

The logo for 'Gentle Finds' is written in a serif font, with 'Gentle' in a reddish-orange color and 'Finds' in a darker, muted red color.[About](#)[Episodes](#)[Contact](#)[Donate](#)The background of the page is a landscape photograph. It features a range of rugged, grey mountains in the distance under a cloudy, overcast sky. In the middle ground, there is a large, calm lake with a vibrant turquoise or teal color. The foreground consists of rolling hills with dry, yellowish-brown grass and some dark green shrubs.

## Transcript: Your Life is A Collage with Stephanie Pierson

### **Stephanie Pierson** 0:01

I just had this great epiphany that I was a collage that I had been cut up, glued back together in a new way and that I was a changed person and that I had become my art. That was a very healing thought, because there's a feeling of being damaged and being sick being scarred, which are all really negative thoughts. But when I thought of it in terms of just being reassembled like a

collage, to take one beautiful picture and turn it into a different beautiful picture in just a transformative kind of way, was really healing to think about myself that way.

**Lindsay Scott** 0:41

Welcome to the Gentle Finds podcast. Today is a special episode because I'm interviewing someone who I've known my entire life. She was literally at my birth, and she's just one of my Aunties. Her name is Stephanie Pierson, and she's got an amazing life story that I wanted to share with you because I think that it can help so many people. Stephanie. Hi, thank you for joining me.

**Stephanie Pierson** 1:07

Thank you for inviting me. This is so fun. I'm so proud of you.

**Lindsay Scott** 1:11

Oh, thank you. I'm so happy to have you and who knew that your life would turn into what it has? Did you ever know that you would become an artist?

**Stephanie Pierson** 1:23

No, no, I didn't. I mean, I always liked art as a child as children do. That was really fun and arts and crafts, and I have been a great appreciator of art and going to museums and galleries and being a viewer and a patron. But I never thought I'd actually become a working artist showing and selling my work. That's a fun late in life surprise.

**Lindsay Scott** 1:50

Yeah. So originally, you were basically working at a school married, the love of your life had two children and you were living just what you know, an ideal kind of life, your street, I won't give the location away. But in, in the group of friends, it was kind of where everybody wanted to live where Stephanie lived, people even bought houses to live next to you.

**Stephanie Pierson 2:16**

It's a nice little tree lined, dead end street and dead end streets really lend themselves towards good neighbor relations and everybody hanging out in the street. You know, without the cars in the way, it just is a really easy place to commune and live and play and be a community together.

**Lindsay Scott 2:33**

So yeah, you really were living the great life. I mean, with all of its ups and downs with great neighbors across the street and the tire swing from your tree and just the parties at your house. It was just a wonderful sense of community that you created. And then your life took turns that unveiled this new side of you. Right? At what point do you think that you knew that art was the path?

**Stephanie Pierson 2:59**

I'd say just three or four years ago that that emerged. As with all things in life, when you look back with perspective, you see how it was all being set up? Or how while unfolding that you didn't realize it was unfolding when it was you look back on it? Through a lot of tragedy that, you know, I found this passion and this vision with this art. And it's been very healing.

**Lindsay Scott 3:27**

Your house is this kind of quaint little house at the end of the cul de sac, you had a hot tub and a garden and a little garage. And you now have an art studio back there in the garage.

**Stephanie Pierson 3:40**

The garage ended up getting renovated to be a family room because our house was small. We needed a place for the overflow and for the kids. And so it was it was the boys hanging out. It was the band practice area. It was video game headquarters. It was my husband's computer office for a while. Yeah, and it never ever occurred to me it was going to be my art studio.

**Lindsay Scott** 4:08

What was the moment of your life where you would say that there was a new chapter that opened. Like you were living that chapter for a long time and everything was stable.

**Stephanie Pierson** 4:18

It was. It was really stable as much as life can be stable, but it was yeah, stable and I'd been married for 35 years and my kids were growing up. My youngest son, our youngest son was in finishing college. And Greg and I were looking forward to our empty nest and our future and retiring and traveling and all those things that you look forward to when you're done raising your kids and working your work and we went on vacation. It was the day after Christmas and he so generously invited me to spend a week at the beach and we'd never done anything like that before and off we went. And after a beautiful day of riding bikes at the beach and having lunch and having a wonderful, beautiful day, he had a heart attack in our hotel room. And died there. And it was very shocking. It was it was utterly traumatic. And my whole world just fell out from under my feet. I was away from home, I was away, I was in a strange place, I was away from all my familiars from my people from my children. And it just, it just was an incredibly incredibly traumatic, horrible event, it put me into a very, very dark place a dark hole of grief that just kept getting deeper and deeper. And, and that went on for a while. And then in conjunction with that, previously to that, 10 years before that I had been diagnosed with breast cancer. And I had gone through a lumpectomy and radiation treatment for breast cancer that was very traumatic, I might have to go back and say, If I'm really going to look at this, like when did something shift? That probably was the beginning of a shift.

**Lindsay Scott** 6:20

Yeah. But you had Greg through that.

**Stephanie Pierson** 6:23

I did. And, and so I healed and I went on, though I, you know, that changed me and cracked me open a little bit. And then so now we're 10 years later, and Greg dies while we're on vacation,

and I'm home and I'm, you know, helping my son get through his last year of college, and I'm going to my job that I didn't, you know, I didn't feel like doing any of that. But anyway, I got back into the task of living in and taking care of myself and my family. Yeah, grieving a lot. And after a few long, dark years, when I just started feeling like, Okay, I need to get back to living, I need to start peeking out from this grief blanket and find out what's new for me in my life. Literally, I would say the next day, my doctor called to tell me that something showed up on my mammogram, and I needed to go have some further testing, which I did, and subsequently get diagnosed with breast cancer for a second time. And at the time, I felt it was the breast that was over my heart, this time, the other breast and at the time, I told my doctor, I know, it's my grief. And I felt like I dealt with my emotional grief. But now I had to deal with my physical grief. And so another series of treatments, another lumpectomy, this time, I had to have chemotherapy, along with radiation, which was a long, year long, grueling experience that really, I really would have been okay, if I died then because it was really hard. And I felt like why am I still living anyway, I've lost my love. And I've had a good life. And I have no regrets. And I'm okay with dying. But luckily, that didn't happen. And I climbed, climbed my way through that, and I was coming. Now I'm coming out of that going, Okay, seriously, really, I need to get back to, to living and making sense of my new life and what has always taught me and and so it was the end of that year, it was New Year's news, as always, you know, that time to sort of start a new journey, dust out the old stuff. And so I'm like, Okay, that's it. Now I'm healthy again. I'm ready. I'm gonna get back into the world. And I went out one evening and ran into a friend and she was on her way to a party, and I invited myself along to crash the party, a dis was feeling like I need to get out and I wasn't invited. But I said, Could I come with you? And she said, Sure, why not. So I went to this small little cocktail party, and very unexpectedly, and with a fun twist of fate, I met a really lovely man there, we struck up a conversation that lasted for hours, and he was divorced. And he had just been through cancer treatment. And we have that in common and we shared our stories and and there was just a lot of chemistry between us. And we subsequently started a relationship that surprised us both incredibly surprised us, both in our later years, and to you know, have lost our marriages in different ways. And he was an artist. So then I got really immersed in the art world. He did art every day. We were constantly at galleries and museums and art openings and hanging around with other artists and art became this really

central focus in our lives that we shared and it was delightful. It was really, really, really fun. And his art was fabulous. And then he started nudging me about doing art, and saying, I really thought that there was something I needed to express and that there was some art in me that needed to be released. And I was very resistant. I'm like, no, no, no, I don't.

**Lindsay Scott** 10:23

Yeah, this is your thing. Yeah, this is not mine.

**Stephanie Pierson** 10:26

Yeah. And but he was really good at just nudging and encouraging. And so I had just recently received a big stack of magazines that someone was giving away. Um, I love magazines. I just love the glossy paper. I love the pictures. What do you do with magazines are so beautiful, and then you look at them, and then what then they sit there and collect dust. And that's why this person gave me their magazines. And I said, Okay, I think I'll try some collage. I like cut and paste. I love paper. And so I started playing around and cutting out paper. And I had no idea what I was trying to what images I was going to come up with. And I started playing around. And I started gluing on different things with different kinds of glues. And I spent a lot of money and ruined a lot of things and made a big mess and got very frustrated. And I kept saying this is your thing, not my thing. This is fine. And I have six bottles of glue. They're all stupid. And I love this, this beautiful thing I cut out of the magazine. Now I just ruined it, I have to throw it away. And he just kept encouraging and nudging and saying you're just doing your research, you're just learning. So I kept going under his, you know, his mentoring and his loving enthusiasm. And then I don't know, but there was a day when I glued a few things together. And it was fabulous. And there was this aha moment of like, oh my god, this looks pretty cool. That was really fun. And he was so excited. And then a friend came over and she was so excited about it. Like what are you doing? I can't believe you're doing this. And she had a friend who ran an art gallery downtown. And so after I made a few pieces, she said, let me take them to the art gallery and get this woman's opinion. So which was really nice of her to do. And so she took some of my work and she went away and she came back and said she'll take three in the next show. So, um, I was blown away. But so I had my first chance just right at first the first place we

go and they're like, yes, and so I had so my collage is in this lovely gallery downtown and actually sold one of them, which completely amazing. And then more and then the art gallery gave me another opportunity to put some art in it a show. A cute story when I was there: the woman, the gallery manager asked me if I - my pieces are tend to be women, I call my paper dolls. She asked me if I did any images with animals. And I said, "No, I don't. I just just pretty much women" and she said, "Oh, too bad because our next show is going to be Animalia with an animal theme. And if you did animals, you could be in the show." And I'm like, "uh, yeah, I do animals. I just, Oh, yeah. Yes." So I went home, and it was like, "Oh, my God, animals like, okay, that's like new to me." And so then I just turned my animals into women, and did some animals and they were in the show and sold some more collages. So subsequently, I've had, I've had my pieces and many art shows, I've, you know, I've been declined a lot. So I've had to learn to be, you know, a little flirty about rejection. But I've also had a lot of opportunities and a really nice reception and a lot of places and it's fun this year. And people's comments are what people see when they see my work, Tommy and I had the wonderful opportunity of being in many art galleries together for shows in group shows where both of our works were accepted. And that was so fun. Some romantic, romantic and he was so proud and encouraging and, and my biggest cheerleader, and that was a really and then all of a sudden I was like what am I doing this new man in my life and now I'm in an art show with him and it's like, what is this life I'm living and then his cancer unfortunately came back it came out of our mission and after quite a few hospitalizations and failed treatments, he passed away. And there was grief again, there was the dark grief hole and you know, we had time to prepare or worried didn't have time with my husband to prepare for such thing. And it was very sudden and shocking. And because both of us had been through cancer, we understood how fragile life is and temporarily and that we both felt like we were, you know, many people don't survive that and that we were gifted with more time. And when we started our relationship together, we we talked about that, and we knew that we didn't know how much time we had together, we were just going to squeeze every bit of joy and love out of it, which we did. You know, it was a brief five year relationship, but it was a lifetime, as well. And we traveled and shared art and, and everything. And so I had time to prepare for the loss, but nothing really prepares you for for that, you know, you think, okay, I can, I'm ready, I can handle this. We made our peace, we had our goodbyes, he was suffering a

lot. It was I wanted him to not be in pain and sick anymore. But you could just never really prepare for that. And so, you know, I was incredibly crushed and sad. And then just two weeks after he passed, I got a call from my doctor again saying something look funny in my mammogram, no, I needed to have more tests,

**Lindsay Scott** 16:24

Oh my God

**Stephanie Pierson** 16:25

and breast cancer had come back again. And

**Lindsay Scott** 16:29

that's too much.

**Stephanie Pierson** 16:30

It was too much. What was curious about it is the three times I had breast cancer, they were three different entirely different types of cancer. They want recurrences. And so because of the history because of the previous radiations that I couldn't have, again, mastectomy was really my only treatment option.

**Lindsay Scott** 16:53

And this time, it must have been very scary, because it must have hit differently, because you had just a few days ago witnessed the worst case scenario.

**Stephanie Pierson** 17:03

Yeah, yeah. So it was and it was COVID stuff. Now I'm going in a hospital. It was it was just I don't know, I just having an out of body experience, I guess. Totally traumatic. And it was very bizarre. And I just was shattered. And I had to kind of I had to put the grief away a little bit so I could take care of myself. It's like, okay, yes, that happened. And there's all this Tommy has two



lovely daughters and all the other people who loved and cared for him and his sister who was in Scotland and couldn't come to be with him because of COVID and so many people who are suffering, but it was like, Well, I have to kind of put that away and then I just has to be about me right now because I had to get through that and be strong for myself. So I had the surgery, I had a double mastectomy. And then there was you know, back to that physical healing. There was lots of healing to be done and and that went on for quite a while. I'd say for six months, I felt really shut off shut down disconnected from joy and are like

**Lindsay Scott** 18:11

how could good come back? You had already gotten your window of good and then that was taken away.

**Stephanie Pierson** 18:17

But I also felt I mean, I just did not feel any creativity or any any ability to just feel anything really

**Lindsay Scott** 18:26

Part of that I wonder if it's because Tommy was gone it was like it was your thing with him. I wonder if it was you had to discover it by yourself.

**Stephanie Pierson** 18:34

And you know, if he hadn't been there, I could just hear him saying, "Come on, come on, let's do this, you know, get to stuff, I'll get my paint brushes." And it's like, I don't want to do this without you. I mean, everything we shared was gone. And then here we come now so that was in the fall. So now we're coming into the end of the year now we're coming to New Year's again and that time when it's time to you know, kind of look at what you want to toss away and look at what you want to manifest in your life and a new start and I thought okay, really I've reinvented myself once I can reinvent myself again. I mean, what's my choice it's like I need to live and and this is a curious journey I'm on that really I couldn't have predicted and so I told myself that when the year came that I was going to go sit at my table in my art studio and I was

going to force myself I was going to pray for inspiration and force myself to just start doing something even though I didn't feel like it really excruciating. And the thing I did the most was just cut magazines app that was easy it just that was more mechanical but that got me started and just touching the paper again using the scissors again looking at images thinking of color and shape and form and stuff and and I was really praying to Tommy and asking for inspiration. And I thought it's really in his honor I need to do this if I let it die now that just seems really tragic.

**Lindsay Scott** 20:02

Yeah, because he was the one who inspired it. And to begin with, it was important to him to see this in you.

**Stephanie Pierson** 20:08

And yeah, and one of his friends sent me a lovely message and said, while he taught me created a lot of beautiful art in this world, and left a legacy of art that's hanging on many walls in people's homes, he said, his greatest legacy is that he turned to you on to being an artist. I thought that was such a lovely thing to say. And I thought, Okay, well, then maybe I need to honor this legacy. And so I really was praying to him, and mostly just saying, "okay, really, you got me into this now help me, help, me. And

**Lindsay Scott** 20:43

Yeah give me your artist magic! You're not using it

**Stephanie Pierson** 20:45

Yean and, I really, I just was like, come on. And I got a phone call out of the blue from a woman I know, who was opening a pop up Art Gallery for six months in downtown. And she was filling each month with an artist. And she asked me if I would like to have one of the months to show my artwork, I couldn't believe it. It's like, "You're calling me and asking me and giving me a whole gallery to hang all the art can be mine on the walls?" Of course, I said yes. And I was very excited. That would have been like, seven months from our conversation. And then I hung up, I

was super excited. And then I thought, Oh, I don't have any art. I just committed to a show, and I haven't been making any art. And now I have to make art. Or I have to call her up and say no, and I wasn't gonna do that. And so that there was my gift, my inspiration, the answer to my prayer. So I started, it was hard. It was a lot of work. It's like, it's fun sometimes. And sometimes it's fun and you but you have to do it, you know, you have to show up, and you have to do the thing. And so I just started but I was excited about the possibility. And then I had agreed with the woman that I can show Tommy's art as well at the art show. So it was going to be a joint show of his art Mar, which looks really beautiful together as we did. And so I started creating and the flow came back. And I really put together some beautiful pieces. And at one point when I was sitting out there, and I was cutting up these images, and I was cutting women, you know, like I'll tear a woman out of I use a lot of fashion magazines, you know, and then I'll cut her head off and cut her arms off and I was doing a lot of breasts. A lot of my images have breasts in them for obvious reasons and so I was cutting up breasts and cutting up everything and I just had an epiphany that I was a collage. That I had been cut up, glued back together in a new way and that I was a changed person. And that I had become my art. And it was just kind of trippy. But that gave me a lot of, that was a very healing thought. Because there's uh the feeling of being damaged and being sick of being damaged of being scarred, which are all really negative thoughts. But when I thought of it in terms of just being reassembled like a collage, to take one beautiful picture and turn it into a different beautiful picture in just a transformative kind of way, was really healing to think about myself that way instead of feeling damaged.

**Lindsay Scott** 23:31

Yeah, because in the end, it's beautiful.

**Stephanie Pierson** 23:34

And it just also there's a Japanese term and technique.

**Lindsay Scott** 23:40

Yes. I think about that a lot, too. Yes. I love it.

**Stephanie Pierson** 23:45

Tommy and I had actually I had just learned about it. And Tommy and I were at a friend's digging some plants up in the garden and he accidentally broke one of her beautiful pots that was on her patio. And it was like uh-oh, and then she said, "Oh, that's okay. That was just the first gift my husband gave me on our first date when we went to this artist's studio." Like, she was very gracious about like, it's no big deal. But then she tells the story. It's like "don't feel guilty," yeah "don't feel bad." And she kind of tucked it away in the garden. She was leaving the next day to go on a European vacation. And we went home and he just felt horrible about it. And I said, "let's go back tomorrow when she's not home. We'll get that and we'll do the Kintsugi we'll come back together" and I told him about this stuff. And so we went over there, you know very stealthily and snuck around of the bushes and got the pot and washed it and then we did that we glued it back together and then he painted the seams with gold paint, then we put it back on their porch with a note and they were so thrilled and so excited about it. So then I just at this time, you know that I was doing collages and thinking that I'd become a collage. I was just thinking about Kintsugi in terms of of that in my life, and that the thought that something that appeared to be damaged when it gets put back together, and then the seams are painted gold, it becomes stronger and more beautiful than it was before. And that thought of wabi-sabi. Finding perfection and imperfection.

**Lindsay Scott** 25:23

There's so much to unpack. I just, you've been through so much. I mean, yeah, like just hearing this story. I'm like, Well, where do we? Where do we focus on the mastectomy? Do we focus on? Yeah, it's just amazing. And through it all, you've been so strong. And I think it's interesting. In the beginning, you were saying, Oh, just forget it. I've, I've had a good life. And this, this can just end because it's miserable. And then after Tommy, I would have thought it was almost worse, because of what you'd been through losing two loves of your life and witnessing Tommy's decline, but almost like the artworks that you're describing, it does sound like you found some new strength. And you said, it's hard. And I think of people trying to exercise and training for a marathon. And it sounds a little bit

like that, like you have no desire to get out there and go out to the garage and do the artwork. But to honor Tommy, you knew that it was the only way forward, I think, because you needed to pat yourself back together.

**Stephanie Pierson** 26:30

Yeah, I really did. It is a lot of work. And I think every artist, writer, musician, painter, sculptor, would tell you that it's, it's a lot of work. And it's not always fun. But there's some inner drive some inner need that you need to write these words on paper, you need to play these chords on the piano, you need to color on paper, and you need to do it. And it doesn't always feel good. And it can be frustrating. I mean, that's one of the things that I've really had to learn and accept and be patient with is that it's not like, it's, you know, people say, Oh, it must be really fun doing that, Oh, these are so fun. You must really have a lot of fun doing that. And it's like, yeah, no, not always,

**Lindsay Scott** 27:12

It always looks easy.

**Stephanie Pierson** 27:15

But you have to, if you want to do it, you have to do it. And it's not fun to and be patient and let it emerge. And I think that was a lesson that I learned in my healing is you have to be patient, and you have to do the hard work. You know, you have to have the treatments, take the medicine, do the physical therapy, do the things to get yourself back to, you know, health and well being and because yeah, just just with an artwork, you want to snap your fingers and have it be done. And same right here. Yeah, I just want to be while now. And I just and it's like, ya know, you're gonna I went to physical therapy for a year, I was very disabled by the surgery and my arms and my strength and had to build that back up again. And then the same way, I had to build up my creativity and my artistic flow again, and it was a nice, I was doing that simultaneously. Luckily, my art was something that was pretty gentle on my arms. I wasn't, you know, carving granted or something, but I probably wouldn't have been able to get back to but it just kind of meshed together. And then when I had the epiphany that I had become a collage,

it was just there was a bit of joy and relief in that.

**Lindsay Scott** 28:30

And there's also an aspect to your story of finding a part of yourself that's so significant, such a pillar of who you are later in life, .because I think so many people in their 20s expect t"o be fully grown. You know, you get to 18 Even my daughter who's four is like, Okay, I don't need you anymore, I'm done," like growing up. And, and you get to a certain point in life and you expect to be done and you expect to know who you are, know what you're capable of. And I have this vision of your life that way you kind of were living in such a stable way. And you kind of knew how everything was supposed to be and who you were and then yeah, this this detour happens.

**Stephanie Pierson** 29:13

And then the bottom dropped out.

**Lindsay Scott** 29:15

Yeah. But it also is reassuring for people to hear. I'm sure it's always nice to hear that somebody finds and discovers this piece of themselves that there's more more to us.

**Stephanie Pierson** 29:27

Yeah, and I think you know, it did surprise me that because this happened later in my life. And you're right when you're younger and you feel like I'll do this and this and this and this and then I'll be all set and I'll have all my ducks in a row and then I'm just live the good life and you know, most people who live any length of time realize that that that's a foolish notion, but it was very fun to discover like the art I was in my 60s and to discover something new and fresh, you know, because I think about when I was a little girl, being in your 60s was, you know, as old as the hills, and nobody did anything new or interesting in their 60s

**Lindsay Scott** 30:09

It's not the same now

**Stephanie Pierson** 30:10

and it's just, well, and it's so not true either. And it's not the same. And I do feel really excited about sharing my story with people who feel like their, their lives are done. They had their kids, they had their marriage, they had their job, they had their adventures. And now you know, the whole thought of being retired. And it's like, there's so much to still discover, we have so much about ourselves, all of us that we haven't even discovered or tapped into. And when you're very busy working and raising kids, and cleaning the house and going to the grocery store and cooking the meals and worrying about making ends meet, it's really hard to be creative. You know, I realized that the timing was right in my life, because I wasn't doing that I had time. So I realized that it also was a perfect setup in my life. Because I had the space, I turned the boys playroom into my art studio, and my dad. And I had so much more time to relax and create and be in that. And I think you know that that's an exciting prospect for people who are older, or in a new phase of their life who are retiring or empty nesters and, and can make time to tap back into that.

**Lindsay Scott** 31:27

Yeah, I think a lot of people in their middle age who are in that same situation, moms, you're sacrificing a lot of yourself, especially new moms are so shocked by this when they have new babies. Where did the old me go? And when will I meet her again. And yeah, you're consumed with dinners and just making sure that everyone else's life goes along as it should.

**Stephanie Pierson** 31:52

But it's no, it's two parents that are exhausted, that are taking care of business from all ends of what it takes to keep a family going and a home going and keep everybody well and healthy. And it's it's exhausting. And there's not a lot of energy left to this town

**Lindsay Scott** 32:10

But even sharing your space with other people is something for your mental state, your attention is focused on other people rather than internally on yourself. And so yeah, it is you finally had space in your life, the boys probably wouldn't have wanted you to turn that into an arts, you know, when they were working on their band, or their video game.

**Stephanie Pierson** 32:35

And you need, you know, I realize you need a space that set up with all your supplies at all times. So that you can plug into that at any moment, lots of mornings, I'd get up in my night gown and get a cup of coffee and go sit at my work table and hours would go by and I'd still be in my Nikau if you have to set it up and take it down every time. For example, if you're using your dining room table, and you have to set all your supplies up and then it's dinnertime and you have to put all your supplies away. And then you have to set them up again, it's hard to be in the flow with that. And then you think, Oh, I just don't, I just don't have it in me to settle because then I'll have to take it all apart. So I'm not going to do it. And I realize you know, it's a luxury to have a space like a studio where you can have all your supplies spread out, I can be in the middle of creating something and walk away from it. Nobody's gonna touch it. mess with that.

**Lindsay Scott** 33:36

No toddlers, scissors...

**Stephanie Pierson** 33:37

Yeah. And I can just pop in and out whenever I whenever I want. And that has made a huge difference to have that space.

**Lindsay Scott** 33:52

And there's a quote on your website, you said you were working a lot with images of women. And there's a quote on your website that I saw that I just wanted to talk about. You say, "my vision memory is replete with countless childhood hours patiently and meticulously cutting out paper dolls. These childhood ventures helped my evolution helped create the identity of the mature woman I am today. The grown woman now



employs sharper scissors has a sharper critical eye. The pre-pubescent innocent images of my childhood are replaced by the sensual, slick smooth visions of women found in the myriad of glossy magazines today, a single image presents itself to me and thus begins the inevitable search for its intuitive companions. This search is a kind of shuffling around of my subconscious. The act of cutting elements into pieces reveals the larger mystery of the female form the female persona, when elements are separated from the original image, then reassembled this random imagery creates a new history." So I was thinking about the act of cutting elements into pieces reveals the larger mystery of the female form the female persona, and I was thinking about that reading that because to me in my life you've been a strong woman model for what a woman should be and how we are in the world. And I was wondering how your idea of women and femininity or feminism, any of these concepts has been affected by your art? Or if you've had your ideas are in that art around women? Well, that's the big question. I should have warned you about that one before!

### **Stephanie Pierson** 35:25

Let's go back to the mystery of women. I mean, it's a mystery. I don't know, I think, you know, I was raised my mother during my childhood was divorced for a time. And so and she was a very strong, intelligent woman. And that was a time when in my neighborhood, I had the only family that was divorced, everyone else had a pretty traditional mom stayed at home and worked at home and dad went out into the workforce. And so I had this model of this very strong, capable woman who was being both parents and working in handling it all. And she also was incredibly beautiful, and looked like a model and was a fashion played. And I was fascinated by clothing and nail polish, and lipstick, and all those things. And then when I went to college, I got into the Women's Studies Department, and that was a new, a new major, a new field to study in college, and I just became completely swept away by that at a time, you know, it's that juncture in your life where you're leaving your childhood behind, and you're becoming your grown up south, and you're becoming more worldly and educated. And it was just, you know, I'm so grateful that I was there at that time when that was, you know, the civil rights movement, and the women's movement was all exploding, and certainly set me on a trajectory into feminism and equality and civil rights. And so, you know, seeing women in more varied ways than my 50s

and 60s upbringing had presented them to me, but also seeing my mother, you know, how she was in the world. But and so that opened my mind up to women in all the ways that women are and can be, and everything they do and could do, and the possibilities of what is available. And and so, my, the images that I make, I don't know what's coming out of me when I make them. You know, I mean, I think women are incredibly beautiful, strong, mysterious, fascinating creatures. And so I put cut these pieces up, and then I just start playing around with them. And then new these people emerge in my life. And I don't know who they're I don't know who's coming when I'm making this stuff. And sometimes I'm focused on little tiny pieces and parts. And it's not till it's all laid out and pieced together that this being gets born, I guess, for lack of a better word that this creation comes through. And it's like, "Well, hello, who are you? Nice to meet you." I'm giving them names. And, and often, I feel very critical, because I've the I see it as a pieces, I don't see it as a whole for a long time, because I've had to obsess about every little part of it. But when I walk away from it and take some distance, and then come back and look at it again, like we were talking about the beginning with life, you step back, you get some perspective. But then when I come and I look at him again, I see this whole being I see this image in this person, and I just think they're all my subconscious coming out. Well, my son said that to me the other day, he was looking, I have a lot of them hanging on the wall of my art studio. And he was looking at him and he said, "Mom, this is just all you. I just see you in every single one of these things" for me, and I think it is just my subconscious. I mean, they're playful, and they're fun. But they're also you know, they're also deep and they're brave, and they're a little damaged.

**Lindsay Scott** 39:16

Yeah. And you seal each one with a kiss, too.

**Stephanie Pierson** 39:20

I do so yeah. So it's funny because when I was growing up, I really did not like you know, we all don't like our looks right? There's something we don't like and I just felt like my mouth and my teeth were too big. And so all the smiles when I was little I had my lip shed and hiding my smile. And sometime a long time ago, I heard someone talking about beauty and they said that

the thing you don't like the most when you're growing up about your features will end up being your best feature. I think that's an interesting thought. And I thought about not liking my big smile on my big mouth, but I think that's true. And I love now you love it. Yeah. And so lips are in all my pieces for the most part, except for maybe every now and then maybe one that doesn't have lips. But all my pieces have lips that kind of as I was looking for my style and my signature look or my thing, the lips emerged, and it's like, okay, all right. And then I don't know, at some point, I just thought, Oh, I'm just gonna kiss the backs of all of them.

**Lindsay Scott** 40:30

About the body image thing. It reminds me of, when I was little, I had a birthmark on my leg that basically spanned my knee up to my hip, which is really large. And my only experience of it was my sisters and my family telling me how beautiful I was. And by gift being given that message, that's all I ever thought it was, I thought it was what made me unique, I believed them. And it never even occurred to me that it would be something to be ashamed of. Or that somebody might not like me because of that. So yeah, and we do

**Stephanie Pierson** 41:10

Yeah, cuz it's all that you were supposed to look a certain way. And this is what this is what's acceptable. And this is what you want to strive for. I mean, I see an interesting thing in the magazines that I've seen in some of the magazines I have that people give me are older, some of them are new, currently, you know, yes, just this year, the last couple of years and some are older, older. But in were slow, the change is slow in terms of women's, you know, with the media projects as a beautiful woman. But I see in the magazine magazines now so much. Women have many different nationalities and colors. And women have many different body types and a lot more full figured women and a lot more women with bellies and booties and thighs and, and fleshy women and thin women and, and pregnant women and, and older models, models that have gray hair and models that have reversals and and I see that more now and and then I try to make sure that I'm projecting that in my work so that I I use a lot of different diverse images. And and that's good to see. I noticed that too. When I'm in stores, the mannequins I noticed or smell the mannequins are, yeah, that it reflects reality or not just beige flesh tone, and they're

not just size eight. Yeah, they're bigger and they're there a variety of colors and, and that's really good. I just got another note that's completely different. But I do I feel good about the idea that I'm repurposing magazines, which reusing things, you know, it's another another way of reusing something. So it just isn't completely ending up in the trash. And that's true. Each magazine is like a book of art.

**Lindsay Scott** 43:20

And then we don't know what to do with them. Because yeah, I totally relate to that. I've had stacks of magazines that are beautiful. They have beautiful images. Like I'll use these for a vision board or something.

**Stephanie Pierson** 43:32

Well send them to me.

**Lindsay Scott** 43:34

Yeah, okay.

**Stephanie Pierson** 43:35

It was very cute my nephew who is a grown man at Christmas this year gave me this lovely gift and I opened it up and it was some magazines. And the first one I looked at was Do It Yourself woodworking and I was like "wow," that's he's a he's a contractor and my thought is he trying to you know, get me to get into a new craft and then the second one was guitar playing and I don't play the guitar and I you know, it was Christmas there was a lot going on but I was thinking well these are really curious subjects. I wonder why he bought me these and he went wait wait, wait wait wait "they're for your collages! I know you don't like guitar,"he said. He said "they have really cool images in him and I wanted to buy you some stuff that you might not have for your collages." That was so cute and so thoughtful. I need to crack them open and start

**Lindsay Scott** 44:30

There are women waiting to be discovered!

**Stephanie Pierson** 44:33

There are. Somewhere in that Do It Yourself woodworking magazine is a woman waiting to be born

**Lindsay Scott** 44:40

Yeah, so how does all this feel looking back?

**Stephanie Pierson** 44:43

Oh, amazing gratitude. I have you know, above all I have amazing gratitude that number one I'm still alive and that I've had the men in my life I had, the artist in my life who inspired me, the dear friends you included who've you know without my friends, you know, the Beatles said, I get by with a little help from my friends. And without my friends, I would not be here and I would not be enjoying all of it life has to offer right now I'm very grateful for the care that I've had, and the support that I've had to get you through those difficult times told me and I crammed a lot into our short five years. But again, you know, and I think, unfortunately, until we're faced with a scary, life threatening situation, we just get really complacent. And we forget how temporary and fragile our lives are. And it's not until something shatters that illusion that we start to get really grateful and careful about the privilege and the, you know, the opportunity and, and I'm very aware that there's no guarantee for tomorrow. And All there is is right now, right here,

**Lindsay Scott** 45:51

Steve Jobs in the morning, when he would wake up, he would remind himself that he was going to die. Yeah, I think that's so true, because we try to learn how to live in the present. But I think that that's a step we can take to really live in the present. Because when you realize this isn't forever...

**Stephanie Pierson** 46:10

And when you're facing a life threatening illness, like cancer, it puts it smashes your face into that, you know, every day, you're you don't even have to imagine it. You're just going oh my god, you know, is this it is this really, you know, and so the the tragedy of that the trauma of that becomes the gift. If you can embrace that, if you can really incorporate that and keep that in the front of your everyday thinking. It's a wonderful gift. And you know, and Tommy and I had that simultaneously together. Yeah, you weren't with a partner who you had to explain how to live in the present. Right? We both got it. So we never hesitated to stop and look at the clouds. Look at the light in the sky. Look at a flower, look it up. Here's some music, enjoy art, eat some food, taste something that was delicious, every, you know, cup of tea. Whatever was amazing to us. It's that's a wonderful feeling to be able to appreciate that because we are all so blessed with so much.

**Lindsay Scott** 47:19

Yeah, it's helpful to find happiness through writing gratitude journals. Like if you just can write down five things you're grateful for each day. And I think the way you're describing living with Tommy is living with that all the time.

**Stephanie Pierson** 47:32

Yeah, it was that. It was that for sure.

**Lindsay Scott** 47:34

That's how you should live. I mean, you did it right!

**Stephanie Pierson** 47:41

Let's see if I can keep it up.

**Lindsay Scott** 47:42

Yeah, well, that's the thing!

**Stephanie Pierson** 47:43

Yeah. It's not like I think I have this all figured out.

**Lindsay Scott** 47:46

Right. Let's be clear here!

**Stephanie Pierson** 47:49

Yeah, let's be clear. I'm just making this up as I go. Right. But so far, so good. I've learned a lot of things.

**Lindsay Scott** 47:53

You've been through stuff that a lot of people haven't been through. And a lot of people are going through any given day, we can be bothered by the smallest, most mundane things, you know that our coffee didn't turn out the right flavor, right? And then, so knowing these stories, it's like, okay, well, if they can do this, they have that going on in their life than I can deal with my coffee,

**Stephanie Pierson** 48:21

Right. And the media is, you know, the media is just very good about telling us all the bad things that are going on in the world, and all the things that aren't working and all the tragedies and we can become really inundated with fear and worry and, and stress about all the hardships in life. And it's nice to be reminded that there are good things happening and there is healing happening. And cancer isn't a death sentence. And you can discover new things about yourself in your later years.

**Lindsay Scott** 48:51

Yeah, and that there's magic along the way. There was a story about how you met Tommy, an aspect to it that I remember you telling me that you didn't mention which was you were in the house and you were like, "Okay, well, I feel like I'm ready to meet someone and to have a little bit going on. And but that's not gonna happen if I don't leave the

house."

**Stephanie Pierson** 49:16

Right.

**Lindsay Scott** 49:16

And, and it was just it was just that decision that changed everything for you. Because you said they're not going to come knocking on the door.

**Stephanie Pierson** 49:24

I was just telling that to one of my friends who lost her husband, and she's, you know, she's depressed and she's been having a hard time finding her new way. And I was just talking about that and saying, I mean, I wish it was as simple as someone's gonna knock at the door and say "hi here I am, you're sad and you're lonely and I'm here to bring

**Lindsay Scott** 49:43

and I'm perfect.

**Stephanie Pierson** 49:44

good things to your life. And it's like, no, never. No, no, that's not going to happen and you have to go you have to go out into the world and look for what you want and be a part of it. I saw a great quote one time that said, which I ended up copying and putting on my refrigerator that said, "if your ship doesn't come in, swim out to it." And I thought that was a good image for me of, you know, and back to the art is work, you have to do the work. Healing is work and living is work, relationships are work, and you'd hopefully it's worth the work and the fun and the joy and the success you feel. But you have to, and taking action, you know, life will offer you things, but you have to be at the same time working with it and taking action.

**Lindsay Scott** 50:42



I remember going through my hard time, which pales in comparison to your story. And telling myself just take action, just do things just keep moving. And if you keep moving, like will happen. And it really did. Yeah, it really changed.

**Stephanie Pierson** 50:59

It's true. It's hard to do that. When you feel bad, or you feel fear when you feel paralyzed. And it's hard to trust that. I mean, I think as you get older, you see how I think one of the reasons I didn't fall into as dark of depression as I did after my husband died as I saw how that momentum propelled me into a new friends and a new craft and a new life. And I knew that I was just like, Oh, I just have to do that work again. You know, like, Oh, this is gonna be so hard. But you do just have to do that in somebody. I wish I could remember this quote and who said it, but I just read it recently. But it was something about how that luck is just...

**Lindsay Scott** 51:42

Yes, luck is preparation meets opportunity!

**Stephanie Pierson** 51:45

Yeah. And I thought that that was really good, too. Because people go, "Oh, you're so lucky." You know, you're so lucky. This is like, "oh, no, I worked at this. This is just yeah, this is work this Yeah, this is one foot in front of the other. This is going out. This is movement and action." And yeah, opportunity

**Lindsay Scott** 52:02

and staring at a blank piece of paper. For how long you're sitting in there in the garage, staring at a blank piece of paper going, what's going to happen and life is that way, you're like, Okay, I've got this blank slate in front of me. And I've got to make a collage out of this.

**Stephanie Pierson** 52:18

Yeah, and I think everybody, I think everybody's really, you know, after you've lived some years, everybody's a collage. You know, when you think about what you've been through, and what you've had to cut away, and what you glued on yourself. And you think about the scars that come from a body well-lived you know, or your birthmarks or your whatever, you know, we're all these pieces of things. And we keep becoming more of that as we get older. And we have more adventures and more experiences and more joys and more losses. And, ya know, there's something very mystical about the whole collage concept.

**Lindsay Scott** 52:57

And I wish we would be more willing to see people that way, because we do so up to put them in boxes, boxes do you check but right if we were willing to see people as collages, I think we could allow ourselves to be so much more, because I think we're trying to fit into those boxes. And so many of us are so much more.

**Stephanie Pierson** 53:18

Right.

**Lindsay Scott** 53:19

So where can people find you?

**Stephanie Pierson** I have a website, [www.Stephaniepiersonart.com](http://www.Stephaniepiersonart.com). I also have an Instagram page, which is Stephaniepiersonart. And then on my website, I also have listed whatever current shows that I have artwork in which currently as we speak, I have a piece in an online show with the De Young Museum in San Francisco. So they have a show of Alice Neil's pictures of people, her portraits, and they did a call to artists for artists to send their pictures of people. And I did and so they have this is running in conjunction with the Alice meal show and it's on the De Young website. And then I believe it's in the gallery as well. And I'm thinking maybe they have a computer setup or a momentary something where those images are filtering through.

**Lindsay Scott**

Oh, you've got to go. Okay, well, I will be tagging you so that everyone can find you and I'll put you on my website so everyone can find you too.

**Stephanie Pierson** 54:25

Thank you so much for inviting me. It's really you know, this is all just kind of emerging as my story. I've been busy living in it, but now just talking about it sort of takes on a shape and a form and a story. So thanks for having me and my story. I do hope it inspires people and people who are going through tragedy and loss and illness and, and retirement and you know, inspires them to know that there's more. There's more it's hard to it's hard to remember that when you're dealing with all the responsibilities and challenges of life.

**Lindsay Scott** 55:07

In the Japanese art of Kintsugi, broken areas of pottery are treated with gold, which in the end makes it into something new to admire and in a way gives it an even more beautiful appearance. A broken vase doesn't get thrown away because it's suddenly not beautiful, patched together with old crooked lines. The broken bits are just understood to be how life goes. They're up there or down. Things are impermanent, life inevitably has cracks and breaks us. No one gets through life without pain. But don't let your scars prevent you from finding the full expression of yourself. Your pain doesn't make you only a broken person. Stephanie's story is a story of love, loss, survival and blossoming, listening to her journey as a reminder that there is always more. In the same day there will be pain and pleasure. And by living in the present moment you gain so much appreciation for the small stuff. Every little moment is enhanced. Anyone who has lost someone in their lives will say things like if I had only known it was our last chance to have a coffee together are a last walk together. I would have told them everything. Stories like hers remind us to enjoy every moment with our people. Take her story today to also help you remember that life is waiting for you. You are always more than you think you are. If you can find the strength in hard times to take small actions. Life offers gifts in the form of people who will redirect or awaken you. It might be the person working at the grocery store. It might be a little kid who says something you needed to hear. Reopen, listen to new people and

try new things. Look at it this way. If you and your life are a collage, what's the next piece you're going to add to make it beautiful

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