

by M. Page Jones | photos by M. Page Jones & Sita Magnuson

# drawing THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WHAT WE SAY and what we — MEAN —



**A**licia Bramlett took a passion and found a career. She is what's called a "graphic facilitator." Using surfaces ranging from whiteboard, foam board, butcher paper, flip chart, and even window glass, Alicia's job is to listen, filter, synthesize and draw in real-time the key ideas of speakers in simple and colorful words and pictures.

The groups she draws for might represent one organization, a community, or an industry. "It's all about how I choose to listen and filter in different ways," she explains. "I illustrate graphically what people are saying to make connections between their ideas."

Alicia says that the best reflection of the usefulness of her practice is in a long conversation with people who know each other. A participant will make a statement and another person will point out that it's already on the board. This can prompt a conversation of "what we say" vs. "what we mean," helping people find a common language.

Alicia stumbled across this career in 1996 and began her own a couple of years later. At that time, she knew of only a handful of graphic facilitators in the world.

"IT'S ALL ABOUT HOW I CHOOSE TO LISTEN AND FILTER IN DIFFERENT WAYS. I ILLUSTRATE GRAPHICALLY WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING TO MAKE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEIR IDEAS."

## HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

After film school I went to a workshop to help a friend with a video project. During meetings I noticed that a few people were drawing, and not looking at whoever was speaking. No one seemed to mind.

In grade school, I was constantly told "look at me" "put down your pencil" "pay attention" "stop doodling." With this group it was okay. It was such a relief to

join in. The graphic facilitators looked at my work and said, "You should be up there drawing!"

## DO YOU EVER GET AFRAID STANDING IN FRONT OF LARGE GROUPS OF PEOPLE WATCHING YOUR EVERY MOVE?

Over the years I've learned that being afraid of what I couldn't do is kinda boring. There was no great dragon waiting to eat me if I tried! One thing I can't hide from is misspelling a word! I have problems with spelling certain words and if you misspell it, every eye sees it. Thank god for erasers.

## SPEAKING OF ERASERS. BECAUSE THESE DRAWINGS ARE





ENORMOUS, MOST CAN'T BE TAKEN BACK TO THE OFFICE, IS IT EVER HARD TO SEE YOUR DRAWINGS ERASED?

After hours of drawing on a board, a few times I had to walk away and let someone else do the erasing. It's like watching a sand drawing blowing away in the wind.

NOT EVERYONE CAN LOOK BACK AT THEIR LIFE AND INCLUDE THEIR LIVELIHOOD AS THEIR PASSION. HOW DO YOU THINK YOU GOT SO LUCKY?

I thank serendipity; I could have had any number of jobs where I would be drawing. But this is one that I chose and it chose me.

WHAT IF SOMEONE IS INTERESTED IN BECOMING A GRAPHIC FACILITATOR?

Practice listening, then work on your drawing. We all listen in different ways. Exercise that skill. Then practice, practice, practice drawing simple images and writing legibly.

WHAT ABOUT GOING TO ART SCHOOL FOR THIS?

I don't push spending time and money on art school. Try a Ted Talks video, it's hard but it's a great exercise [or] join an organization like International Forum of Visual Practitioners. If you are even more committed, there are schools that offer training like The Grove Consultants International.

WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF "PASSION"?

My passion is art ... it's something I can't "not do," I have to. I could try not to, but I'd go bonkers. I have that voice inside my head saying why aren't you working on your art? I thank god (whoever she may be!) that I've learned to listen to that voice more. ■