

CREATIVITY PORTAL

An Interview with Artist/Actress Angela Cartwright

By Chris Dunmire



I was watching a recent airing of the biography show "Lost in Space Forever" (1998), I finally connected Will Robinson (Billy Mumy) with that creepy all-powerful kid who controlled an entire town in a nightmarish episode of "Twilight Zone." "Oh, that's who he is!" I cringed with shivery thoughts of not being a good thing and wished away 'to the cornfield'.

I'm always intrigued by 'Where are they now?' shows, especially when child stars are profiled in before-and-after segments. We viewers finally get the inside scoop on where the kids we watched growing up on television ended up in life.

Sometimes it's on to another show, 'When Child Stars Go Bad', but most kids grow up just like the rest of us do with similar challenges and rewards – they go to school, get married, have children, nurture careers, and pursue that thing called happiness. For some, this means staying connected to show business; for others, leaving it behind.

Angela Cartwright, the dark-haired girl who played Penny Robinson on "Lost in Space" (the alien-monkey pet-toting teen) is definitely one child star who hasn't gone bad. When I learned this "Make Room for Daddy" and "Sound of Music" star has grown up to raise a family and successfully carve out a life as an artist along with her acting career, I went straight to the Internet to learn more.

Wikipedia gave me a detailed biography and filmography about Angela with links to her various art-related sites and online studio. When I visited her blog 'Said & Done – in the shadows of an unruly artist', I was thrilled to see that she was chronicling her creative journey online like so many other artists. Not only that, I learned that Angela is into altered art and photography, writes articles and books, sells art on Etsy, and creates rubber stamps sold by Stampington & Company. Wow!

Curious, I contacted Angela to see if she'd let me interview her for our Creative Careers in the Arts series. Knowing how busy actress/artists can be and all, I thought it might be a long shot, but was willing to risk the rejection. A week went by, then two, then three, and finally a month later I received an affirming response that took my breath away: "I'd be happy to."

After picking myself up off the floor (my first celebrity interview), I spent the next week percolating on possible questions I'd ask someone who's traveled to outer space. When I finally got over my star-struck "so what's it like living down here on earth with ordinary people" questions, the following Q & A manifested between us and a flood of TV show pictures and art images zinged into my inbox. See Angela up there in her spacesuit next to cornfield boy?

Thank you, Angela, for sharing your personal experiences, creative perspective, and beautiful artistic images with our creative community. Your insights and advice are affirming to all artists and will hopefully encourage anyone who may be 'lost in creative space' to begin a new exploration. Bloop.

Angela Cartwright Interview (March 2009)

Q: Your blog, *Said and Done: In the Shadows of An Unruly Artist*, is an online journal of your artistic journey. How has this artistic part of your life evolved against the backdrop of your acting career?

Angela: Photography has been a passion of mine since I was 15. After my kids were born I found myself incorporating my photography into different art endeavors and from there it just blossomed. I have always had to have an outlet for my creativity and when my life became more about raising my family than the bright lights of show business exploring my photo art was a great outlet for me. My shadow in my art is one way I trace who I was and where I have been. My shadow and I have been on a journey for quite a while now!

Q: What perspective do you have now on your early acting days, especially as a child actor in "Make Room for Daddy" and "Lost in Space"? Do you miss being in the spotlight?

Angela: I was never one to seek out the spotlight. I am kind of a private person, so I don't miss that part of show business at all. Looking back on my career in television and making a movie like "The Sound of Music" from an adult point of view, it actually seems kind of unreal. I was involved in shows that people grew up with – that hold memories for them – and it's a cool feeling.

Q: What do you want people to remember the most about you as an actress? As an artist? As the person Angela Cartwright?

Angela: I hope they'll remember a character I played that touched people's lives in a positive way. I hope that through my work, artists will take some chances,

break some rules, and make art that comes from inside of them. I would like to be remembered as a kind person, a great Mom, and a bit unruly – in a good way!

Q: What is one 'reality check' piece of advice you'd like to offer to parents of aspiring child actors?

Angela: Rejection is a big part of show business. It can be tough on anyone who doesn't have fairly good self-esteem. Especially kids, as they try to discover who they are. When I was a young kid, I thought everyone my age went to work everyday and was on television (I started when I was 3). As I got older, I never considered that tons of people were watching me on television every week. I give a nod to my parents for keeping me as normal as I could be in an un-normal adult world. My parents kept me in check. I had to make my bed, set the table, and do my chores every day but those things were balanced with getting to laugh and be a kid, too.

Q: What gifts have come into your life from being an 'unruly artist'?

Angela: It frees me up. Being unruly in my art means there are no rules I have to follow. Out of that I feel a real freedom and it means I have no fear holding me back. That's half the battle sometimes. Fear can be paralyzing to ones advance in anything they do. So the gift? Having no fear.

Q: You're very much into altered art and photography and have authored the book "Mixed Emulsions: Altered Art Techniques for Photographic Imagery." What is it about these particular mediums that draw you in and keep you creatively engaged?

Angela: The possibilities are endless and I am constantly reaching for how photographs can be interwoven with paint and mediums. Each time you play with gesso, paints or molding pastes it comes out differently. Writing my book "Mixed Emulsions" solidified what my art is about. It made me write down some of my techniques and the products I use and the different ways you can color and alter your hand painted photographs. I was totally consumed over the months I was writing my book. There's a big part of me on every page.

Q: Describe your creative process when approaching a new project.

Angela: There are no hard rules. If you learn and read about different techniques they can open up a whole world to your art. I try to soak up as much information as I can and then put my own spin on it. I just experiment and don't believe there is only one way to do something. I have learned not to judge my art play...sometimes it sucks...but out of that 'playing' something cool happens if you let it. So I have no rules about my creative process...I just go with the muse whenever that happens.

Q: You share so much with your fans and fellow artists through your Web site, blog, and online shops selling your artistic creations. What made you embrace the Internet early on and how would you'd like to see its potential harnessed for the greater good?

Angela: I have a geek side. I started learning by hit and miss how to make websites over 10 years ago. I had so many pictures from my past and the art I was creating that I wanted to catalog everything and share it. What better way than through a website. My kids were in their teens and they had just naturally picked the computer up, so I taught myself the computer so I could stay up with the times. But I found I really loved it and all kinds of possibilities with my art started brewing. I loved the design aspect of it all. For awhile my son was my go-to guy but now I have my web tech wiz brother to help me with the technical part. My art website www.acartwrightstudio.com was fun to create and I am able to keep it current because I'm the one that manages it. Now I am rebuilding my show biz website from the inside out...One day you will go there and it will be completely new. If only there were 24 waking hours in a day...it would be done by now.

Q: How has creative collaboration and community online enhanced your artistic life? Is regular participation in this real-time medium important to your creative well being?

Angela: It keeps me on my toes. I'm always looking for blogworthy stuff to shoot when I am out and about. My blog deals with everyday life. Sometimes my toes are dipping into my show biz half...other times my current art or gardening.

Q: What are you working on now? What's coming up for you?

Angela: I have a new book coming out April 1st. It's called "In This Garden.Explorations in Mixed Media Visual Narrative." It's the second book I have collaborated on with artist Sarah Fishburn. Our first book "In This House – A Collection of Altered Art Imagery & Collage Techniques" had 12 artists interpret 'home' in their artistic way. The results were amazing. Each artist embraced the word 'home' from their own perspective. So we followed it up with 12 artists interpreting the simple act of 'gardening' and we were not disappointed. Each chapter focuses on a particular book/lantern garden, and includes brilliant photographs. It's also filled with tips and techniques for artists and avid gardeners. When you start a project like this it is always a journey and you can learn so much about yourself.

As well as the books we have written, Sarah and I collaborate on a magazine called Pasticcio Quartz three times a year. The word 'Quartz' actually stands for Quality Art Zine, because it is a self published magazine packed full of beautiful art from well known to up and coming artists, tips, techniques, ideas, and more. We have a blast putting it together from start to finish and it usually takes us

about three months to produce each issue. It keeps us current and artistically involved. I enjoy collaborating with Sarah on each issue. We both have our own style but we compliment each other well as we both contribute our thoughts and findings to each issue. I love doing the layouts and putting it all together. We have just released our 6th issue of Pasticcio which can be ordered at our Lulu store.

Stampington & Company just released a new line of rubber stamps I created from my shadow photographs called "Unruly Shadow Stamps." They can be used in a multitude of ways in ones art. They are my second collection, the "Unruly Girls Club Stamps" were released last year and made from my quirky girl sketches (see them here).

I also have a new exhibit of my mixed media altered photo art in the near future, and look for something really exciting happening at my newest enterprise www.acstudio9.com. I just like to keep busy and as long as it taps into my artistic side...I'm happy. •