



Disturbing the Peace

Many (many!) years ago, when I was in high school and having to start thinking about how to answer the question "What are you going to do when you grow up?" I really didn't have to give it much thought. In those days, I was so crazy about playing my flute - to the exclusion of pretty much everything else - that it was an absolute 'no-brainer'; I wanted to be a musician.

Now although my father was a musician, this wasn't actually a case of following in his 'footsteps'. His background was in popular music, having come out of the British dance band scene in the immediate post-war period, but I was interested in classical music. From my point of view (at the time, I hasten to add), the path I was choosing was quite 'superior' to his, so I wasn't looking to him as a model.

But what did he think about the idea? Well, although he didn't try and forbid it, he did make his own feelings quite clear: "Just keep music as a hobby. Once you have to make a living at it, you'll find it's not so much fun any more."

My response was along the lines of "Well, *you* didn't take that advice, so why should I?" and I of course completely ignored him, as he knew I would.

Long-time readers of A Story A Week well know how this worked out. Although I did actually become fairly proficient in my musical endeavours, I wasn't able to 'make it' as a professional, and eventually moved on to other things. So my father's 'prediction' wasn't tested in real life.

Let's now skip ahead many years, to the point where I had moved to Japan and was beginning to develop proficiency at my 'hobby' of woodblock printmaking. Although my father was not involved in the choice this time, the scenario was similar - although I enjoyed this activity very much, what would happen if I made it my job? Making woodblock prints for a hobby would be a pleasant pastime, and completely stress free. Making them for a living would mean working under deadline pressure, accompanied by constant stress from the business side of the activity - the selling part. Would that really be 'fun'?

Well, again long-time readers know this story too. I *did* manage to strike a pretty good balance between the making and the selling. And even now, more than twenty years after I sold the first one, my pleasure at the 'making' has in no way decreased. My father was wrong, and I have found that it *is* possible to make a living at your 'hobby', without losing the pleasure.

Why do I bring these things up just now? Well - as you might guess - I've arrived at a place where I'm going to try and 'push the envelope' a little bit. There seems to be something in my character that is somewhere on the 'troublemaker' side; "Hmmmthere's a nicely spinning wheel ... what would happen if we put a stick in it ..."

Yes, it's time to 'disturb the peace' yet again. After a couple of years of thinking it over, and mulling over the pros and cons, I have decided to 'open up' a bit and involve other workers in my work. A few months back I took the first step on this by hiring 'outside' workers (a designer, carver and printer) to produce the first set of Senshafuda prints I am publishing, and a couple of days ago, I cleared out a space in my workroom and set up another printing 'station', which will - if things move ahead as planned - be joined by a couple more in the coming months. Training sessions for the first new printer have already begun. My little 'hobby/business' is about to undertake a major expansion.

But I do wonder about all this. Will it still be 'fun'? After all, there are only so many times that you can ignore your father's advice before you get in trouble. He can't be wrong *all* the time!

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