

PAM WALTON'S LATEST GREAT FILM

- Ceramic: I do think I've gotten better at creativity as I've gotten older, because it's like a centipede. When you have all these legs of experience...I mean, I've got 40 plus years of background.
- Nan: I trust myself as an artist more than I ever have. I don't question. I did that in my youth. I judged myself much too much. Now, much rolls off my feathers.
- Jeanne: The great majority of people writing out there and publishing books and being well-known, they are younger than I am. You know, there's a young person writers' club, in a way, and I am not in it. I'm in the old person writers' club.
- Ceramic: I made the best dinners and was the charming wife and mother when I had a good day in the studio. I mean, it's a great way to live. So, now I'm throwing it out, and I'm going to keep throwing it in the same direction, because I used to like this side the best. You can see how you take someone's technique, and then you fiddle with it. And sometimes you make it look worse. But now, look at this side. See how it changes, and there's a rim? I mean, it's just, it's just so interesting. This is a good section right in here. And I would score that and then put that on top. I love some of these. Wow. I just figured out what I want to do. Okay. So now I'm going to put these in here, and they are going to be spirals. Okay. And I've got to get the wings ready, so I'm pressing the wings in hard. Okay. So, there's the wings. And I'll put, I'll put a black slip on them and wipe it off, so they'll really show up. Okay. See? There are the wings. I'm thinking shape. I'm thinking cleanness of form. I'm thinking of what I want to emphasize. Okay. I love this technique. People don't do this. And I think high school teachers hate it when I show kids how to do it that way, because they've taught them how to score. And I think this would look much better, let's see, yep. Now, I could go like this. We'll just try it...see, I'll start the biggest I think I'm going to want it. It doesn't look better.

Pam: It doesn't?

Ceramic: No. But, you know, I'm not done. So, you can see why I wreck things sometimes. Oh, yep, that's better. Alright. One time they published a picture of one of the pieces I'd done in a book, and it said "This artist considered texture, and then having lots of simple, linear textures, set off the image." I hadn't thought of that at all. I hadn't thought of it at all! And I thought, 'Oh, wow, how 'bout that?' You can recognize people's work. Like the painter you're doing. You probably recognize her work. I mean, sometimes I think I'm kind of narrow, but, I have kind of a narrow esthetic of things I want to make and things I love.

Nan Have you felt this? This is just like, it's just like a wonderful wool. I'm not going to answer the phone. I don't answer phones, by the way. I've done this piece already. Yeah. And when it will hang, it will hang just with two pins on either side, and the bottom will be, all of them, will be several hundred pieces. And the bottoms will be waving, and there's going to be a little fan put on them, so they'll be gently responding to the wind as they kind of shake around. And it's all, it's paint on paper. It's a wonderful paper. It's just beautiful. Beautiful, beautiful paper. And wonderful, because I could travel and not have tons of canvases, but travel with, just box it up and be very portable. This was a painting I had done, a big painting I had done. And it sold, and I missed the painting. So I took photographs of the painting, and then I used all the photographs and slapped them back on here so I could have my painting back in an odd sort of a way. I don't want to let go. I'd say I do, but after 50 years or so of this. These are my boys. This is a series called 'Green Dog', and this was called 'Yellow Dog as a Green Dog', and then I have 'Red Dog as a Green Dog'. Then I have a 'Green Dog as a Green Dog', it's just so easy. Just do it and put a little title, slap it on, and...stamp. I love dropping something like that. And usually I would say 'I'm not wasting 33 cents', at least the piece I know is worth 33 cents. I'm going to get 33 cents for this piece. I love the cross. I love what it does. I like the,

I don't need to interpret, I just really can't, it just bores the shit out of me to do any kind of interpretation. I decided to do a 'Very Gold Piece'. And next to it is a 'Very Silver Piece'.

Jeanne:

When my agent told me that Random House was the one, the publisher that was going to publish my book, I was at first a little disappointed. Because Random House is so huge that I thought I will never get individual attention there. I will be lost in some vastness, and no one will pay much attention to me. And that turned out not to be true. The editor at Random House that I work with, Jim Thomas, turned out to be a wonderful editor for me.

Jim Thomas:

She had that concept, I'm sure she's spoken to you about that. She had that concept for many years. And I think she told me that it came from anxiety surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis and that whole post-Cold War sort of feeling in the United States of bomb shelters in the back yard, and that sort of thing.

Jeanne:

I didn't sit down and think, 'Okay, now I'm going to write about a city that functions as a bomb shelter.' That was not in my head. The main source of it was my having grown up in the 50's, during the time when people were afraid there was going to be a nuclear war. Magazines were showing you how to put a bomb shelter in your back yard. Those pictures, you know, of happy families down in their bomb shelters playing checkers and stuff while the world ended up above. And it made a huge, huge impression on me. Everybody has darkness inside in some form or another. And I think that Ember is probably an expression of my own personal darkness as well as the darkness of the nuclear world.

Jim Thomas: You know, whenever an artist shares their work, there's a lot of their own person invested in that product. I'm sorry to use the word 'product', but it sometimes is a good word, because we are bringing it to market. So it becomes a product. So, as an editor I do feel quite responsible for a creator's feelings and try to be mindful of that whenever I do any kind of work.

- Jeanne: Here is the way my first page looked. Now I had written this book so many times that I knew I had gotten it perfect, especially this first page. It was the way I wanted it to be. When it came back from the editor, it looked like this. It had stuff written all over it. Up here, one of his very first comments was, "I wonder if the title should just be 'Ember' or 'City of Ember', no 'The'. Or, what about something slightly elliptical, like 'Ember Over' or some such. Something like that that rings..." "Escaping Ember", 'Ember Dying' or 'Dying Ember'. And I knew that I did not want to change the title of this book. I liked the title, 'The City of Ember'. It had a dignity that I wanted to preserve, and I told him that. And we did a little back and forth, but I prevailed.
- Jim Thomas: Jeanne did something I think by instinct that a lot of people who intend to write middle-grade books sort of miss, which is that she had a male and a female protagonist of very equal power or presence. Engaging world, this sort of dystopian 'what's going on?' thing was really cool. And then, middle graders love puzzles. Really a very engaging element of the story that's so present in the story. I mean, it's a very important piece of the story line.
- Ceramic: That freshness I see in my grandchildren now. Just my grandson Zachary's voice. So ready. And that's what I want to be, ready. I want to be ready to just keep doing this. One of my kids announced the other day that I should have hired a babysitter.
- Daughter: But your studio was outside in the converted garage, so... You would sew, and we would do art down below. Or, you would cook right over there, and we would do art.
- Ceramic: We didn't have a TV, so they had to have...we got 50 library books a week.
- Daughter: In a huge suitcase.
- Ceramic: Yeah. They hated.

Daughter: We would actually take a suitcase to the library.

Ceramic: The hated seeing us coming.

Daughter: Load, unload, re-load.

Ceramic: My kids worked with me a lot in the studio, but I was always trying to balance and try to grab another half hour or 45 minutes. A lot of young artists hire a babysitter, whether its two hours a week, or every morning, or something. I never did that. It didn't feel high pressure, but I could never have the energy to do it now. I think it's the joy of creation and not being involved with myself so much. It's one of the best ways to be existing for me. I love being in that studio. It's kind of surprising I've been successful, actually. I mean, I never, I never planned or geared up for success. I just figured I loved making things. A friend of mine said she entered three shows a year, and I thought, 'Oh, what a good idea.' So then I entered three shows a year. It was pretty slow in coming. Of course, now I'm not entering shows any more, because now I get asked to be in enough shows. But I'm 70, you know, look how long it took me. The first time I entered a show, I made a list of 17 nice things I would do for myself if I got rejected. I got rejected. What was confusing to me at first is what success was. Because there's always someone who's in more shows, or more impressive shows, or sells for higher prices. It took me lots of years of enthusiasm and not much recognition is the fact of the matter. So, if I hadn't lived this long, it never would have happened. I had a husband who was a university professor, and I wasn't scratching the bone to make a living. And I do think that was a great gift. These young women who are earning a living, oh my God. They're organized. They're on the ball. And they're just making it happen.

Nan: One of my teachers at the San Francisco Art Institute I was blessed to have was, he's since passed away, is Nathan Olivera. And they believed at the Art Institute that you had to know the underneath. You had to know what was under the clothes, under the subject, behind the skin. But it was training, technical training as an artist. The

reviews would be “She paints like a man, an old man”. And I’d go, ‘Why can’t I paint like the young woman, I’m 19, 20 years old, that I am?’ I don’t want to be in front of my work. I like to be behind it. The work is what I project. I’m not interested, I’m never interested in the person of the work. I’m interested in the work. Most artists yap and yap and yap and talk and talk and yap. Who cares? So what about all of that bullshit? I just want to see the work. This is my Monster Girl series. I don’t think you like them. And I had my little Monsters way before Lady Gaga, and I love that. That’s one of my favorites. That looks like a friend of mine, and I’m not mentioning names. Empire State Building with King Kong. So, what I know is the paint. Or, I hope I know it. I picked the jars of color out. They actually came from straight out of the jar. No mixing. I don’t mix my color on palette. I mix on surface. And I love the pure color. You could eat it. You could take cadmium red, open it up, take your finger, scoop it like peanut butter and eat it, if it weren’t, and it’s nontoxic. I bet you could. I have a feeling that a lot of us would like to eat the paint, it’s that delicious.

Jim Thomas:

When a publishing house learns that one of our books will be made into a film, or one of our author’s books will be made into a movie, that’s good news. That’s cause for rejoicing across the board because, good or bad, a movie will help book sales.

Jeanne:

It was my agent who said we might look into seeing if there’s interest in making a moving of ‘The City of Ember’. And from what I heard from other writers, many, many books are optioned for movies. Very, very few of those movies ever get made. So when my book was optioned by Tom Hanks’ studio, that was extremely exciting, but it didn’t mean that the movie was actually going to happen. I got a phone call one day telling me the deal had been done. The movie was going to happen. The cheque was going to be in the mail. And I felt that cliché at that moment...my knees went a little bit weak. I felt like I am going to drop to the floor here. I didn’t, but I felt it.

Movie voices: Ember, time to support life. What would count down to nothing? It sounds like Doomsday.

Jeanne: When the movie was beginning to be made the director sent me a very, very nice letter. He said he was so pleased to be working on 'The City of Ember', it was a great story. And then they sent me the script. And I was upset by a lot of the things in the script, a lot of the changes. Why is there a giant flesh-eating mole down in the tunnels? Why is there a beetle the size of a cat flying around? These things were out of place.

Jim Thomas: You know, we have mixed feelings about the Ember movie. I think it worked fairly well for what it was supposed to do. I think it's a family movie. I think it's great for kids. I think it did well on DVD, for example. And it absolutely helped sales of Ember. I mean, Ember sells very well now ten years later, even without a film. But, it boosted the numbers, and we sold a lot of movie tie-in copies also.

Movie voices: What was that?

Ceramic: I'm not much of a perfectionist. Oh, shoot, I just got acne all over her chin. This is what I like about clay, though. I'd make a terrible jeweler. All that precision and carefulness. In fact, my daughters and I took a jewelry class together. God, the teacher just couldn't stand us, because we kept doing such sloppy stuff. Ah, but when I roll it out, it gives it...yeah, I think it gives it more depth. Okay. They say most artists, it takes ten years before you get to be an artist. Well, I had this childish enthusiasm. And I, it just didn't occur to me that I was making mostly really dumb stuff. Because it was so much fun to make it. And then it sort of started getting better. But I still can look at almost every piece and tell you how it could be better. I don't like the purple neck. The hair is not bad. But that green isn't that appealing, and it's not placed closely enough for the anatomy. And the red lip is too bright. And you get rid of the nose, and it improves a little bit. And they look like pig eyes, they're so close

together. Oh, it's just terrible. This one I sort of like. But see, it's a little more subtle. The eyes aren't so screamie, and the nose is a little more subtle. Because just carving through I got all those little stripes.

Nan: Living, living is an art. New York has been great for its visuals but mostly for its people. I did a whole series, a subway series. As it's flashing by, as the trains are moving by, the streaks of color that are left, and the faces that are blurred and coming by, and as the pink moves on by, and it's all blurred. It's remarkable. Remarkable. New York. I can't imagine being elsewhere ever in my life. It's like moving. It's dancing. It's a song. It's standing on a block and seeing the whole world on one block. This was a little love book from my muse, Dixie, who is my love as well. I made her a little thing...that's my self-portrait. It really represents me the best, a little round, fat, white-haired dude. And then, could you see? This was a water color I did when we first met 31 years ago. And then this was, she was in bed and I was over her, standing over her. I kind of butched her up a little, because she does have that nature as well. And she has this, she has this in her office where she does her private practice. And after all these years, the face is so stunning.

Pam: Do you let Dixie judge your work?

Nan: She doesn't, I always show her everything I'm doing.

Pam: What do you do if she says she doesn't like something?

Nan: I listen to her. And she doesn't ever say she doesn't like it. She always has a, you know, she always knows when I'm riding the surface. She always says, 'Now it's all technique, and where's the soul? Where is the heart?' You know, that stuff. I say 'There's no soul, there's no heart, but I want to show off, and I want to use technique.' Nah. I've got to go back to the beginning. 'Inspiration to be inspired is as vital as to inspire.' And I've had great

inspiration by great American abstractionists. Jackson Pollock makes me weep. I sit at MOMA. I go there all the time to sit at that chair that faces that most incredible painting that MOMA has. See the center? You see that? Little white...see that circle of white? See the perfect balance of this painting? Of the black, the white, the beige? Oh, my God. And I sit there, and I cry. I'm overcome. So I share in it. I don't study it as much as I share in the adventure of the paint. Color surrounds me. As I look at you, I see the color of the room, I see colors in the room. The color where the camera is photographing us now, there's a red, a spot of color. It's so beautiful. Then another red spot on the lighting. And another red spot just above here. And so, I try, so I roam around with color. And I, my eyes are always open.

Jeanne:

I find writing a novel extremely difficult and complicated. And I can't plan it all out ahead of time. If I'm lucky, I know what the beginning is, and I know what the end is. But always I get to a point where I realize this isn't working. This direction that I've taken isn't going to get me where I want to go. And I think, I don't know where this book is going. I don't know what this book is about. I don't know what has to happen next. I don't know if the whole thing is going to work. I may have to throw all of it out and start over again. If I can get one question, put one question in my mind, like 'How does this character get from this spot to that spot without being seen by this other character?' Something crucial that has to happen. If I can take one question, go for a big walk, ask myself that question over and over and think about it, then I can often get through it. I feel that I discover the book as I go along, that I have a germ of an idea, and I write along, and what I have written tells me what has to happen next. It's as though the story grows out of itself. I need to do other things. I have to get up from the computer. For one thing, my back is not great, and I can't sit in the same position for long periods of time. So it's perfect for me to sit at the computer for a while and then go out into the garden and pick green beans and tomatoes. Or, sit at the computer and then play with my dog or take him

for a walk or take him to his training class. I would never be one of those writers who sits down at eight o'clock and does not move until five o'clock at night. Some people work that way. Not me. I get tons of email. It's a wonderful thing in most ways, because I have heard from people all over the world. The internet phenomenon has changed everything. What you get is a million readers on Amazon, most of them saying good things about the books, and some of them saying the most awful, the most mean, the most stupid things that are just horrible, and they're there for everybody in the world to see. And it is really hard to deal with. Some writers I know don't read reviews at all, just don't read them. Others have their agent or their publicist collect the reviews and send them only the good ones. I think that's a sensible thing to do. Random House has sent me on tours when I have a new book coming out. With Ember, they sent me all over the country. And it was a wonderful experience. They treated me very well. I stayed in wonderful places. I met lots and lots of people.

You need to learn how to look at your writing and look at the books that you think are really good and see how the two compare and what you can do to make yours better. It requires a lot of practice and a lot of doing it before you can do it well.

But, I am not a great traveler. I don't love to fly. I am really not a presenter. I am not an entertainer. A lot of people who write for children are very good with children. They get along with children, and they are entertaining. And I think I'm moderately entertaining. But I don't love to do it. And so I'm doing much less of it. I have kids write to me and say 'I'm 12 and I'm writing a novel, and I want to know what to say. What should it be about?' And I want to tell them, 'Well just live for another 40 years, and you'll have lots of ideas.'

Nan:

I used to always go on and on and on and spoil many a painting by turning it into mud. Now just

by, just with wisdom, I think, and getting older, I know when to stop.