

Angie Whitehurst Part 2 of 2: A Life Resumed

Transcribed by: William Aitken

Angie Whitehurst (Guest): I have an appreciation for the art of the human body. I studied in art in college. I did draw nudes for, what was two years about.

[I Need a Dollar by Aloe Blacc starts playing]

AW: Everyone can draw. The way you write, the way you make an "L", the way you do your "T", that is an art, the way you dot the "I".

[Song continues to play]

Adam Kampe (Host) This is Sounds from the Street, where we get to meet the men and women who define Street Sense, D.C.'s non-profit media center, dedicated to creating economic opportunities for people experiencing homelessness. I'm your host Adam Kampe. Today, we pick up where we left off, in part 2 of a conversation with Angie Whitehurst, talking about art and homelessness. Last time, we learned about Angie's backstory, how her life and career were interrupted by two diseases, cerebral malaria and fibromyalgia, and her deep dedication to her family. Her artistic vision comes through, whether she's taking pictures, acting, or dreaming up ideas for the homeless art bus. Speaking of art, [Clears throat] tomorrow night, October 1st, is the annual Street Sense Gala. Home is where the heart is, at the Josephine Butler park center, on 15th st, NW. Alright, now back to our scheduled programing. Here's Angie Whitehurst.

[Light Piano Music Plays]

AW: I've always loved art. Took my first art class when I was real little. I must have been, maybe six or seven. It was after I had polio. It was at Cartwin School of Art. They had a children's program, and my parents put me in it, and I made a puppet. My mother used to sew, and she had made these Hawaiian muumuus, and it was green, with gold ---- on it, and it had a paper mache head, and it had coat hanger arms and legs. I made the dress for that puppet out of that muumuu. It was basically pasted on. We did other artwork and collages. That had a lasting impact on me. I was hung on art ever since then.

[Soft Guitar Music Plays]

AW: Everyone has creativity, like, I tell them, everyone can dance. When you walk it's a dance. When you go up the steps, that's a movement, that's a dance. Everyone can draw. The way you write, the way you make an "L", the way you do your "T", that is an art, the way you dot the "I". Everyone can sing. It's the way we talk. It's just that some can put it together more melodically than others. I can't sing, but I love singing. And so, all of these things are like strengthening, and building, and healing exorcises, whether we see it that way or not. On the other side, once you put it together, and you see that everyone is creative and everyone has their own rhythm, and movement, and way of creating things that are beautiful, and it's a mechanism to hear our

voices, so that other people hear and say, "Wow!" These are people who are not that unique, because there are thousands of others out there like them. Oh, what are we going to do to help them? And now, before, when people might walk back on the street, or they might know you and say, y'know, "That broad don't have a job." Da Da Da Da Da Da Da... Now, when people see you, and know your story, and they've heard the other stories, they have a sensitivity. They have a compassion. They have less condemnation. Street Sense, through the media center, it makes our presence seen, heard, felt. It educates, and it moves people to do something other than say, "Oh, I read the paper. Oh, I saw that film. Oh...". It's like the "Oh", and the "I know", and the "I saw", is not enough. I must do.

AK: And, you're in the photography class, correct?

AW: Yes, with Sue.

AK: What does photography mean to you?

AW: Photography, to me, is a reflection of my eye and what I see, my perception, my sensitivity, heart, and my soul, because the way I take a picture, if I'm focused on it. I look at it from the sense of what it makes me feel. It's my perception of what something or somebody else is doing. Once that image is out there, if I've done a good job, you will see the sensitivity that I've picked up. And then, on the other hand, you might not see it. You might see the image, and then it becomes yours, because your viewing it through your perspective. And so, from that standpoint, photography is good, because it lets people share. We can all look at the same photograph and see it in our eye in a different way from the next person and the next person and the next person, and what's important in that photograph might be different, but it's also a way to share other people's lives and feelings, and I think it's important in connecting people, because it's permanent. You can always go back to look at it again and revisit it, and each time it's like a movie you love. You'll see something the next time that you didn't see the first time or the time before that, or the time before that. And so, photography is important.

AK: Is there a particular kind of picture that you like to take?

AW: I'm trying to think of what my favorite is. I think what I tended to take, when I had a camera, I tended to take more pictures of sunrises, sunsets, water, trees, forests, not because I love it so much, but because that's what make be serene. If I had to say pictures that I love to take, I think I would take pictures of ballerinas, of dance, of movement, of jazz bands, of musicians, artists. Pictures that I would buy, that I like, I love black and whites. I studied art in college. I did draw nudes, for what... Two years? Just about... I have an appreciation for the art of the human body, but, coming from my family, and being in Washington, that was a little bit avant-garde, for people to understand or to accept, because we live in an, maybe not just Washington D.C, but we live in a world that's very... They like to talk about love and sex, but they don't want to see it, except in the movies or on the soap operas. So, the angles and the drawings, I like those. I find it interesting how people interpret different parts of the body and facial expressions, and that's why I like black on white portraits with shadows and angles,

because it's so interesting. But, that reflects the photographer and not necessarily the person. You have high cheek bones. We can all take a picture of someone with high cheek bones, and it'll look different, because of the angle and how we set it up to take it. And...Let's see....My favorite, favorite, favorite, photographs... Y'know, I would have to saw, maybe the portraits, the faces, because they tell stories.

[Organ music plays]

AK: Switching gears a little bit, and the trailer for the art bus, when that was being launched.

AW: I loved that.

AK: All the different artists that were involved have a little moment where they talk about what they do and their name, and you said, (singing) "My name is Angie. I am an artist. I have a vision." Can you describe. Are you able to share what you vision is, or is that a secret?

AW: My vision for the art bus? Oh no, the art-

AK: I don't know if that meant a vision for the art bus, or if that meant you have a vision.

AW: I have a vision in terms of life in general. My vision is for things to be better. My personal vision is just serenity, peace, paint, to do artistic things like with cameras, arts and crafts, and cooking, and sipping fine wine, and enjoying movies, and going to cricket matches, which is the most boring thing to do in the world, but the best place to meet other people, and having fun in life, playing tag, hide and seek. **[Happy piano music plays]** Just the light, enjoyable things of life, that's fantasy. Although, it would be nice.

AK: Just one big hide and seek game.

AW: Yeah... But, in my vision, this is for a better, more peaceful, calmer, healthier, happier life for myself and everybody else. The art bus, I see as a vision, because I see that it can be so many different things at so many different venues, like, y'know, the way we did it, was our individual statement and vision, and each place we go, it can be different. It can be that we want to go support someone who has a movie out, or someone who is recovering from something, and we could do something with that, or it could be used for poetry readings or for jazz sets. You'd come and sit, bring your blanket out there, in front of the bus, and listen to music.

[Guitar music plays]

AK: What myths about homelessness would you like to dispel?

AW: Homelessness comes in many forms. There are wealthy people who become broke and homeless. There are poor people who already have no money, who become homeless. The lack of shelter, the lack of stability, there's nothing. There is no framework to hold you together. It is as if the ribcage around your heart just blew up and fell apart, and I think that people have this

stereotype that homeless people are dirty and nasty, disease ridden, crooks, prostitutes, pimps, they got there because they deserve to be there, and I think that's something a lot of people still feel. I know from my own experience that many people that knew me, who did not know what I was going through, and I did not tell them, one, because of embarrassment, two, because of my own shock and not knowing what to make of it and what to do, and the rest of it was depression, self-pity. You get to the point where you just really don't care, and you just don't want to talk about it, where the thought of talking about what happened to you makes you very angry. I still get those feelings when other people have been abused, and I'm like "I have to really work on that." But, that whole thing about homelessness... That can happen to you.

[Piano music plays]

There should be housing for everybody, no matter what their state is. I take issue with how we charge for utilities, health insurance, life insurance, gas, electricity, water are considered utilities. Those are life sustaining things and things that are important to maintaining, saving, and perpetuating life, but these are things in our society that are traded on Wall Street. I think that's obscene. They need some type of regulation and curtailment, because everybody should have a place to stay. Thank god they don't charge us for air, but who knows what will happen. But, I think that these are things we can address as a nation, as a people, and certainly, our congress and senate can look at these thing, and the departments that we have. I think that it's ridiculous, y'know?

AK: So, have you announced you candidacy for president of the United States yet?

AW: Oh no, they would shoot me.

AK: 'Cause that's exactly what we need, another candidate. If you had to define your life by a song, which song would you choose?

AW: It's funny that you would ask me that. I was thinking about what I wanted my life to be, that it is not, like I said, the husband, the kids, the dance studio, the swimming pool, all of that stuff. This past weekend, I was thinking about that, and there was a song that I learned when I was a kid, that Doris Day song, (singing) "Que será, será, Whatever will be, will be, The future's not ours to see, Que será, será, What will be, will be". That's what my life is, and I mean, that's not definitive. That's not focused. And, I was saying, "I wonder if it's because I sang that song, that my life is like this." What makes people successful? What makes some people avoid some things and other people not. I tend to think that it's what we were grounded with, what we will accept, what we won't accept, that isn't okay, and sometimes, when we have things that are like the rocks on the path, the rungs on the ladder, the swings on the trees, the Tarzan minds, the Tarzan and Jane minds. Y'know, Tarzan never fell, and he didn't ever let Jane fell, 'cause he always had another mind to grab hold of. I wonder what would happen if I had songs that had more tangibles to grasp hold of.

AK: In a word or a phrase, Street Sense is...

AW: Street Sense is a pendulum with a rock, meaning that the pendulum swings, but it has a rock it catches onto, that anchors it in place. It's a voice, a pendulum, and a rock.

[Dance music plays]

AK: That was part two of a conversation with Angie Whitehurst. Once again, you can meet Angie and other vendor artists tomorrow night, October, 1st, at the Street Sense gala. So please, come on down to experience the art bus, live theater, see films and illustrations made by homeless men and women or formerly homeless men and women, have a drink, maybe two, listen to music, hang out. Did I mention the gala is at the historic Josephine Butler park center at 15th street, NW? The terrace, which will feature a bar and a DJ, overlooking Meridian Hill park, awaits you. Tickets are still available at <https://streetsense.org>. The Sounds from the Street theme song "I need a dollar. How to make it in America." Is performed by Aloe Blacc in the album "Good things", used courtesy of Stones Throw Records. The song was composed by Aloe Blacc, Leon Michels, and Nick Movshon, and Jeff Dynamite. Used by permission of Songs of Cobalt Music Publishing, EMI Blackwood Music Inc/Sony ATV. Excerpt of "Uneven" by Beats Antique, from the album "Electrophone". The following songs used in creative commons, found on FMU's free music archive. Excerpt of, "Opening credits", "In a dream", and "gare du nord" composed and performed by johnny_ripper, from the album, "Songsfor a film that doesn't exist". Excerpt of "Happy times", "clouds", and "Birds", composed and performed by Adam Selzer, from the album "Production Music". Excerpt of, "I can't imagine where I'd be without it." Composed and performed by Chris Zabriskie, from the album, "Thoughtless".

AW: You're listening to Sounds from the Street. (Blows kiss) Street Sense! (Adam laughs in background)

AK: I like that.

AW: We should have a radio show called (Blows kiss) "Street Sense!" And then all the crazies come in every morning.

AK: And then, they blow their kisses.

AW: And when they talk, they gotta go (blows kiss) Street Sense! (They all laugh)