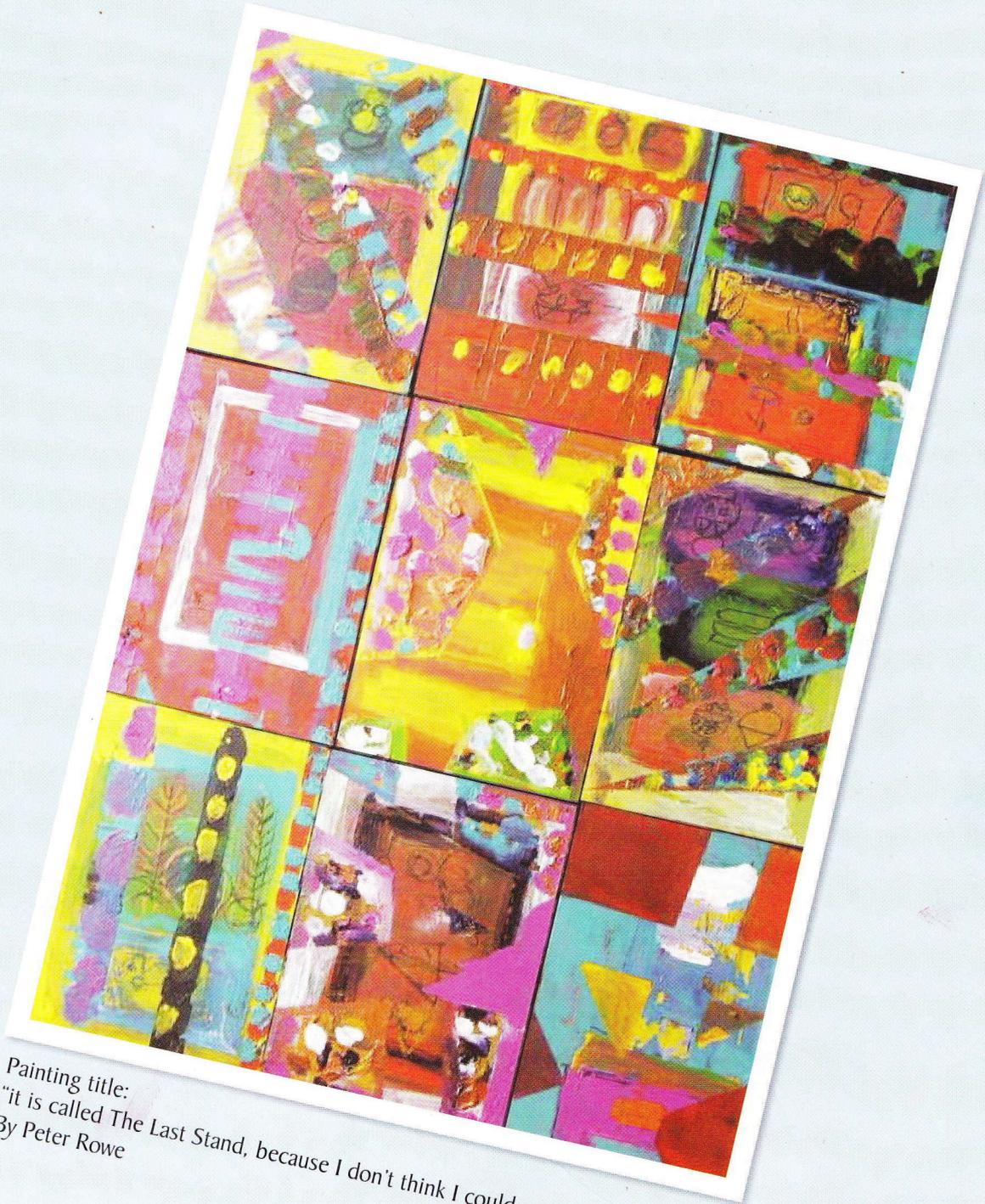




AGOSCI

in focus



Painting title:
"it is called The Last Stand, because I don't think I could paint another like it"
By Peter Rowe

This issue ...

Tricky Issues: Positive Solutions

MY LIFE – A STORY AND THOUGHTS ON COMMUNICATION

Peter Rowe

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My name is Peter Rowe and I am an artist, an author, a poet, and importantly a person with Down syndrome. I say importantly, because I am proud of who I am. This was not always the case for me. When I was younger, I had a different perspective on life. It's funny how our experiences shape us isn't it? When I was young I found it hard to accept that people saw me as different. I'll let you in on a secret – even though I just was little, and even though I had people trying to protect me, I still knew I was not quite the same.

First off, can I challenge you to think outside the square? Think of being in a body that makes people sometimes think you're dumb, a body that doesn't let you speak, and a body that gives people certain opinions about the personality you should have. Do these things add up to indicating happiness? If it wasn't for a couple of things, my life would not be what it is today. What are those things, I almost hear you all thinking at once.

The initial thing is family. It is what keeps me secure, comfortable and confident in who I am - a loving son, brother, and uncle. It is family who have been there for me in the worries, the struggles, the celebrations, and the joys of life. The early years have not only memories of difference, but also memories of laughter and being included. If it was not for family, then there would not have been the laughter. *2 love:*

The other important thing in life for me came years later. Possibly it was lucky. I met the right person who seemed good enough to not listen to popular thinking and gave me a way of being able to communicate. Communication is the thing that is supposed to be a basic thing we all have a right to. It is the thing that helps define who you are.

In the moments following my connection with a way of communicating, I saw that this great right also had some challenges. My family were a bit surprised, to say the least. The person they thought I was, was being challenged. Was I different? No and yes! I was the same person but the impact of me communicating certainly changed me and my relationship with others. The people outside of my family were often challenged by me communicating.

These people didn't know me. They did, however, think they knew what I should not be able to do because of the way I look. Unfortunately, people believe in the things that make them feel comfortable.

What makes some people feel uncomfortable? Having a person with Down syndrome challenged them to consider the possibility, they have assumed, that people can't think based on

how they look. I'm being honest, sorry if this offends. Offending is not the purpose of this paper. Getting you to reflect is. Getting you to see past a diagnosis is. Is there a theme coming through yet?

C. involve
Point number three: Being involved brought me happiness too. Growing up always meant doing the same as others. This was important. I am happy with who I am, as I have always been seen as one of the family. Really it has been only since being able to let others know my thoughts through typing that I have felt honestly connected with my community. It has been this connection with the arts community that has helped me throughout some difficult times. I have grown comfortable with myself through being able to share experiences both typed and in different visual medium with family and friends. Do you learn about yourself through chatting about things with other people? If you answered "yes", then we are not different in that way.

So now I have to end this paper in some witty and memorable way? I guess the messages I would encourage you to hold onto are simple. Just accept differences. Accept and welcome things that will cause you to both be Challenged and reflective. The big one is let your eyes tell you only part of the story. The chapters in the book will be revealed when you use all senses and match it up against your heart.

In case there are any people still wondering, I am happy. I am happy that I was lucky to have the support around me to follow a path to happiness. My heart goes out to those that may not have the family, community, or have not been offered the right communication opportunity for them.

That is why I dedicate my books and this paper to: The people who know, but can't tell. Who hear, but can't speak. Who receive the information from the world around them, but can't sort it. And the people who were blessed with the gifts of the body in full working order.

Peter's artwork has been chosen for this issue of AGOSCI in Focus. To learn more about Peter check out his biography on the contents page.