

Rachel Ann Lindsay

Interview by Ryan & Tina Essmaker
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Rachel Ann Lindsay is a freelance illustrator who is making a name for herself through her whimsical, continuous line drawings. Born in rural Ontario, Canada, Rachel moved to Toronto after graduating from Sheridan College's illustration program. After a few waitressing gigs, Rachel got serious about illustration, quit her job, and dove into freelance work as her sole source of income.

Describe your path to becoming an artist.

It's really not an interesting story. I figured out that I could draw when I was taking art classes in high school. It came really easily to me and at the time, I liked drawing everything perfectly. I loved English and art and at the end of school I just picked one.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in the country outside of Woodstock, Ontario (Canada). Woodstock is the dairy capital of Canada and I grew up just outside of there, on a little dirt road. I would have given anything to live in one of the villages a few miles away where my friends lived, like Sweaburg or Oxford Center. That would have been a really big deal because they had ball diamonds and general stores there. Looking back though, I was lucky to have a childhood in the country.

Was creativity a part of your childhood?

I think I had all your standard childhood creativity stuff going on. I was crafty and made stuff for people. I spent a lot of time outside. It wasn't anything out of the usual in terms of a creative upbringing. My grandmother was a painter and our house was full of her paintings, but I was never around her while she painted. My mom can paint too and my brother could always draw, they just never do it.

Did you go to college right after high school?



Yes, I went to Sheridan college in Oakville, which is right outside of Toronto and an hour and a half from my family. I had also applied to the OCAD (Ontario College of Art), which is in downtown Toronto. I was accepted into both of them and I chose Sheridan solely because it was out in suburbia and I was terrified of living in the city. I didn't want to go anywhere near it. I was mostly afraid of public transit and getting lost all the time.

What is your degree in?

I earned a Diploma in Illustration. It's different in Canada because college and university are two different things. I did one year of art fundamental classes and applied to the illustration program. I spent

the next 3 years focusing on illustration.

I worked really hard in college. I had that fear coming from a small town. It's one thing to be the best artist in your high school, but you think, oh, I'm going to an art college and everybody is going to be the best artist from their high school and I'm not going to stand out at all. I did my absolute best on every assignment.

Did you jump right into working as an illustrator after college?

I worked so hard in college and I feel like there were weeks where I didn't sleep at all. When I graduated, I got an award for best in show and all that stuff. But after I graduated, I did nothing for a while. I waitressed, worked in bars. I didn't

draw for ages. I saved some money and travelled and got away from my art for a while. Then I started out really casually and got a few jobs, then gradually a few more.

Was there an "aha" moment for you when you knew that you wanted to do illustration?

Um... no, not really. I actually struggled throughout my illustration program. In the last year, we were required to do a work placement at the end of it for 3 weeks. A lot of people found internships with working illustrators or interned with magazines. At that time, I was thinking illustration was maybe the absolute wrong thing for me and I had to get special permission to intern at a gallery instead. I thought maybe I didn't fit into the commercial art world at all. Working at a gallery showed me that I wasn't a fine artist either. I think I was always more of an illustrator. I'm glad I did that internship. It showed me that I did want to be an illustrator even though I was worried I wasn't cut out for it. I am more commercial than I thought.



Did you have a mentor? Who was it and how did they inspire you?

Yes. When I got out of school, I was waitressing, but doing illus-

tration jobs here and there. Gary Taxali, an incredibly talented and successful illustrator had seen my work and contacted me. He was teaching at OCAD and asked me to come speak to his students and I said, "I can't speak to your students, I don't know what I'm doing yet." He said, "No, come anyway." So I did and we became friends and I used to call him my mentor and he hated it. He would ask me not to do that. But the truth is that he really was a mentor to me for a period of time. He was the only person I had around me in the flesh who was working and had this great career as an illustrator. Knowing someone who was doing it made it feel more attainable. I credit him with really helping me kickstart my career in illustration.

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At the time, I was still waitressing on the weekends and there was one specific lunch where he said, "Rach, you gotta quit this waitressing shit because you're not hungry enough. You always know that your rent is going to be paid. You're never going to get anywhere. It's going to take you ages because you're not required to work hard enough for it. You have to get rid of this safety net." I was pumped. It was a Friday and I went to work a couple hours later and just quit

my job.

It was probably not smart at all and it was scary because I hadn't saved or anything like that. I didn't have a steady income from illustration yet. It was rough for 6 months or so. I even paid the rent on my credit card a couple times. It was bad. And then, it just came together. If he hadn't really pushed me... I felt like he dared me to do that, I may have held on to that safety net for years otherwise. I don't know if I would have ever felt ready to let go. That was maybe 8 years ago. God bless him.

That ties into our next question about risk. Was that your big moment where you took a risk to move forward?

That was it. I don't know how I did it. Now that I'm older, and very much enjoy knowing my rent is paid, I think that was crazy. You gotta go through it though, I guess.

Are your friends and family supportive of what you do?

Yeah, all of them. I have a terrific family. My parents... you know how parents are. They would be supportive of me no matter what I did. They have framed every promotional postcard that I've ever done. I say, "Guys, these are just postcards!" (laughing)

