Rose Sellery

The child scrambles up from the floor calling, “Mommy I made this for you!” The mother takes the paper and peers down perplexed, but responds, “Oh, I love it!” Then she asks, “What is it?”

The child begins her rambling explanation of the squiggles marking the paper, “That’s Mommy, that’s Rosey, that’s baby going circus, kanga comes tooo, that’s BooBoo’s doggy, doggy grrrrrs, Mommy says no NO BooBoo’s doggy, BooBoo’s doggy ruf ruf ruf, Mommy and Rosey eat pennie budder samiches, go seep now, wake up Mommy, wake up Daddy, brefest time, Rosey do it, Rosey make brefest…” and on she went.

My parents worked in their studios, ate and read. They read when they came home, they read at the dinner table, they read after dinner and in bed. Stories were a large part of their interaction with my sister and I whether through books or the terrifying stories my father would tell us just before bed. Stories became part of my life. I still tell stories today, though I try not to frighten small children.

As an infant I crawled through the art studios at UCLA while my parents completed their master’s degrees. After school and a brief stint teaching they moved to Venice, CA and set up a their studios. My mother was a jeweler and my father started a ceramic studio. As children, my sister and I were not given toys, and coloring books were absolutely forbidden, but paper, pens and crayons were a staple, as was clay. There was always an abundance of clay.

A visceral memory, that must be one of my earliest, is the flavor and feel of clay in my mouth. The memory is so strong I can nearly taste it to this day. Clay was such a large part of my everyday as a small child – “Daddy’s working. Here’s some clay to play with.” And, I played. Even today, it still feels like play.

These early preschool days shaped the person I’ve become and the pieces I’ve done over the years. Stories, words and phrases ignite the work and the feel of the material, my feeling for the material moves it. My unconventional parents, burdened by children, gave me the gift of creative play and, for that, I am truly grateful.