

Life/Work Direction

June 2014

Dear friends,

Our walls are alive with art. It is an odd gallery of things we have been given or have found or created over the years. The assortment we have chosen has more to do with companionship than decoration. We are encircled by a cloud of witnesses in the photography, tree bark, pastels and poetry that enrich us. The images remind us of themes essential to our work.

One photograph Eunice took of a waterfall hangs behind us, facing those who come each week to make sense of their life and its direction. Once, after weeks of seeing it, a participant halted in mid-sentence and exclaimed, “There’s a *person* in that waterfall! Did you know? Have you seen it?” Suddenly, the image they had grown accustomed to was viewed in a new light. A watery figure emerged from the falls—present all along but only then recognizable.



We hope for moments like this in the work we do—that flash of recognition when a person awakens to a part of themselves they had not seen clearly before. Form and purpose emerge from the pieces of their story. A surprising integration happens—a coming home to oneself, often with a deeper sense of God’s presence there all along, faithfully working to redeem and empower.

We celebrate experiences like Lyssa Palu-Ay’s whose story we feature in this letter – a story of this kind of recognition. May it encourage you to greater wonder and faith with the pieces of your own life story.

With thanks for your continuing prayerful support,
Scott and Louise Walker



Lyssa Palu-ay is an Associate Professor of Studio Foundation and Director of the Academic Compass Program serving first generation students at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston. She is a doctoral candidate at UMass Boston College of Education and Human Development.

I found Life/Work Direction in Jamaica Plain— right where I was living! I was sitting at lunch with a friend at the Cuban restaurant two blocks away. When she told me about what I would find at Life/Work, I was instantly interested. “It’s right over there a block away!”

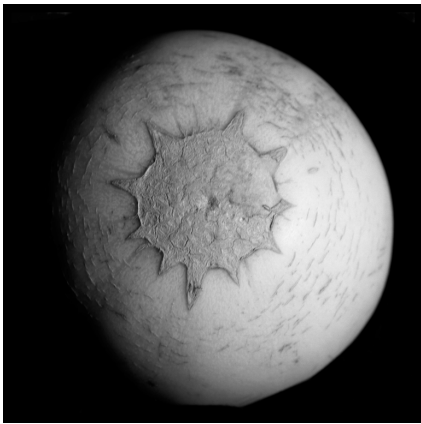
The moment I walked into 32 Halifax Street I knew something felt familiar. I wasn’t sure exactly what it was, the art on the wall, the books on the shelves or the warm inviting room. I had come to a crossroads in therapy work where I felt in my heart, it would only take me so far. Life/Work Direction dealt with questions therapy had not addressed and gave me *movement*. I realized how my work was linked to essential aspects of who I am gained a new relationship with my self and the spiritual life and God. Although I talked about some of the same things as in therapy, it was not in the same way. I began to speak from my heart.

I soon realized that this space was a place to think, pray and reflect on my life in an integrated way. It was familiar because this was the type of work I had done in my year with the Jesuit Volunteer Corp after college. There I was encouraged to live thoughtfully through spirituality, community, simple lifestyle and social justice. I was older now, married with a young son and in the middle of a doctoral program on top of teaching. Life was hectic and many good things were happening but I found the space with Louise and Scott gave me time to be more conscious of how my choices were shaping my life. In some ways, the work with them reinforced the path I was taking but it also opened new areas of possibility. I realized how my work in art education and my new role as a researcher was linked to essential aspects of who I am. I began to feel connections between my interests in cultural identity and what happens in the classroom rather than it being merely an intellectual pursuit.

I was reminded of the values I want to pursue in my work. They relate to the development of cultural identity, something absent in my own life growing up. I wanted recognition as a Filipina, and not be absent from the conversation. I wanted my cultural identity and values to be more integrated. And it is now the way I shape curriculum in the classroom and help students express their cultural identity in art education.

As a result, all my worlds are becoming integrated. It makes sense. Everything is aligning. This has given me new confidence. For example, in writing one chapter for my doctoral dissertation, I was able to craft something that integrated parts of my past life. I could see for the first time how my personal experiences in the classroom as a young student, my life as an artist and my work in education were weaving together connections that made me whole.

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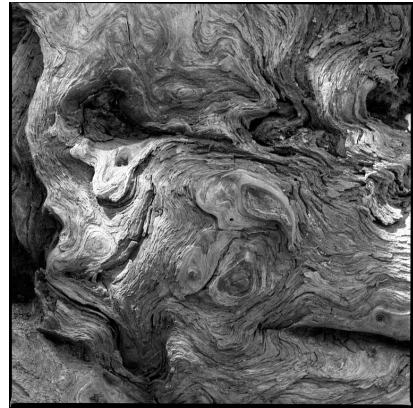
Photograph by Lyssa Palu-Ay

It was a *birthing process*. Up until this time, when I faced obstacles in my work I would take a bullet for my students and that has not changed. The difference now is that I can stand up for myself as well as for others I feel more confident about asserting myself rather than reacting from a defensive position..

Another difference is my motive: I do not operate merely out of duty or obligation, but my actions are aligned with my core values.

I continue to work with Louise through Listening Prayer and it has further offered support and guidance that I need.

Prayer has opened a vista to a new landscape where I feel the presence of an assurance, and a gentle yet strong guidance of God. I have two more years to finish my doctoral work and I am not exactly sure what I will do next. But I feel more assured about my choices and content with my life.



*Photograph by Lyssa Palu-Ay
in New Mexico, 2014*

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