



## **“ART SAVED MY LIFE”**

Paul Pearce is a pocket dynamo! You can see from the photo above that he is passionate about educating young people and is fortunate enough to have enjoyed many different passions in his lifetime.

I have known Paul since 1999 when I first arrived at Trinity College North School and became part of the Art Faculty of the College. Paul was teaching on the South School and our paths crossed at faculty and staff meetings fairly regularly.

I have never known Paul not to have a welcoming and warm smile on his face, but in 2014 that smile certainly disappeared for quite a while. Unbelievably, Paul was suddenly afflicted with a stroke. He was young and super-fit and managing the Trinity College Starplex Gym at that time. He was definitely the last person anyone would have expected to fall victim to such a life-changing medical event.

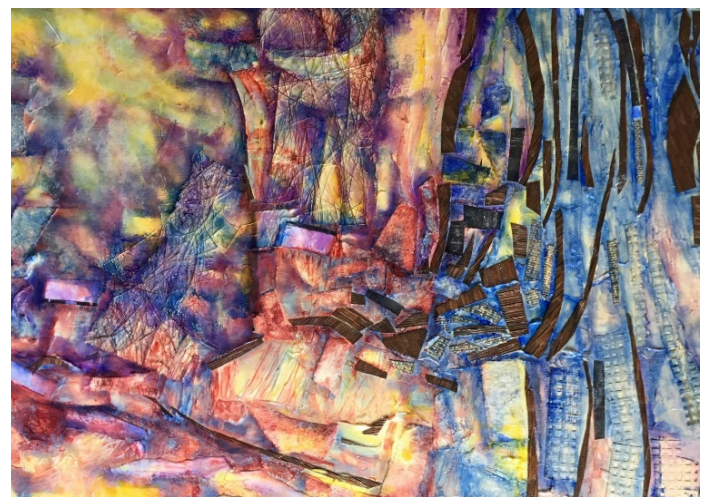
Paul had enjoyed a long and successful career in the classroom (he had previously begun his teaching career elsewhere in 1990) as an accomplished art teacher, but his other great love was body building. So committed and successful was he that in 2005 Paul was named as Mr Australia. His level of fitness was daunting to those of us who do a few casual gym classes and there is no doubt that he was in his prime when he was suddenly caught off guard and suffered a stroke in February 2014.

Paul had successfully transitioned from the classroom to the role of Gym Manager and was much loved in that role also. He was inspiring in the way he helped members to achieve their fitness goals and got the best out of his team of instructors on the gym floor. Suddenly he was unable to do the simplest of tasks and possibly if not for his level of fitness, he might not be here today to tell the story.

Paul now had a lot of time to reflect on his life – he had a beautiful wife and two young boys who were entering that phase of their lives where they were looking to their parents for direction and inspiration. Paul felt shattered and did not know how he was going to claw his way back to full health.

As he lay on his recovery bed, Paul instinctively reached for simple drawing materials and drew what was around him – this happened to be his hand – and this is where his love of art slowly brought him back from the brink.

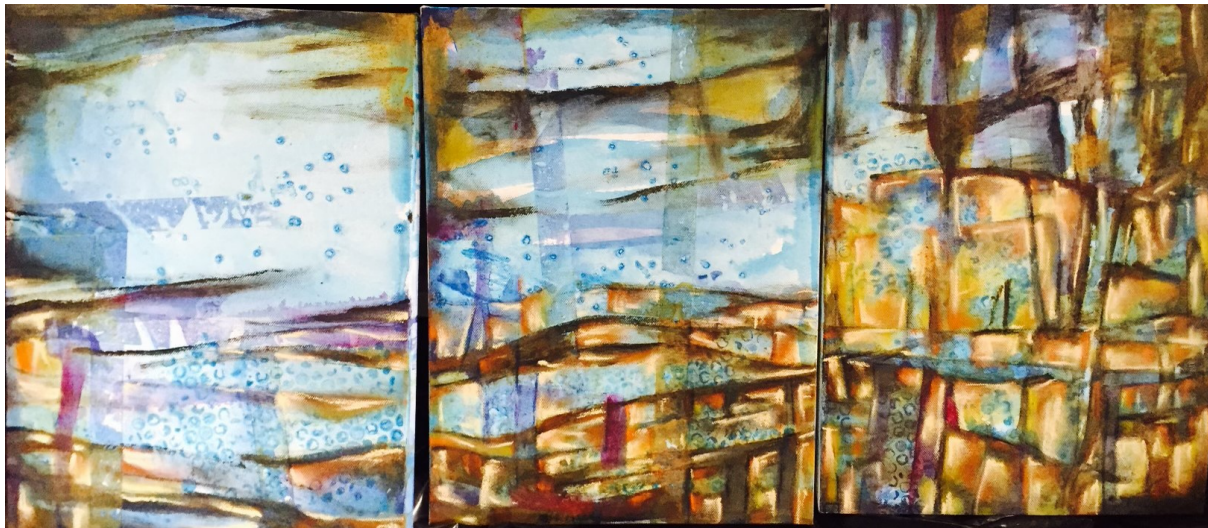
Schooled in the traditional techniques of drawing as the foundation of all art practice, with observational drawing being a key feature of developing artworks, Paul found that “making marks” and doing simple drawings gave him a reason to get going each day and slowly regain control of his physical self. His mental health was also a critical concern at the time. It is not hard to imagine how difficult it would be to face your own mortality at such a young age and in such an unforeseen manner. Creating tangible pieces of work became the source of a sense of achievement once again for Paul and he eventually had his wife set him up with paints and canvases so that he could be as productive as possible and get in touch with his creative spirit once again. Paul understands that his talent is a gift and it should always be used. Painting gives him such joy and his works certainly portray a tremendous sense of life and animation when you view them.



Once Paul developed enough strength, he gave a lot of consideration to his future at Trinity. He realised that he had sorely missed the act of creating art while working in the gym and that teaching young people had also been a love that he had neglected. Thus he met with the Deputy Principal of Trinity and asked to come back to the classroom as an art teacher. How fortunate he is that Trinity is such a large organisation and that the gym is owned by the College – he was able to resign his role at the Starplex gym and resume his teaching practice very smoothly, and thus he re-joined the art faculty at the start of the academic year in 2015.

Paul is someone I would describe as *Mr 150%* and the students at Trinity are the winners from his unshakeable commitment and dedication to his craft of teaching. He has regained that mega-watt smile and it is impossible not to be swept up by his enthusiasm for everything that life offers. He is now the Head of Arts at Trinity and is an excellent role model to the faculty members and students, revealing that he always has artwork on the go. His ideas are influenced by new discoveries and he shares his zest for creativity in all that he does.

Paul readily admits that he is happiest when he is engaging with his artwork, teaching and helping others – it is what makes him truly joyful – and he is the best version of himself when he is being creative. He considers himself extremely lucky as his stroke was the wakeup call he needed to tell him that his life was way out of balance and that he needed to get back on an even keel. He now knows how to recognise if the “cracks” are starting to appear and he will pull back and ensure that he lets some things go if it is all too much.



I personally feel very blessed to have worked alongside Paul for a number of years in Art teaching. One can see from his paintings that his sense of joy shines through on the canvas and lifts one's spirits. I thank Paul for being willing to share the story of his difficult journey and allowing me to write about it for others to appreciate.

Deborah Russell

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