. My wired brain was now relaxed and satisfied. It was amazing. My stuttering stopped. I was still considered an undergraduate but now I easily jumped to graduate courses and individual contracts with the faculty. The art teachers loved me, and I loved my art teachers. There was nothing I couldn't do. It was a “WOW” in my life.

I wasn't going to stop this turn of events.

My wife of several years must have figured that I couldn't provide a living drawing pictures, so we separated. Looking back, I couldn't really blame her, my future was uncertain.

Barbara had her own personal problems. They were primarily sourced from her relationship with men. That's my guess. Barbara's relationship with her father is unknown to me. I believe her father died at an early age in his 50's. Then, there was Norm, Barbara's husband and father of their three sons. Norm abandoned their marriage, leaving Barbara with the children and a mortgage.

Barbara, as a neighbor next door:

Our relationship was firmly cemented together by our mutual determination to fulfill our talents in the arts. Whatever the reluctance, we enjoyed our Second Saturdays together. Barbara, for me, was my essence for life. She represented all of life's joys and meaning and was my truly outward source of expression. We gradually became more relaxed together and Barbara was much more willing to trust me. Happiness was coming together.

Yes, we did. We loved life together. She would pour me a glass of life and I would drink it. I would pour her a glass of life and she would drink it. It was passion ... the elusive mutual fulfillment of life ... that would remain with us for the rest of our lives.

We would talk many times about reaching that elusive state of Nirvana. We are not talking about drug induced states ... this is real ... a state of mind only accessible by a heightened passion of thought. Nirvana may not be the correct description, as this infers a religious origin. We're talking about the unconscious, that level of thought existing beyond conscious awareness. Something that would fire a synapse, lift an arm or lift a hand to flick a knob of color on a canvas without conscious meaning or consequence ... without conscious thought ... it was satisfaction guaranteed ... it was us.

We could feel it ... but not until now have we attempted to describe it in more solid terms. This special thought process has its origins via the same methods as the ordinary thought processes that we all accomplish without excitement or fanfare --- like how many sugar cubes in our coffee this morning, black or make room for cream. Thoughts like these are commonplace, ordinary, they are processed in the same way, everyday, in the conscious realm of our minds. What we describe here, is different, as our minds emerge from this common level of conscious thought and we enter into what we call, the unconscious. This is the central clue toward our view of creativity. We visualize the unconscious as the warehouse of our mind ... tap into its riches of information ... tap into our entire being ... tap into creativity. Barbara felt this. I felt this. It's an explosion of self that takes place in our inner thoughts of our minds and trickles down our throats like licorice.

Creative people live for this moment --- may I tell you mine:

It was the '70's ... I was laid off from the aerospace industry, collected unemployment, and was married with two kids. Plus, it was food bills and a mortgage. This situation, I'm sure, was not uncommon for the time. My major was Computer Science but managed a few extra classes in Art History and Studio Art --- which provided easy extra credits for the needs of the GI Bill. It was the art classes that changed my life. In the back of my mind I resisted this fact, but I knew it was so. I did the art homework, participated in studio classes and enjoyed the association of the art teachers. The atmosphere was terrific.

At night, I continued these thoughts in my garage. It was 2:00 AM and the family was asleep. All was quiet and I'm at work doing art homework --- but it wasn't homework --- it my immense desire to fulfill myself as an artist. I couldn't get enough --- this event progressed like this

The moment began slowly --- and stopped quickly --- life after this was never the same

... it was acrylic paint, a blank canvas and my art classics book with a picture of Rembrandt's self-portrait bent open. I told myself that it was homework. But it wasn't. I loved Rembrandt's work so much that my mind melted within the page and onto the canvas. The canvas was two-dimensional, but my mind was three. I devoured this process, reaching past the surface of the canvas with brush, fingers, thumbs, and maybe arms. I can't remember. Color shot through my fingers. Everything moved --- but without my bodily presence. I barely remember. It was complete chaos and complete satisfaction. Nothing worked fast enough. It was a concert of both hands and both arms operating on the canvas like sculpting in a colored frenzy --- but it was controlled by another person. Someone else

was directing the dance. I can clearly remember ... looking at my arm ... seeing it move. This sight was indelibly fused into and onto my mind. Time vanished completely. To this day, some 50 years ago, I have no idea how long this episode took. I finished the painting, brushed the remaining background with a varied gray from the remains of the palette, which still hung on my thumb. I turned for a place to rest but ended on the floor.

Looking back, looking for details, trying to subdivide this experience is shadowy at best. I remember nothing out of the ordinary. I was focused --- certainly focused --- really highly focused. But it was a slow and methodical change, nothing even resembling great leaps of energy. Like the frog in the slowly heating pot, that must have been me, the frog. Things happen slowly --- not recognizing the overall change until it happens. Time was meaningless. It was that “second party” that crept into my head and refuses to leave --- like the 800 lb. gorilla, it cannot be ignored. All of this intense energy stopped like a shot. It stunned me. I sat down on the floor of the garage and tried to record this episode on paper. The pencil would not go fast enough. Notes ended in scribbles. Later I wrote reports, typewritten, to satisfy graduate contracts for my art professors. They asked for copies.

Barbara wasn't there in the garage, but she didn't have to be. She felt the description. She knew it, she felt it. We agreed.

Barbara and I would always hover around the Art Walk on Second Saturdays. Never missing a beat. This was fun, we knew it and we enjoyed it. We swam amidst our peers and loved every minute. Appreciating a painting was not the usual, it was an intense examination of brush strokes....because that's where we lived.

In time (I don't know which or when), Barbara started to delve more seriously into three dimensions. She claimed that I was the cause, but I believe that it was the natural progression of thought. It was in my nature, however, to introduce her to other alternatives ... new ways to do things. Barbara was willing ... and we enjoyed our mutual relationship ... looking for “new”.

Barbara produced a lot of small, low fire, ceramic pieces. Small, because of the size of her kiln and low fire because of the kiln's capability. Her ideas had no bound within these technical limits, and, like many artists, she would produce more pieces than she had room for. No room on the table. No room on the wall. Because every piece was part of her passion, she was not willing to destroy them or crush them for new material. So, in keeping with her personality, she would find room in the garden. The smaller pieces would join her plants and live alongside the roots, while the larger pieces would share space within the shrubs and around the trees. They would peek through the garden leaves as you walked through her front or back yards. The pieces she enjoyed most became part of her house ... her living area. She loved, and shared space. Over the years her house became a museum and her yard became a forest of gentle creatures ... either little beings peering through the leaves or buried in the garden. This was her life. She could not do away with her friends.

While working as a student of art at Sac. State (thereby having the use of very large kilns), Barbara was able to lift her pleasure to large ceramic objects. She reveled in this. Nothing was off the table. She was early-on influenced by a visiting lady artist (I'm sorry, but I can't remember name or details, but I think she was from northern Europe, maybe Norway) who introduced Barbara to the “slab-technique” of building objects in clay. The “slab-technique” was especially useful when building large pieces, as this might result in thinner walls, which ultimately equals lighter weight. A “slab” is very similar to a

drawn piece of pizza dough. You can form it in all directions and, especially from Barbara's point of view, work it from the inside out. This method of shaping thrilled Barbara because it allowed infinite freedom of movement (i.e., going back to the unconscious). Free forming with no bounds. This suited Barbara extremely well and resulted in a primitive style which allowed her to subdivide the complicated into simpler forms while balancing her "negative spaces" with her "positive spaces" ... her favorite topics.

Barbara's most ambitious work was what I call "The Lady of the Fountain". This piece is about three feet tall, three feet wide and about two feet deep. It's a naked lady that might be sitting next to a fountain or pond of water. Its overall style is realistic ... if you squint your eyes ... if you open your eyes, it is wildly impressionistic. This would be extemporaneously done. It would be rough slabs of clay and placed with intent and feeling. Barbara felt the real presence of her lady and allowed it to become alive before her eyes. Notice the erotic zones, the erogenous zones of the lady's breasts, her nipples. The nipples are represented as holes. You can imagine forming the breasts from the inside out...pushing a finger to punctuate the form. It's not known if the holes were created by Barbara's fingers or were created by the firing process, as thin areas of clay may well be burnt through. Regardless, the presence of the figure will take your breath away.

After the Sac. State ... large kiln ... phase of Barbara's career, it was onward and upward, but not by working clay. It was full size figures from papier-Mache. I don't know where she got the idea, but it became clear that it was up to me to provide the steel, supporting, framework (although she was so tough that she would not hesitate to do it herself if I weren't around). Barbara's papier-Mache figures went from full size players of music (she loved blues/rock music) to full-size horses. I had my hands full keeping her provided with steel frames, as she could easily out-build me.

Barbara's most significant piece in papier-Mache --- "may" --- (your guess, there were many) have been the most prominent figure of a famous Blues-Rock-Band which originated in Sacramento (and has toured the world). Having been told about Barbara's work, the leader of the band (and his business representatives) made a visit to her studio-home and was so dramatically impressed with Barbara's work that he asked if he could see her complete works. If you count everything hanging and standing, Barbara's house looks more like a museum than a place to live. He bought the full-size figure of himself (his accountant paid for it) and left with a deep appreciation of a fellow artist.

That was it --- NO --- this is where I come into the picture. Barbara needed a wooden chest (or a tall, slim box) to decorate. I know not what. It doesn't matter. Barbara's most common source for these types of products would be the Saturday morning garage sales, we call this practice, "garage sailing". To alleviate her disappointment of not finding her needed box, I offered to make a box. The following is a true story ... as we stumbled ... headfirst ... onto our personal genera of our secret collaboration. It was the collaboration of "Gnorts and Snave".

Gnorts and Snave is an offshoot of my beginnings at Aerojet. A friend of mine, a fellow worker, possessed the unique ability to talk backwards (at least pronounce words backwards). Dub snave became my name. Of course, Gnorts is Barbara's last name spelled backwards and Snave is my name spelled backwards. Why we choose to do this? My fault. I wanted my persona to remain separate, secret, not attached to my artwork. The artist, me, would remain a fantasy. So, it was, Gnorts and Snave would remain something entirely personal to us --- this would be our secret code. It was special and personal.

We were about to embark on a duo ... a full-scale collaboration of energies. This was heroic, at least in my mind, as I had never done this before. It meant exposing my inner self to people. For Barbara, this was common practice, after all, she was a practicing artist and teacher. For her, artwork is just a visual communication. If done well, art talks about your “insides” as well as your “outsides”. So, it’s a “tell all” to the world, or at least to the people who take the time to assimilate your work. To put it in more modern terms, it may be like tweeting the world . I certainly wasn't ready for this. Thinking back, it was chilling. That’s the reason I went for the nom de plume. It really didn't matter. We just did it. Barbara had no problem. So, there it was. Gnorts and Snavé was born.

Our artistic endeavors were unspoken and deliberate. We certainly didn’t mean it that way...it just happened. It may be common knowledge that artists may be the most stubborn people in the world. You can tell an artist how to invest or what to eat, but you can't tell him or her how to do his or her art. And so it was between Barbara and me. We would have it no other way. It was an unspoken bond. It was between us ... no one else. It was a collaboration of “no speak”.

Weeks later, the “garage-sale box” evolved. Barbara knew what she wanted and tried to tell me. She wanted something she couldn't find. I was willing but had no willing direction. She thought and presented herself. I waited....and from nowhere came our beginning. She delivered clay pieces that represented her thoughts. I did not read her thoughts ... I just read her pieces. It was an assimilation of love and I relished its presences. I closed the garage door (my workplace) and completed her thoughts ... with my thoughts.

The pieces Barbara gave me were a woman's face and two hands. All three pieces where of low fire ceramic. So, I had four things to work with, the face, the two hands, and, of course, the slender wooden box which existed only in my mind ... and ... maybe a fifth ... our relationship. How do I put these pieces and thoughts together and present them, in total, in the form of a slender box?

My thoughts ...

The woman must be tall and arise from within the box. She must burst through the tangibles and be dominant. Dominant yes, but she must always be a woman. She must be loving and be gracious and be our mother. Like Barbara's slab work, I chose primitive over slick. No machine work, no fussing with detailed measurements ... everything must be assembled ... either by eye or by feel. “ We” (the cabinet and I are now equal partners in this build) must have secret doors and latches. We must fulfill the wants and needs of a woman. It must not be stagnate. It must move. It must present itself boldly (and bodily) to the world, but, in the same breath, the cabinet must be clever, and it must hold secrets.

To accomplish these needs ...

... the box was tall (4 ft.) and fitted with four hand-made steel wheels. Our lady had numerous secret doors and a secret operator handle that allowed for the spooky opening of our lady’s cabinet. This was accomplished by a mysterious and silent swing of the door --- using no visible hand. It was secret. The cabinet wood was gathered from cast-off Douglas Fir --- discards, having unusable knots or burrs. All wood surfaces were burnt and charred to degrade the soft inner core of the wood and then brushed --- cross grain --- (like your high school shop teacher told you not to do) with a sharp, bristly steel wire brush. This technique degraded the surface and allowed the strong age rings and craggy knots to remain as prominent visuals. The cabinet was then hand washed with a white, mineral based, stain and rubbed to a smooth finish. Mistakes (several) were celebrated --- not hidden.

As time went on, Barbara and I presented the results of our newly found collaboration to our peers and, for a brief moment, we seemed to have made a small change in the genera of our time. Copies began to appear. We followed this initial show with others. Different gallery shows in the Northern California area were included, plus the California State Fair. We delighted ourselves with this attention. We enjoyed talking to people interested enough to ask questions. The secret was out about our special collaboration. Frankly, I confess that I have forgotten about the results of these shows. However, the one show that stands out in my mind is the last formally juried show that covered the greater part of Northern California. "Our lady ..." collected the "Best of Show" award and the juror was on his hands and knees examining our lady's handmade wheels. Hats off to this judge. He cared enough to closely examine this piece, as well as all the other pieces in the show. Yes, we were exhausted.

Other G-S pieces followed but not frequently. Barbara had her hands full delivering artwork of clay or papier-Mache to the local galleries. However, when we did come to a mutual idea, it was always the same scenario, that same special collaboration --- it was no-speak.

As time went on, we later approached (you might more accurately describe this delicate process as a "dance" of wills) the thought of building a box (yes, another box). This one was to keep our most precious things inside ("things" might be thoughts as well as physical items). It evolved. Like other times, Barbara gave me a small ceramic figure. It was of a reclining woman in the form of Titan's "Venus". It was roughly 12 inches long, 6 inches wide and sculpted in deep relief. It was a beautifully conceived piece, primitive, with a reserved passion. I liked it. She was not sold on it. I suggested that we talk about it later ... she agreed, but I brought it to my garage and produced the box ... which I believe is an outstanding representation of a typical Gnorts and Snave work. I fell in love with Barbara's reclining ceramic figure and delicately inlaid the ceramic figure into the cover of the box. She is resting on a blanket of loosely woven fabric. The rest of the box is made of wood, distressed, burned and cross brushed and toned with an oil-based stain (as the "lady in the box" piece). Copper sheeting covered the inside of the box and is framed with linear accents of calico fabric --- turned inside out. Except for the brass piano hinge, all else is hand made, and made mostly of copper. The latch is an insert of copper and is cut and form-beaten into the word "forever"... Need I say more. I am exhausted. The box was a loving gift for Barbaraf o r e v e r.....

Two more Gnorts and Snave items were produced. These were no smoking signs....yes, that's what I said, no smoking signs. Had I not mentioned that Barbara and I were political activists? What else would you expect from people whose absolute selves were thrown (of our own doing) to the wolves of our fellow beings. We expose our inner beings to all. So be it ... what's next ...

.... the no smoking signs were next. They evolved from nowhere. Not so, they were from me ... but Barbara went along with it. She is so sweet, and we so believed in each other so much that she agreed. It was for a good cause. And so, it was.

Soon a ceramic piece arrived at my door (that's not really what happened, but essentially, it was the same thought process). My garage door closed (as before) and we gave birth to a living-breathing no smoking sign. We gave it to our local public television station for an art auction where it achieved a bell ringing prize for over-the-top popularity --- i.e., It brought in more money for the television station than expected. We're good.

The next one was even better. This ceramic piece also surfaced in that same magical way. As always, it was beautiful. Imagine a distorted face, partially blue in color with mouth open in gag format and a cigar stuck to the top of a protruding tongue. Marvelous. The job was finished with simulated smoke, complimented with blue babies and a joggling “NO”. Can't beat it --- still have it --- won't sell it.

Cold cereal and a warm heart:

With Barbara's soft voice and pleasant personality, it comes as no surprise that she had no trouble making friends. She loved to dance. She loved music. She loved making art and showed it by becoming an art teacher. She flaunted her creativity to her pupils, and they loved it. It was painting crafts and clay crafts, she did it all.

At home, her clay studio was just a simple table in her back yard, not even a roof. The kiln was tucked in the corner of a shed. It was fine with her. Her fineness lay in the fantasies of her mind. From time to time I might ask her for a favor. This time I wished for a dish. A dish with two parts, one for my morning cereal and one part for the milk. This way I could slop over just enough milk onto the cereal so the cereal flakes would not become soggy. Sounded good to me but not for Barbara. She likes her cereal soggy!! Besides being disappointed, I was devastated that we weren't on the same page!

Cold cereal aside, we did love to dance. Barbara was far and away better than I. She tangoed, she waltzed, and she rocked and she rolled. As much as I tried, I could not follow directions and keep my feet going in the right direction ... so the waltz and tango were out for me ... but I did rock. I loved the freedom and creativity of moving with the music. We did enjoy this together. We would follow our favorite rock bands around town and especially on Saturday night. Maybe a little embarrassing, but once on our way back from San Francisco, we did stop at “The Graduate” in Davis, and, along with the college kids, we did share the elevated dance floor for two hours. It goes pretty fast when you're having fun.

We took a bus trip to San Francisco. It was a French Impressionist Show --- it was Monet. We both were starved to see it. We went through the gallery rooms at least three times. It was the day. We were consumed by the presence of Monet's pieces. Thoroughly drained, we surrendered ourselves to the Japanese Gardens and sat in its splendor and felt the warm sun on our shoulders. I couldn't hold Barbara close enough. Such a magnificent time, I shall always cherish this experience ... I shall always remember ... Barbara was my love and we shared our passions.

After this “Monet experience”, everything else seemed pale. But we did retrieve our bus and we did return home to Sacramento. From that time on, San Francisco was always our destination of choice. After a year, we managed to jump on the bus again. This time it was for the Bay-to-Breakers Run. Our favorite were tickets on the bus sponsored by the Sacramento Firemen. They really know how to have fun. We sang, we drank, we ate, and we actually jogged our way to the coast. The following could be heavily redacted. Leave it to Barbara, she found a way. Barbara was always a little self-conscious. She thought she was a little too heavy in the bottom ... so she figured a way to become “Barbie”. (I remind you; this topic never came up. I loved her, no - matter - what, but this is what happened). In some way, she pulled out of her closet a white (East) Indian gown. Head to toe. All white. This was her “canvas”. She painted a voluptuous figure of a woman. The figure looked like a cross between “Barbie” and “Wonder Woman”. It was the front view and then the back view. Pretty impressive. She was the hit of the day and the Bay-To-Breakers runners flocked to her to celebrate her creative solution to a common problem. To this present day, you can see copies of similar “Barbie'd”

shirts or blouses in almost all the souvenir shops along the Bay.

War was coming, and we didn't like it.

Then there were "good" things and then there were some "bad" things. We say this in terms of politics. War was coming and neither Barbara nor I liked it. This was in the era between the years 2002 and 2008. In our view, it was nasty, and we were driven to protest. By this time, both of us could qualify to be "Gray Panthers". We didn't care. It was guts and yelling at the top of our voices. We weren't alone. This was crazy.

We had to communicate. We would communicate visually. We made signs....but these signs were BIG. What we lacked in "voice", we made up in "view". I have to admit, these big signs were my idea, but, since Barbara signed onto it, she was equally as guilty. The signs were made out of cardboard and painted black with white letters ... so you could see their meaning, even at low light. They were made to fold-up into small sizes, so they could be taken on the bus. Clever. They were all 4 feet high, but their lengths varied from 16 feet to 32 feet long. Yes, this was crazy, but the political situation was equally as crazy, at least in our view. We spent most of our protesting time at home in Sacramento, much of that time was spent at the corner of 16th Street and Broadway but also, on occasion, we would go to San Francisco. We were fierce. Barbara was fierce. I would ask Barbara to come with me and she would jump at the chance. She would hold up her side of the sign and I would hold up the other ... and it wasn't easy. The signs were so big that they looked and handled like sails. The wind would gust, and she would fly. I love Barbara. She was my delight. Yes, she had her boys and I had mine. Her first love was to her boys and mine, to mine ... but let me tell you, we were one. I'll never forget it.

We loved Mexico. I hope it will never change, but we know that change will come. We love Mexico because it communicates to the basic drives of life. Nothing is fake. When you see rock work designs in the pavement beneath your feet ... you know it was done by a real person. I don't care if this person floods his or herself with cerveza after work or just comes home to family. We are all one in this world ... and I thank them for sharing.

It was June in Mexico and the weather was best. Barbara and I would take walks along the beach. She would sketch with pen, ink, and pencil. She sat on the volcanic rock and shared the airs of the sea. I had a camera, but Barbara didn't want her picture taken. I would sneak it. We would walk along the beach, hand in hand. Soon we came along a special outcropping of jagged rocks; it formed a secluded hollow in the surf. On one of the rocks was a balanced column of small, smooth, stones. I wish I had the presence of mind to have taken a picture. The stones were balanced to such a degree that it was seemingly impossible to imagine. They could not really exist. We thought that these balanced stones might be a guardian for the sleeping person we found behind the rocks, maybe a religious symbol protecting this sanctuary. We did not disturb. We left for town.

Our experiences in Mexico were unforgettable. We met my sister in town, the town of Vallarta. We shopped, we rested, we ate, we enjoyed our "family" in Mexico. Unforgettable.

Back home was also welcome. We certainly enjoyed Mexico, but it was nice to relax in the protected and secluded atmosphere of our own homes.

We both struggled with our finances, Barbara the most. We were both retired and making the most of

our pensions and Social Security, but inflation was creeping. We both kept busy with our work. Barbara was very generous with her artwork. She gave many pieces to me. It was then that I thought that I might provide some help. Some financial help. I started to write \$100 checks. It happened every Second Saturday. It wasn't a gift. On the "for" line I always wrote "artwork". Barbara was a proud lady and would not take handouts. That was good, so I escalated a bit. I gave her a cell phone for her birthday. She was delighted. So, the escalation kept going ... I asked her to marry me ... but we're getting ahead of the story.

During our dates, our "time outs", our Second Saturdays, our conversations might drift among our personal thoughts. It became clear that, on an emotional (romantic) scale, neither one of us ranked very high. Our love experiences were not top notch. Maybe that's why we put our emotions in our art work. We really didn't mind that conclusion ... for whatever gave us the drive, it was worth it.

Barbara never experienced a man on bended knee, asking her for her hand. I'm not sure how that episode came about, but I, also, was guilty of that same situation. In my case, it was Bridal Veil Falls, Yosemite. I was ready, with ring, but my significant other didn't want to get wet. So, our relationship lingered, and we finally tied the knot by a committee of two (I can't remember... and I'm not proud of that, either.). As time went on, I felt the need to deliver for both, Barbara and myself.

Barbara loved jewelry. We often visited her favorite jewelry stores...so I had a pretty good idea of where to go. So, on one day while driving, I stopped at one of Barbara's favorite jewelry spots and, with absolutely no hesitation, bought an engagement ring and a wedding ring...both...I was sure. I chose a deep, warm, gold with as many diamonds as I could afford. No hesitation.

During many of our gallery tours, we would stop at Jacks Urban Eats ... the one down the street from Sac. State College. Yes, yes ... Jacks is not the most romantic spot in the world ... but it doesn't have to be. What it has to be is crowded, noisy and very, very, popular. It was the noon time crowd, and everybody was happy for Friday. And then there was this old guy, me, in the crowded aisle, on one knee, asking his beloved for her hand. I was fairly sure that I was crazy ... because that's the look the waiter gave me ... but I didn't care ... I was ready to stop the world ...

..... but I didn't stop the world.

Everything else came, sort-of, hazy. I'm sure Barbara was as stunned as I was. I can't remember. We must have finished our sandwiches and drank our beers. I think, on the way home, we talked about Barbara wearing the ring on her right hand ... as a friendship ring. That was O.K. with me. I knew, I had some work to do ... at our age ... life doesn't change in an instant.

I wasn't Barbara's Prince Charming ... but I knew that Barbara was still my Princess.

Nothing changed in our relationship. In fact, from that time on, Barbara would most always wear the ring ... on her right hand ... and would always draw my attention to it. I appreciated her thoughts, but I couldn't quite get through the barrier. Months later, I gave her the other half of the duo, the wedding ring to wear ... which she did.

As time went on, we participated in gallery shows and Second Saturdays. Nothing changed. It was still us against the world....and we really didn't care what the world thought. Soon it was going to be a fun time for Barbara. The year was closing in on autumn and a few of Barbara's closest women

friends were organizing a trip to Taos, New Mexico. Barbara was invited. Time was short. It was happening during the first of the month, but that meant our Second Saturday was gone. Regardless, I was happy for Barbara and I wrote her my usual Second Saturday check for \$100. and told her to spend it all. She was thrilled ... but she insisted, she wanted to bring me back a souvenir. So, I told her to bring me back a “T” shirt ... make it “Taos” and make it yellow.

... and that, she did. It was a beautiful shirt with the Taos Pueblo logo ... Taos, New Mexico ... and, like the autumn leaves of the Pueblo it was yellow.

I held her and kissed her ... just like we always did ... I loved her more than anything in the world.

Sometime later I received a phone call. Barbara had a stroke.

I knew that things were slipping fast. I wanted to save as much of her as possible.

I would take a wheelchair ... it made no difference ... I would take as much of her as I could get. We could still take trips; we could still visit her favorite places. We could still do things together.

This was not to be. I was at her side almost constantly. I bought her clothes to wear in the hospital and in the care home. Her family and many friends were there.

Barbara wanted to talk to one of her best friends ... a lady counselor. I picked up Barbara's counselor friend and delivered her to Barbara's bedside. I walked away. They needed to be alone. Barbara was crying ... She was scared. I have never seen Barbara like this ... she never cried ... never ... she was never scared ... never

I was helpless ... seeing her crying like this cut my heart. Nothing else ... nothing. I could do nothing ... I could only wait in the hallway ... my love was dying ... and there was nothing that I could do.

A few hours later, I drove Barbara's friend back home.

I stayed overnight at the hospital.

I got as close to Barbara as I could. She had hoses and wires all over. I told her that I loved her

... and that I would never leave her. We kissed each other as intensely as we could ...

She told me that we could get married. We talked about the ceremony ... we could have it in her back yard ...

We could have people bring dishes ... a wedding potluck ... it could be done ... we planned our wedding right there, on the hospital bed.

I think that Barbara's counselor friend, allowed Barbara to separate herself from the past ... to allow her to live life ... without consequence ... to let go ... to love ...

..... I will love Barbara forever ... I empty my heart ...

Looking back ...

Barbara lasted for several months. She fought hard. She tried her best. She really tried to do what the therapist wanted her to do. She was valiant. During her standup exercises she would turn her head, look at me, and, with sheer willpower and determination, she would raise her head and would look straight ahead, straight into the eyes of her physical therapist, eye to eye , just as she was asked to do. Barbara was a warrior. She mustered that same willpower and determination that she had holding the "NO WAR" signs on 16th Street and Broadway ... determined and relentless ... fierce ... but her body finally gave away. May my Barbara please rest in peace ... I know that ... that will happen ... for

peace ... is what she always fought for... all...her...life.....

.... I am now alone ...

August 7, 2012

