

ART BECOMES HER

BY DIANE DASH

**ARTS CORPS FOUNDER LISA FITZHUGH
USES HER MANY TALENTS TO FOSTER
STUDENTS' ARTISTIC SPIRITS.**

Some might call her an overachiever. Fluent in French, she studied political science in Paris before returning to the states to graduate from Duke University. Her political career ranged from House intern for a local congressman to special assistant to then Seattle Mayor Paul Schell. Research coordinator, project manager and community award winner are other titles she holds, but Lisa Fitzhugh's greatest challenge came in December of 1998 when at 31 years old she was diagnosed with breast cancer.



Gasworks Park Kite Shop
206.633.4780

Seattle's Funnest Toy Store!
Been There Yet?

Gasworks Park Kite Shop
3420 Stone Way N. Seattle

revolutionary art by 150 local artists

REVOLUTION
Gallery

Gilman Village • Issaquah 425.392.4982
www.revolutiongallery.com

Don't Miss the 3rd Annual

LOVIS
celebration of the arts



Fine arts, crafts, & affordable gifts

Saturday • November 18th
9:00am-3:00pm

Hosted by **University Child Development School**
5062 9th Avenue NE Seattle WA 98105

"The point of facing your own mortality is it's time to look inside," says Fitzhugh. "To heal thyself one must know thyself. I'm a survivor, and I felt deeply moved to keep going in the world."

The diagnosis, successful treatment, and subsequent soul-searching caused her to ditch the security of steady work to search for a calling. "All I knew was I wanted to do something with kids and art," says Fitzhugh, who spent months interviewing people to find out what was already being done in the community and, more importantly, what needed to be done. What emerged was Arts Corps, a nonprofit organization that challenges low-income students to "know thyself" through poetry, dance and other forms of artistic expression. Founded in 2000, it now boasts 30 paid teaching artists, 150 classes, 5,000 students to date and an annual operating budget of \$800,000.

Fitzhugh was introduced to the art world early on by her mother, Suzie Fitzhugh, who supported Lisa and herself as a freelance photographer during a time when it was still a vastly male-dominated field. "I discovered when (Lisa) was really young that she was a great picture editor," she recalls. "After a shoot I'd ask her which picture worked best, and she always chose the right one."

Says Suzie, "Things always came easy to Lisa, but she recognized that other people struggled. She always really enjoyed working with others, making things easier for people."

As Arts Corps founder and executive director, Fitzhugh found her professional background to be a real asset. "Past positions taught me to be rigorous and analytical. I also learned administrative and project management skills, which are invaluable in running an organization. The exposure to the political world helped me to develop a strategic sense – which teaches you to not waste time on things that are not useful – to really hone in on what will move you forward."

Located in the Youngstown Cultural Arts Center in West Seattle, a converted turn-of-the-century elementary school,

the décor of the Arts Corps offices are bright and colorful. The walls are adorned with work created by kids enrolled in the programs, as well as photographs shot by Suzie. Lisa is accompanied to work each day by her "zen dog" Oliver, a handsome black Lab rescued from a Tacoma animal shelter.

High-profile donors have not only helped the program succeed but confirm that others feel Arts Corp is filling a need in the community. A friend of Stone Gossard of Pearl Jam, Fitzhugh

**WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE
HAVE A SENSE OF
THE ENORMITY AND
UNIQUENESS OF THEIR
SPIRIT THEY CAN
BUILD A LIFE THAT IS
WHOLE, HEALTHY AND
AUTHENTIC, AND THAT
PARLAYS INTO EVERY-
THING – ACADEMICS,
SUCCESSFUL FAMILY
RELATIONSHIPS, AND
NAVIGATING LIFE'S
QUESTIONS.**

– LISA FITZHUGH

got him and the other band members involved early on. "They were instrumental as founding investors and have given significantly every year. They really believe in this work."

Fitzhugh stresses that the goal of the organization is getting underprivileged youth to find out who they are and what they have to offer. "Making art is the gateway to knowing your spirit. Your spirit is this big, infinite-sized sense of self that's not defined by others' points of view; it's not inhibited by conventional limitations. When young people have a sense of the enormity and uniqueness

of their spirit they can build a life that is whole, healthy and authentic, and that parlays into everything – academics, successful family relationships, and navigating life's questions."

Multiple studies have shown that access to art classes improves self-confidence, self-discipline, empathy and problem-solving abilities, but the reality is that arts programs are the first to go when budgets are cut at public schools. Toni Webb, a Community Learning Center coordinator for Bailey Gatzert Elementary in central Seattle has witnessed kids who were once shy and withdrawn blossom through Arts Corps classes. "It's amazing what they do. I think it brings out a different dimension in these kids. It's an avenue by which they can let their hair down and explore their personalities."

Now the official Arts Corps photographer, mom Suzie's job is to visually capture that transformation. "I'm totally fascinated by how education works. The teachers are doing something that's really hard. They have to get the attention of and grab the hearts of their students, and get them going on a path that they might never have thought was there (for them). What's fun for me is to try to photograph that happening, to get the intensity of the teachers and excitement of the students."

In addition to overcoming cancer and founding Arts Corps, Fitzhugh's proudest accomplishment is the birth of her son Jack. Afraid she might never conceive due to chemotherapy and radiation treatments, pregnancy became yet another hurdle to overcome. Now in complete remission, Fitzhugh juggles running an ever-expanding organization with raising a four-year-old ... adding "Mother" to the long list of titles this extraordinary woman can claim.

For more information about Arts Corps, visit their Web site at www.artscorps.org

Diane Dash is a Seattle-based freelance writer and frequent contributor to Seattle Woman.

WATCH THE SPARKS FLY

PRATT FINE ARTS CENTER The Place to Make **ART**

OPEN HOUSE • SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4TH, 6-9PM

See artists bronze pouring, printmaking, blacksmithing, glassblowing, welding and more!
Information on art classes and scholarships. Tours, refreshments, and a no-host bar.

Free admission – Free parking – Everyone welcome!

1902 SOUTH MAIN • SEATTLE, WA 98144 • WWW.PRATT.ORG • 206.328.2200

Mystery School Programs in Seattle
November 8-12, 2006

Unmasking The Goddess
How To Meet The Divine

Special pricing for early registration
Visit our website for information on these and other classes

www.mysteryschoolnw.com (206) 508-3810

New Year's Eve.
A mother. A daughter.
A college essay. A blueberry pie.
WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?

**NOVEMBER 16 -
DECEMBER 17, 2006**
IN THE LEO K. THEATRE

TICKETS START AT JUST \$26!
UNDER 25? ONLY \$10!

SEATTLE REPERTORY THEATRE
206.443.2222
WWW.SEATTLEREP.ORG

BY Kathleen Tolan
DIRECTED BY Allison Larver

TITLE SPONSOR THE SHUBERT FOUNDATION