



The View from Right Field

by Rick Ohler

a bi-weekly column in the

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“Learning to See”

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Long time readers know that, out here in Right Field, we'll spare no expense or effort to craft a decent column. Even if it means submitting to the indignity and vexation of air travel, sitting in the middle seat of the 36th row of an Airbus for four hours between two 2XL next-set neighbors. On St. Patrick's Day, no less. Honestly, the things I do for my readers. Hopefully you'll find that the resulting column was worth it.

This column began as a discussion in the inner sanctum of the world's best hometown newspaper at 710 Main St. At issue was the review of a new book that had just been published by a local writer. Who wants write the review, the editor asked. I raised my hand immediately. I wanted to write it, of course, because the author is my sweetheart, my helpmate, my best friend, Kateri Ewing, whose new book *Look Closer, Draw Better* arrived in bookstores (like The Bookworm in East Aurora) and on amazon.com a few weeks ago.

My editor demurred, (correctly, I have to admit) noting that I didn't have enough "distance" from the author and her book to write a real "review." After all, the author and I live (with three curious and supportive cats) together at Right Field World Headquarters on the western fringe of the village where she creates her artwork and records video lessons that go out all over the world and where I keep track of all things local for the newspaper. Global and local—we make a good pair. But for me to write a supposedly honest review would risk the opprobrium (RIP Snake) of the journalistic community for sure and perhaps the *Advertiser* readership as well.

So I flew out to my brother and sister-in-law's home in the Granite Mountain region of central Arizona, 1,890 miles from the 14052 in a town that, once known as Jackass Flats, is now called Prescott Valley. I hoped that might be enough distance (and altitude—Prescott Valley is a mile above sea level) between the author and

reviewer. “Um,” said my editor, when I told him where I was, “that’s not really the kind of distance I was talking about.”

Which brings me, fairly early on for a change, to an announcement about “View From Right Field” No. 357. Okay fine, this is not a book review. It’s not even a feature about the book. It’s a first-person column, and an unabashed love letter to the author.

Look Closer, Draw Better is a marvelous book in so many ways. On one level, it’s a marvelous book because it accomplishes its mission as an instructional guide for amateur artists who want to learn about drawing with graphite, charcoal, pen and ink and about painting with watercolors. It’s written from the heart in a clear style and it’s divided into four, easy-to-follow sections that welcome everyone from the never-ever artist to the experienced mark maker. For the legions of people who have always assumed that drawing is beyond them, it’s reassuring and inspiring.

On a visual level, *Look Closer, Draw Better* is stunning, a book that invites you to pick it up and spend some time, even if you don’t ever draw a line. Largely photographed by Kateri in our home studio and featuring her drawings and paintings, it has been assembled and printed with such care and professionalism by Rockport Publishers/The Quarto Group that bookstores and art galleries around the world are proud to carry it. You can find it at the Bookworm, at Hyatt’s in the city and Barnes & Noble. I’ll have a copy at the *Advertiser* office every Wednesday morning if you would like to stop in and have a look.

But there is another level to *Look Closer, Draw Better* that makes the book ever more valuable and inspiring, even precious. When you really read the whole book, not as you might an owner’s manual for your car—thumbing through, waiting for one particular item to catch your eye—but as a continuous message from her to you as, yes, a hopeful artist, but as a seeker of beauty, as well, you will understand why she wrote the book.

Take a second to read the introduction: “If I had to choose one lesson that I could pass along to other artists, there is only one real choice: the importance and joy of learning to see. I have been absolutely amazed and enchanted—as perhaps you have, too—to discover what happens to our artwork when we truly learn not just what, but how to see. If I had to explain the core of what I have taken into my heart, as an artist, it is my belief that if we pay close enough attention, we can discover immense beauty in the most ordinary subjects of our daily lives.”

From the day Kateri took painting and drawing into her heart as a vocation, a career, a *raison d’être*, she has focused on teaching—guiding and helping friends, family and complete strangers discover the glory of seeing and embracing the world around them through art. Our house, several times a week, becomes a video sound stage where Kateri creates, not artwork to sell, but videos to share. You’ll find her Dandelion Lessons (inspired by the dandelion seeds carried by the winds to all four

corners) on YouTube. You can subscribe to her Patreon account for more in-depth videos about the wonders of artistic expression. In return, grateful students and kindred spirits keep our letter carrier and UPS and Fed Ex drivers busy, delivering letters, cards, handmade papers and journal, handcrafted original pigments from Europe, Asia, Canada and most of the 50 states. Some of her correspondents talk about their art; many talk about their lives and how Kateri's kindness and encouragement have gotten them through a rough patch or have reawakened a dormant or as yet unrealized passion for art. When she does make paintings or drawings to sell, often they take the form of smaller works, affordable to all.

In *Look Closer, Draw Better* you will have the privilege of hanging out with her for a few pages to learn and, hopefully, to see. It's not as cool as being next to her, like I am (and the cats are) ever day, but it's a wonderful start.