

TONY AISH

Born December 12, 1938, and in the following year a war was held in my honour. As a result I moved all across southern England, living with people who were related, but whom I had never met before.

My mother "joined up" and my young dad was sent to Egypt as a 24-year-old civil engineer. He died not long afterwards of shiga paralytic illness, very nasty form of dysentery. He is buried in Egypt so I never knew him.

As a result of all this I did not grow up in a "neighbourhood" with a gang of kids. I attended "public" school, likely paid for by my grandfather Aish. This was fine, but public schools tended not to offer music, art or drama so I had no idea whether I had any "talents" in these areas. My mother left the army pregnant and I have what is believed to be a half brother in England.

We write regularly, but have never met. For my last year in England I lived in a small and private "group home" with four other children, and then in about October of 1948 I flew out "solo" and joined my mother [in Victoria, B.C.] for a few lean years. I was happy to be back with Mum and conditions did not concern me much.

I first attended St. Louis College as a non-Catholic for the cost of \$7 per month. Again, no art, music or drama and I realize now that this was a shame as I have/had abilities in those areas. I was used to strict male teachers and all boys so I assume Mum felt I'd feel more at home. Mum remarried when I was 13.

Around grade 7 I went to the University School for Boys, now St. Michael's University School. Again, no art, music or drama. The British public school system was more interested in raising future soldiers to guard the Empire so the "arts" were not considered important. For grades 11 and 12 I attended Vic High and finally took art classes and found that I had a certain talent in art.

I graduated and worked for three years at the Royal Trust Co. in the Income Tax department and realized that, while I could do the work, it was not a career for me, so I signed up at U. Vic. For Elementary Education, just to get in the door as there was no Math 101 that would have killed my chances. I had no particular reason for choosing teaching except that there was no mathematics other than a dopey course re the new grade 8 math program. I failed it, retook it by staying at home with the text book, and made 72% on the second try.



I then began my art studies and courses and seemed to have a real talent and was pushed along by my chief instructor (and friend), Donald Harvey, a fine painter whose work I admired.

I was married in third year because my wife asked me, and soon began my teaching career after a year of travelling about Europe and North Africa. I had not decided to become a "painter" as, for me, it was too lonely a life and I enjoyed the company of young kids. I was art teacher at Esquimalt High for about six years, but detested the job and asked to be removed to focus on English. I taught one year at Oak Bay and then went on to Cedar Hill Junior High where I became the teacher of the grade 8, 9 and 10 Gifted Program in English and love it. No art at all.

I'm not sure what sparked my art interests later but part of it had to do with discovering the '05 technical drawing pen and I realized that I was a "details nut and that, with this pen, I could do all sorts of things. This was as early as 1974, but I had little time to get really interested. And then I did, and began taking the large pieces seriously.

Divorced for the second time in about 1979, I now had time to devote to the hours that went into the drawings. It was like a meditation. I usually had a germ of an idea and then built upon it. I was also of an age when I began to pay more attention to a world that was beginning to trouble me with everything from climate change to wars in the Middle East. I read the Koran, all of and about T.E Lawrence, and ended with very mixed feelings about "the West". My drawings began to reflect this, one way or another. I was also a fan of Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti and pieces of their works appear in the drawings. I was aware, too, of the poverty of so many, of U.S. violence at home, of climate change and of a world that I felt was heading for troubles. I also recall Aldous Huxley fearing that one day we would experience some sort of global plague. He considered this more likely than an atomic war. Thus the title: "Messenger From the Time of Plague". It has nothing to do with COVID-19; that just turned up at the "right" time.

I did little with my new-found talent as I was too busy with English and in the summers I was motorcycling about B.C.

I remarried and re-divorced, but was now glad to be alone as I spent hours at my drawing table with my '05 pen, and some of what I have done quite surprises me. Once I had money (inheritance) I could afford to have the pieces properly framed, and then along came our gallery and I was asked to show my works and I am pleased that I have as I felt they were worth looking at and thinking about. I am not a grim misery, but I am quite aware of the muddle we seem to be in, and a bit appalled by some of the world's leaders.

Anyway, I hope I get you wondering. Don't try to read too much into everything as I don't even know the reasons for some images.