



THE PORTLAND ART MUSEUM PODCAST EPISODE 21 TRANSCRIPT

JON RICHARDSON

This is the Portland Art Museum Podcast, a channel between the Museum and you. Our goal is to amplify community voices through conversations and personal stories. And we're here to facilitate respectful dialogue, debate, and the free exchange of ideas. To participate submit your idea at pam.to/podcastidea. We invite you to connect with art through your own experience, voice, and personal journey. Relevant links and transcripts for each episode are available at PortlandArtMuseum.org/podcast. Depending on who you ask an art museum can mean something completely different. To some it's a historical repository of artworks. to others, it's a landmark for protest and social change. There are even some people who see an art museum as a place for quiet reflection. On this episode of the podcast, we're exploring another category: visitors who come with a friend or loved one to form or strengthen a personal bond.

BEN CONTE

We come here probably four times a year. We'll hang out we'll do a kind of a quick walk around and then grab a burger, a little dad and daughter time.

JON RICHARDSON

That was Ben Conte. He's one of the Museum's members and actually submitted the idea for this episode. He's been coming to the Portland Art Museum with his daughter Maeve regularly for the past 12 years.

BEN CONTE

We moved here in 2007 when she and her sister were five and three, and we moved right downtown to the Pearl. And what do you do when you've got a five and a three year old and you arrive in a place like Portland in the summer? You go to OMSI, and you play in the fountain

MAEVE CONTE

and the Art Museum

BEN CONTE

and you go to the Art Museum. So we came here very early in our kind of life in Portland and have always just really enjoyed coming here as a family and particularly Maeve and I.

JON RICHARDSON

Through their experiences here, Maeve has come to learn A lot about her dad, especially in the way he experiences art.

MAEVE CONTE

Well, he always just recognizes things very quickly and he understands like once he sees a few paintings and reads the

descriptions of them, he puts like the whole, the whole exhibit together. He's like, Oh, you heard about this and this and the dates and this and I'm like, What? Like all I saw were paintings, like, I hope I got that much, but I feel like you read into the whole experience more than I do. And I hope I take some of that. I don't know.

JON RICHARDSON

And Ben has learned a lot about his daughter and the way she is impacted by art, too.

BEN CONTE

She's very broad minded, and very open minded. You know, just, you can see kind of that art means something to her that it is very neat to see things and see her emotional reaction to things that I thought, Okay, well, I sort of breezed by that and she picks up a different thing. So I just I appreciate the perspective and the open mindedness and then art for art's sake is a wonderful thing, so whenever you see that come out in anybody else it's really special.

JON RICHARDSON

What you can't see my little listening to this Podcast is the way Ben lights up when he talks about Maeve and the tradition that they share when they come to the Portland Art Museum together. But now that Maeve is in her senior year of high school, their father daughter days may begin to look a little different. At the time of this episode's release, Maeve is in the process of applying to college, and it is likely that she will end up out of state in the fall. That being said, their father daughter dates may have to change but as far as Maeve is concerned, they're far from over.

MAEVE CONTE

I'm sure we'll do some more little lunch and Museum dates there. They're my fave- they're really so fun. I love them. Doing that is my favorite we always get I always like get dressed up and we come down and we go through the Museum and it's it's so fun. I love it.

JON RICHARDSON

On behalf of the Portland Art Museum, it's a real honor that we've played a role and Ben and Maeve's life here in Portland. After Ben came to us with the idea for this episode, we put a call out on our Facebook page for anyone else who has similar traditions. That's when we met Matthew Friday. A teacher in England and storyteller for children at a school in Switzerland. In 2012, Matthew met Jill, a Portland area native living in England. No, this isn't their story. This is the story of Matthew and Morgan. Morgan is Jill's niece and became Matthew's niece as well when Matthew and Jill married in 2014. Once they were officially uncle and niece, Matthew thought that visits to the Portland Art Museum during his and Jill's twice annual trips to Portland would be a great way for him to get to know Morgan and vice versa.

MORGAN

Well, it's been really helpful in getting to know him.

JON RICHARDSON

That's Morgan.

MORGAN

One day, it was around Christmas time, he asked me to come to the Museum. And we did and then we kind of got talking and then I got to know him better. And then ever since then, every time we come, we just get to know each other better. And it really helps like build a relationship and bond.

MATTHEW FRIDAY

Well, it's kind of like our special day.

JON RICHARDSON

And that's Matthew

MATTHEW FRIDAY

Because you know, Morgan's really busy in as many things that she's doing. And this is where I can kind of carve out time where I can just spend time with her and we chat about things that we wouldn't normally be able to chat about. And like Morgan says, each time, it kind of helps us build our relationship more and more just her and I, because of course, you have a different relationship when you're with in a family, especially as someone who's kind of coming into a family. And it's really nice to have this time and I make an effort to make sure this happens every single time, because I think it's kind of special.

MORGAN

There was once a car exhibit here. And when we came to that he kind of seemed like a little boy again, where he was like, obsessing over all the cars,

MATTHEW FRIDAY

And I don't drive. I don't have a license, but now I want it.

MORGAN

So that was fun to see. And then we kind of talked about, like, how he, he like grew up in England. And it was really different from what I've heard about, like my parents growing up here in Oregon. That was pretty cool.

MATTHEW FRIDAY

It's always nice to the new exhibitions, but it's it's not nicer. But it's also really nice to see the same pieces of art and my favorite pieces around the museum. And I keep coming back to them and keep surprising myself, it's like Oh yeah, that's that piece I really like. So there's always the kind of the new experience. And then there's the sort of reassuring familiarity of those pieces that I remember fondly.

MORGAN

I enjoy the cultural parts, because Matthew gets really into it. And then we kind of get this whole conversation started. And it's really interesting, because kind of that piece of the Museum kind of helped me get to know him when I first met him, too.

MATTHEW FRIDAY

Yeah. And we just sort of talked about sort of random things that crop up, you know, what would it be like to time travel back to that time, or there might be a particular piece of art that stands out which we get draws our attention, we never really know what we're going to chat about as we walk around. But it's always something that we wouldn't normally ever do if we were back at the house in Lake Oswego.

JON RICHARDSON

like I mentioned at the top of this episode, there are so many ways to experience an art museum, and there's no right or wrong way to do it. But there is something to be said about discovering things about yourself or a loved one. Through the art.

MATTHEW FRIDAY

This is a great way for Morgan to see me it's a great way to see me in a way that perhaps when you're in a family setting You see a part of somebody. And then when you see them in an environment that they really feel differently about, you see a different aspect of them. So this is my way of showing her something that cannot be shown in other ways. And we use the Museum for that, because this is a way where I feel really inspired. And, you know, the transitions that Morgan goes through in middle and high school, we don't have in England, we don't have them in such a way, and we don't have the school structure in such a way. So it's understanding her experiences where we get to talk about them, just her and I, that's really valuable for me. really valuable, and not as a teachers as, as our uncle,

of course, you know, just understanding what it's like to be a teenager now in 2019, and things that are similar and different than when I was a teenager.

MORGAN

Yeah. And in the future I'm hoping that I might find more people that are interested to come and see so I can build a connection like I did with Matthew. And in the future, it might be nice to even come more than once a year, maybe like two or three times a year even, to make it stronger I guess because I've only known him for about half my life. So we've had a long time where we haven't known each other to like bond compared to other members of our family.

JON RICHARDSON

Thanks to Matthew, Morgan has a new way to connect with other members of her family. And since the Museum is free for visitors 17 and under, Morgan always has a great new way to better bond with her friends. Now, the next two people we're about to hear from are quite different from Matthew and Morgan or Ben and Maeve. Gwendolyn and Drew have been married for over 30 years. After each moving to San Francisco in the early 70s, they met at a dinner party. From there, a relationship bloomed and their lives were a balance of working together to help small businesses and enjoying the artistic riches of San Francisco. I could go into much more detail about their lives and individual histories working toward social justice, but I'll let Gwendolyn and Drew tell their story of artistic discovery and how that further blossomed here in Portland.

GWENDOLYN FIELD

I would say art entered my life primarily through Drew. I was an English major. So things of word, things of book tend to interest me the most, and Drew taught me how you venture into a painting when you're standing in front of it. And so I credit him with opening up the world of museums as an interactive place to be.

DREW FIELD

When I was a student at the University of Idaho and Rutgers in New Jersey. I would go to bookstores and look at art books. And then when I started working, some travel was involved and I went to Washington DC and a whole world opened up but the National Gallery of Arts and the National Portrait Gallery and just traveling around the the city intensified my interest in Art wherever I could find it. We both independently came to San Francisco. I used to, in Philadelphia read the weather reports every evening to and pick the city that had the best weather and that was San Francisco.

GWENDOLYN FIELD

I went looking for the hippies and I was a few years too late. But, but San Francisco felt like the place where you could go to find out who you were, without your parents, reminding you who you're supposed to be. We only moved away because kids and grandkids had moved to Portland and we were following them and Portland feels to us a bit like San Francisco did in the early 70s.

DREW FIELD

It may be that the first time we were here in the building was because of the Northwest Film Center. Somehow we were directed to the theater here. And then we noticed there was more to it than in the basement,

GWENDOLYN FIELD

and I think after living in San Francisco, I assumed that was the apex. That would be where there would be the most interesting, not only paintings, but programs to introduce people to them. And for our experience, Portland is way beyond that. The Portland Art Museum really captured me when it had its meditations. Twice a month, a docent would take us to different paintings, tell us a bit about the painting and then guide us through a meditation and it's so unAmerican to sit still for a half an hour in front of one painting it, it changed my way of looking at art, that it was an experience to be had not something to be checked off the list. And I have to say that we've lived in very art oriented communities on the Monterey Peninsula and in San Francisco. But we find the Portland Art Museum has the most

creative programs for doing just what that experience did for us, drawing people in. So that's the gift of the Portland Art Museum is slowing us down and capturing us so we can be there really, really experiencing the art.

JON RICHARDSON

At the Portland Art Museum, we are very proud of the programs that our Department of Learning and Community Partnerships organizes for our visitors. Please be sure to check out the link in this episode's description for our programs calendar. Now, as you've learned from Ben and Maeve, and Matthew and Morgan, is that this episode is about the bonds that have been strengthened here at the museum. Gwendolyn and Drew have a much longer history and are in different stages in their lives. Featuring them on this episode is less due to their relationship with one another, but rather the other rich relationships they formed while here at the museum.

DREW FIELD

I think we've learned that the people are at least as important as the particular works of art that are in the collection or on tour at any time. And I think we were both happy with the recent change from guards into visitor service representatives, because we found that the customer service people have just not only been helpful and fun and experiencing the Museum, but have become real friends,

GWENDOLYN FIELD

They are real friends. And I have to say that seeing the paintings is, of course, the initial thing that brings you into the Museum. But there's a real family feeling here. And we literally lived in San Francisco near all the art museums and probably went to each of them a couple of times a month. But we're here probably five days a week, not all day, but for an hour here an hour there. Because we are so comfortable with the employees and the docents are really rich in their way of introducing us to things we haven't seen in art we thought we were familiar with. And then there's always the courtyard where you can sit and read books and wait for the next art tour. So it's just it's been a real gift that suggested itself to us caust it's not what we were looking for, but it has really become a centerpiece to our lives.

DREW FIELD

We've been retired for over 10 years now. So I don't find myself trying to find something to do or something to see or somebody to talk to. It fills a really big part of our lives.

JON RICHARDSON

And for Gwendolyn, it isn't just the staff and docents that get her to come back.

GWENDOLYN FIELD

I didn't realize you could have a relationship with a piece of art. For instance, there are a couple of paintings that I literally have a relationship with, and I like to go visit them in on different days I see different things.

JON RICHARDSON

But still, their experience at the Museum always comes back to their ritual of visiting with each other.

DREW FIELD

It would be a very different experience that I don't even try to imagine if we were doing this together. It doesn't mean that we feel the same way about every work of art we see and that's part of the fun, because there isn't any loser or winner and To find that to Gwendolyn is seeing something that I also see or is seeing something that oh my goodness I didn't know was there is really enhancing the whole experience.

JON RICHARDSON

Again, there is no right or wrong way to experience the Portland Art Museum. If you come in with an open mind, you just might form a bond of your own. If you'd like to submit an idea for an episode of this podcast, fill out the form at pam.to/podcastidea. This episode's description contains a link to information about Museum membership. And don't

forget, children 17 and under always get in for free. I'd like to thank Ben Conte for suggesting we explore his idea for this episode, and his daughter Maeve for going along with it. I'd like to thank Matthew Friday for responding to our request on Facebook for participants and to his niece Morgan for exploring this ritual with him and sharing it with us as well. And I'd like to thank Gwendolyn and Drew who you are likely to spot at the Museum as they are here most days. This podcast is produced and edited by me, Jon Richardson, with help from Iuliia Mamina, a work-study student from Portland State University. incidental music is by Marc Orton.

