

# Make Your Introduction Unforgettable

Turn your Artist's Profile into a Narrative

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People love stories. If you want to get them to know you and like you (and buy your art), don't give them a business resume, but rather a brief story or two that explain your approach to art. If there are twenty questions on the guide to writing a profile, pick one or two--or at most three--that provide the most interesting stories from your own life.

Take the question, "Where are you from and how does it affect your work?" If nothing springs to mind, don't answer that one! Go on until you find one that makes you instantly think of an anecdote about your own life. On the other hand, suppose this comes immediately to mind:

I was born on a ranch in Montana, and until I went to college I never lived in a town or city. We lived not close to nature, but IN nature. Camping wasn't a special event, but the way our family spent days at a time as we rode with our parents to check on our cattle, who might have wandered up to a hundred miles from the ranch house. Our dogs and horses were not pets, but part of our workforce. That's why in my paintings you see mountains and forests, and wild animals like the puma I once came upon as a twelve-year-old kid. "King of the Mountain" is how I remember seeing him up on that rock, about to pounce on me. Fortunately, our dogs realized what was happening and ran in force to drive him away, so I lived to paint his picture.

Then don't forget to add a full-color picture of your painting, "King of the Mountain"!

Your life was never that exciting? How about the old chestnut, "Where do you find your inspiration?" Perhaps your life is more like this:

In the factory town where I grew up everything was gray, including the air. Instead of Spring Cleaning we did Spring Painting--to cover the stains from the very atmosphere. There were few athletes among my acquaintances, but I saw athletes on television. Baseball, football, basketball--I was glued to the screen. Volleyball, wrestling, hockey--beautiful, healthy, strong people living exciting, colorful lives! Their athletic scholarships were a fantasy to me, but as soon as I was old enough to realize that any scholarship would put me on a campus beside them, I began to study--hard. When it came time to apply, my teachers said, "Apply for an art scholarship!" Endless drawings of basketball players and gymnasts adorned my notebooks, and sometimes my homework, but I had never thought them worth anything. The art teacher helped me create a portfolio, I sent in my applications--and got accepted to four universities. One offered me a full scholarship, which meant I could actually go there! I started doing graphic art for local businesses while I studied, and that led to a lifelong career, a husband, and three kids. But now that I'm retired, I don't have to draw sexy shampoo bottles anymore--and if you look at my paintings today, you will see the inspiration that made it all possible: athletes, athletes, athletes!

That woman's life sounds exciting, doesn't it? But read it again. She never did anything out of the ordinary--even her art career was as a graphic artist in advertising. No mention here of gallery exhibitions or paintings going for millions at auction. No Oscar or Emmy or Tony for scenic design. She has lived about as ordinary a life as is possible for an artist, and she has loved every minute of it! That love shines in her story, and in her paintings. So write about the inspiration you love!

I said one or two, or at most three, right?

So, just one more. Do you have a formal education in art?

No, but boy, do I ever have a formal education! All the way to PhD, with nearly fifty years on the other side of the desk, teaching everything from 7th grade to graduate school. Although I "knew" from failed attempts through the years that I had no talent for drawing or painting, I finally had time after I retired to study all the interesting things I had let pass me by. I found first a book, and then an on-line course, that both insisted that the ability to draw and paint realistically--my original goal, as it probably is for most people--is not a matter of art, but of craft. Find good lessons, and then practice, practice, practice. I followed the instructions in the book, and then the course, and you know what? I improved! No, I was not an artist, but if I looked at myself as a student, the teacher in me said, "If you keep going this way, you are going to get there!" So I became the kind of student I always wanted more of in my classes: I listened, I applied the lessons, and I practiced-practiced-practiced. Then I enrolled in basic drawing courses at Murray State, was not afraid to show how far my skill levels were below those of most incoming freshmen, and I continued to improve. Over the next four years I studied, took the advice of a professor to try pastels, and suddenly found my medium! Within the next year I was winning various honors in local contests, and my work was selling steadily. Although I now call myself an artist, I am still studying and will continue to do so. That is what my life in education has given me: the ability and willingness to learn, which is the one and only way to succeed at anything.

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