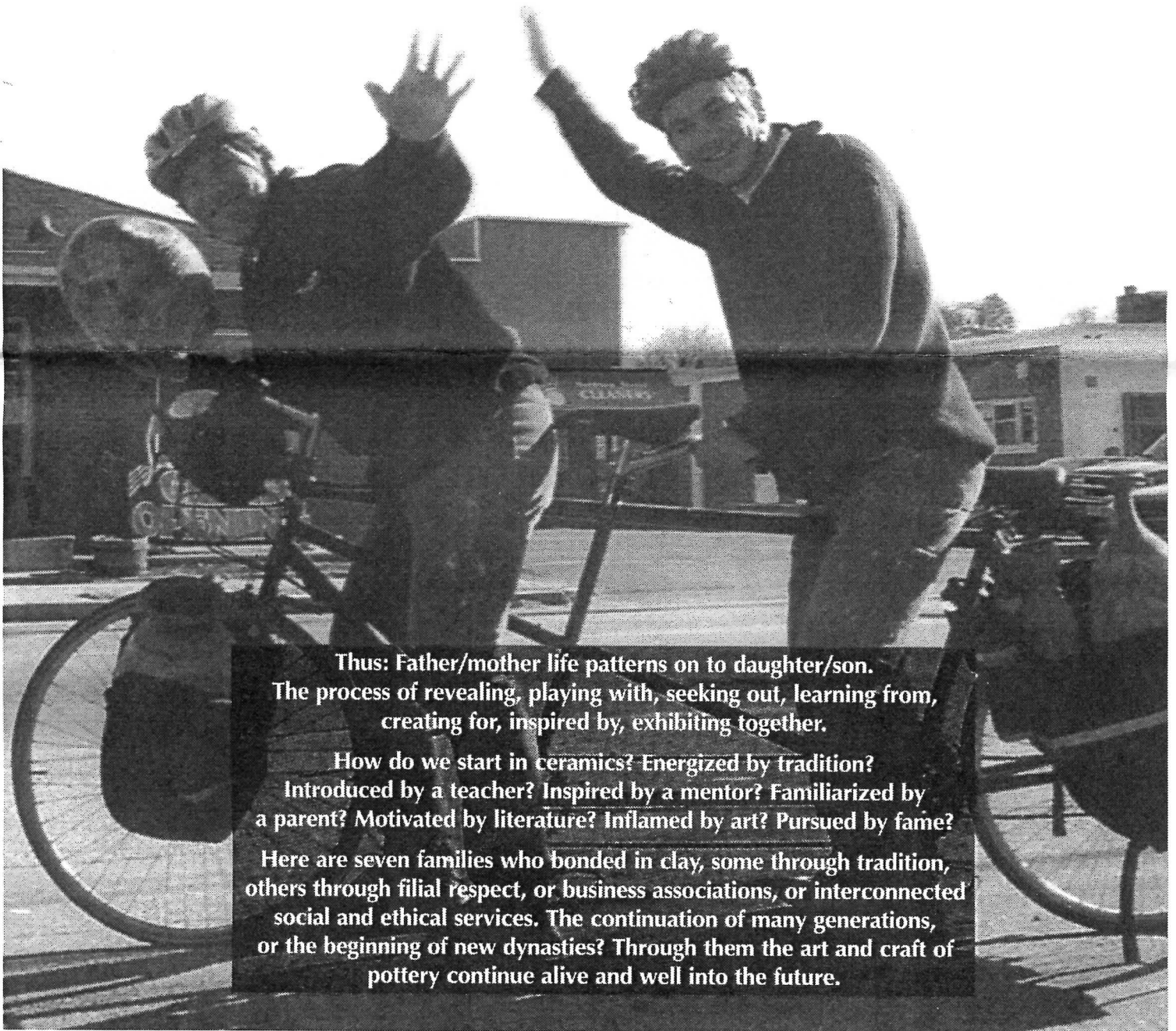


LINEAL:
“A direct line of descent or ancestry.”

IDENTITY:
“A person’s association
with qualities of another person.”



Thus: Father/mother life patterns on to daughter/son.
The process of revealing, playing with, seeking out, learning from,
creating for, inspired by, exhibiting together.

How do we start in ceramics? Energized by tradition?
Introduced by a teacher? Inspired by a mentor? Familiarized by
a parent? Motivated by literature? Inflamed by art? Pursued by fame?

Here are seven families who bonded in clay, some through tradition,
others through filial respect, or business associations, or interconnected
social and ethical services. The continuation of many generations,
or the beginning of new dynasties? Through them the art and craft of
pottery continue alive and well into the future.

Steven Branfman and Jared Branfman

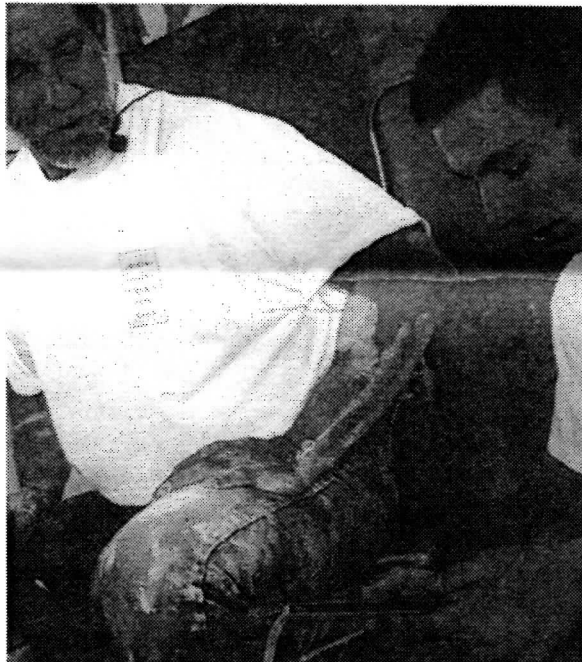
PASSING IT ON

Jared: When I was a child my parents seemed no different than any others. They dropped my brother and me off at school and went to work. They picked us up, helped us with our homework, made us dinner, and sent us off to bed. I went to the studio with my father, watched him make pots, tried to make my own...wait a second! Eventually some differences became clear. No one else's father had a studio, their dads didn't wear blue jeans and a tee-shirt to work! Our walls were covered with shelves filled with things, mostly clay things. The few walls that didn't have shelves were covered with paintings. We ate off of clay plates and bowls, and often my dad would come home, leave again and return hours later covered in dust. Needless to say, I was immersed in art at a very young age.

Steven: Art has always been a part of my life, but I found art as a sixteen-year-old high school senior. It wasn't really art as much as it was simply making things. My teacher was cunning and manipulative. She didn't burden us with terms, dates, or labels. She just encouraged us to use materials, make stuff, and have fun. It worked. There was never a conscious decision to do art or to become an artist. It's not the kind of activity one decided to do. It's more like something that gets done because it has to. I knew that working with art was important, but not until I discovered clay and pots in college did I become truly invested in the creation of objects and the aesthetic and intellectual basis for these objects.

Jared: My first clay memories are of accompanying my

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father to his studio and watching him work. At four or five, I started classes in his studio, though he wasn't my teacher. I made pinch pots, castles, used the extruder to make huge (6"-8" tall) vases. I even made tiny wheel-thrown bowls. My interest in pottery waned as my involvement in sports grew, and I spent less and less time going to the studio with my father. By the time I entered middle school at Thayer Academy, where my dad taught, athletics were really the only thing on my mind. This is not to say that we spent less time together. He was one of my first soccer coaches. Often we went on bike rides as a family. And both of my parents came to all my games. By my senior year, I was captain of both the wrestling and track teams.

Steven: How does one find his role in life? My mother was a music graduate of the Julliard School who played piano and did occasional pencil drawings. Her grandfather, a Russian immigrant who lived with us when I was a child, was a tailor of fine clothing. My great uncle, also from

Russia and with whom I was very close, painted landscapes while he made his living as a house painter. Is it in the genes? It is environmental? Perhaps it is simply random? I never recognized these family members as artistic role models. They never talked about art or being artists. I never visited a studio. No one ever told me that you could have a career as an artist. We did go to concerts. I did take piano lessons. There was art hanging on our walls. But I was interested in athletics: star captain of my high school track team and on my way to one of the best physical education programs in the country for college.

Whatever...somehow, the recipe of events, images, words, and sounds came together. The art that was there, that I observed, lived with and was passed on.

My children have grown up having a potter as their father. Who knows whether this has influenced their own interests, but both are pursuing creative studies. I never influenced my children to be artists, consciously anyway. I never forced them to look at work, to have dinner at the studio while I fired a kiln or to do any other obvious thing that might lead them to an interest in the arts. Wake up! Who are you kidding?

Jared: My father taught ceramics at Thayer. Having my father as a teacher seemed like a cool thing, so for fun I took his class. Little did I realize what this casual reintroduction to clay would become. I was drawn to the studio, consistently late for whichever class followed. To finish projects I used free periods, lunch, time before sports, whatever I could carve out of the day. My father was by far the strongest influence I had at this beginning stage of potting. His throwing style and technique were and still are very specific to the work he makes, and it wasn't long before most of the pots I made were smaller, heavier replicas of his.

As I began to speculate about colleges, it dawned on me that my father studied clay in college. This seemed a fantastic idea, and one evening over dinner I announced that I wanted to go to art school. My parents were shocked, as neither saw this coming. My dad seemed pleasantly surprised, while my mother was more worried than anything else. She eventually came around.

Steven: *Ellen and I have always shared things with our children: our love of culture, participation in and appreciation of sports,*

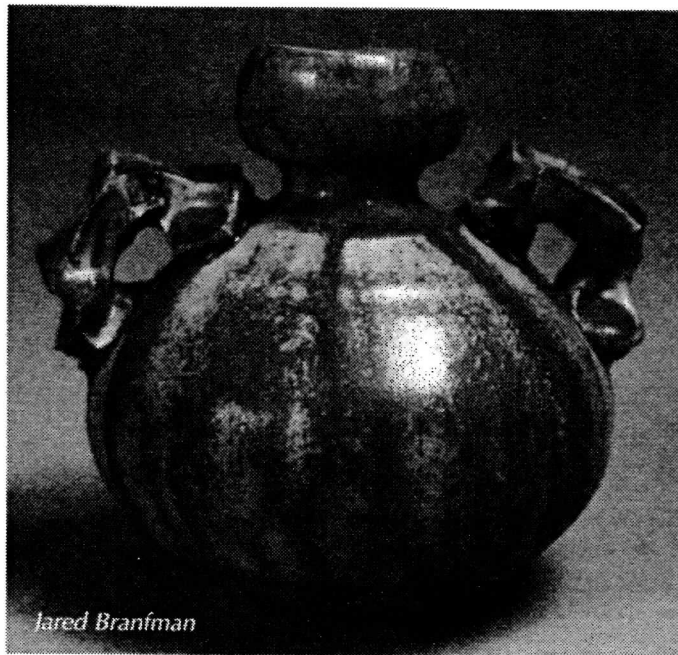


Steve Branfman

games, and, of course, art. Travel has always been an especially important part of our lives. In fact, when a young friend once asked, "What do you do with the kids when you go on vacation?" she became quite embarrassed when I looked at Ellen, and we both looked at Jared and Adam, and I replied, "We always travel as a family." But when a parent and child can claim a common passion, one that has the potential for competition but instead develops as mutual admiration, support and encouragement, then you have come upon something very special and very rare indeed. How do these things develop? Serendipity, randomness, coincidence? Or calculated, conscious, and deliberate premeditation? Either way, the outcome is never certain.

One day early in his Junior year at Thayer Academy, having had virtually no conversations with us about college, Jared announced at the dinner table that he wanted to go to art school. An uneasy quiet filled the air as I thought: "Ummmm...how about that! How wonderful that he

knows (or at least thinks he knows) what his next step will be." I smiled an approving grin at him, and just as I turned to Ellen, she blurted out: "Art school! How will you make a living?" After a moment of silence, all four of us exchanged glances and we broke out into uncontrollable laughter. How ironic that my wife of twenty-five years, the wife of a successful artist, would have that as a first reaction. No matter, with our love and support Jared is following his dream and has found his passion.



Jared Branfman

Jared: I spent my first two years at Alfred University try-

ing to balance inter-collegiate sports with my time in the studio. It was a compromise that simply wasn't going to work. I discussed this with my father many times as he was just as much a supporter of my athletic dreams of my artistic dreams. He eventually helped me realize that if I was going to achieve what I wanted in the studio I would have to pursue athletics on my own terms.

Though I continue to be enamored with, and influenced by my father's work, I feel as if I have turned a corner in my own direction. The biggest influences upon my work now come from the Japanese folk pottery traditions of Tamba, Iga, and Bizen. Though most of my time is spent away at school, working quite separately from my dad, we talk often. I assist him at as many of his workshops as I can get to. As an art student I've realized what a key role my father's studio has played in my growth and development. For one thing, it's allowed me to work during my vacations and summer breaks in the company of my father and his assistants. For this I feel very fortunate.

Two years ago I proposed to my father that we have a show together during my senior year at Alfred University as I was preparing to graduate. Our pots would meet only as we installed the show. Instead, I've spent this past year at home on a medical leave of absence. We were forced to work closer together than we have since I was his student at Thayer. The exhibition, *Father-Son, Student-Teacher*, happened this past January, and much of my work was made here, with my father, in his studio. Being presented with different materials, equipment, and environment made me adapt, but I was also able to adapt the studio where it was most important. I built two small gas kilns in order to satisfy my need for reduction and salt firing, and I was able to get materials that my father didn't previously have available.

Steven: *Last January, Jared and I had an exhibition together. The show was to be a sort of celebration of Jared's impending graduation from The New York State College of Ceramics. He was going to present the work he was making in his studio in Alfred in preparation for his final critiques and ultimate senior show, and I was going to exhibit new work made in my studio. The work naturally would have been produced independently from each other and come together only as we assembled and installed the exhibition. As is often the case, however, life gets in the way and uncontrollable circumstances made for a very different scenario. Jared found himself on a medical leave from school and after a few months of physical therapy and rehab started producing work in my studio, a studio with different materials, kilns, equipment, environment and atmosphere. We worked side by side, interacting, observing, critiquing, observing, suggesting and asserting. Cohabitation is not always graceful and tranquil. We glazed and fired together. He assisted me*

and I him, ultimately driving each other toward destinations that we might not have discovered on our own. Just as the show was closing, Jared's medical condition took a turn for the worse. His leave from school continues and will do so through the next year. What also continues is the strengthening of the creative bond between us as we talk, see, argue, teach, and learn.

There are other children who have followed their parents' path to clay. I would guess that there are many more who haven't. Is it consequential when a career, a lifestyle, a passion is passed on? When it happens does it mean that the parent and child are closer? More in tune? More likely to be friends? To respect each other's work? Each other's lives?

Jared: *Though now our pots are quite different, the give and take relationship that I look for with my clay quickly became apparent in our relationship in the studio. We help each other in the work, we assist in each other's firings, and talk with each other about our work more than has ever been possible. This past year has been a turning point for me in many ways, and I know that when I do return to Alfred I will continue to be affected by it. For both of us our work has changed. But more importantly for me, the way I think about my work has changed. I believe the same is true for my father, and this has helped us both.*

Steven: *Perhaps the similarities in our individuality and work are clear and unequivocal, or perhaps they are concealed and unobservable. Either way, there is an undeniable link between us that is part blood and part aesthetic, part familial and part creative. We all bear a legacy. What is mine to be? Pots, teaching, writing or the quiet satisfaction of knowing that a vein of clay can flow from father to son as it does through the geology of time. Whatever I may have passed on has rooted, anchored, taken hold. Whatever it is that we share has been strengthened. Jared is just beginning his journey, and his path has already been diverted. Mine is thirty years old, and it, too, has changed course. I know that we are both the better for it.*