

## On the bright side: artist Dominic Pangborn shares inspiration

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Dominic Pangborn was the illegitimate child of an American soldier, born into a divided and bombed-out country in 1952, during the Korean War. On the bright side, he had next to nothing.

“Having nothing and being in an environment of nothing taught me a lot of things,” he said. “One was creativity.”

Pangborn’s unflinching positivity has helped him become a successful artist, represented by the world’s largest art dealer, Park West Gallery. He’s the founder of both a graphic design firm and a fashion label, and finally, an endearing and inspiring public speaker.

He spoke recently at Great Bay Community College in Portsmouth as part of the school’s monthly Leadership Series, which invites students and the public to meet with businesspeople and discuss their success stories, philosophies, and current issues and trends.

As a child, Pangborn and his friends created toys and games from imagination. He lived in a small village where everyone knew each other, but outside of it, he was called an American bastard. He never met his father. Always the optimist, Pangborn said, “He had one great night. You take what you get.”

At the age of 10, he was recognized by a missionary and adopted by an American family. He found a father figure in his new grandfather, who he called his mentor, teacher, advisor and best friend. He was also Pangborn’s first employer, paying him to mow the lawn.

When he was 15, Pangborn got his first real job at McDonald’s. While many would consider this a dreaded rite of passage or a last resort, he called it “one of the greatest moments of my life.”

He said he learned everything about business in four weeks, became junior manager in two months and worked his way up the pay scale.

“I have never sat still or taken things for granted,” he said.

The one thing that stunted his confidence was his inability to speak English well. He came to America without a word of English and held onto the shame and fear that his lack of linguistic skills would hold him back. It was this that led him to art school, where pictures said more than words.

“The only things I knew about artists were, 1) They were all crazy; 2) They were all starving,” he said. “I didn’t come to America to be a starving crazy person.”

But it didn’t take him long to recognize how much he loved art.

“I loved everything about what I was learning,” he said.

The greatest lesson didn’t come from his professors, but from a stranger on the elevator who encouraged him to smile. He said this woman helped him decide to focus on his blessings and use color in celebration of life. She eventually became his first client, buying his still-life paintings. His new outlook redefined his life.

“The painting is like my kid, but the best part is being able to share it with others,” he said. “My mother didn’t give me up. She wanted to share me.”

Pangborn took advanced classes as a freshman, then went on to get a master’s degree without acquiring a bachelor’s, became a college professor at a different school and, two years later, was on the board of trustees at his alma mater. He was later awarded an honorary doctorate from another school.

“I want to do everything, as much as my body and mind can muster,” he said. “I want to have a full life.”

Pangborn began his artistic career in the 1970s, and his work is now exhibited in museums across the country. He’s won awards for his graphic work under Pangborn Design, and has a fashion label, The Pangborn Collection, which is sold in stores around the world.

Last year, Pangborn moved into intellectual property management with Pangborn

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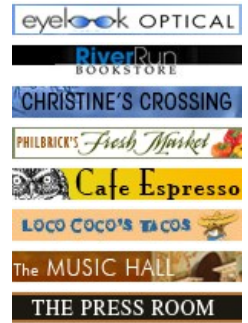
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Portsmouth music documentary, premiering at the New Hampshire Film Festival, recalls the glory days of local rock. To Marc Dole, the Seacoast music scene hit its peak during a span of four to six years in the 1990s. A

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Technovations, which is working on innovations in several fields, including biotechnology, automation, and computer hardware.

Pangborn travels the world, taking every opportunity to make new connections. He was recently the subject of a Korean documentary and is now the top request on the country's most popular Internet search engine. He never turns down a friend request.

He told his audience not to be shy when looking for a job.

"Don't send 100 e-mails. Show up at the damn door," he said. "All they can say is 'no.' So what? You didn't have it to begin with."

He also advised students to go after what they want to do.

"If you're good at something, then you go and do it," he said.

And, of course, he encouraged them to look on the bright side.

"Life is all about balance. The best day is looking up at the sky the day after a huge storm," he said. "When things are tough, I know this great beautiful day is up ahead."

Pangborn dedicated one of his large abstract paintings to the school. Its swirls of green and red represent a balance of East and West and the zen of life.

For more information on the Leadership Series, contact Mike Fischer, director of student life, at 603-327-6444 or [This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it.](#)

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