



Alison Wells

Hello everyone my name is Alison Wells, I am an artist and an art educator and I have been living in New Bedford for sixteen years. I am currently the owner of Alison Wells Fine Art Studio and Gallery on 106 William Street in downtown New Bedford. I'm in my gallery right now, I tell people it's my happy place. It really is my happy place and I've come a long way in sixteen years of being here, and I must say, you know, I haven't done it on my own, I've got the help of the amazing community in New Bedford, the amazing arts community and my family, my family back home have really supported me as well. And so, I really came here specifically to do my master's degree and I went to UMass Dartmouth and I did my degree in three years, it was a three year degree program, I said I was going to do it in two because you could do it in two, I said two years and I'm outta here. I tell the story all the time. And of course, I ended up doing it in three. I love that I did it in three and then I decided huh things were happening in the city, like a renaissance in the arts and you know, people didn't want to leave. In the past, a lot of students came, they got their degree, and they left, and that was my plan. And then I started to see students were staying back, they were renting affordable studios, and there was so much going on in the city that I wanted to be a part of that, and at that time,

I'm originally from Trinidad and Tobago, so I had an opportunity to stay there for longer with OPT, Optional Practical Training, and I decided yeah, I'm going to do that, I'm going to do Optional Practical Training for a year, see what happens, and just continue this ride, because a lot was happening in the city. So I decided yeah, I'm gonna do that. And I had to get a job, so I was looking for different jobs. And in the community I was offered two jobs. I was offered two part-time jobs. The first one was at Artworks, so my heart is there, it was one of my first jobs, Artworks, I was teaching kids in the summertime, and afterschool programs, and believe it or not, I'm still teaching afterschool programs with them. I was also teaching with the New Bedford Historical Society, and that was an amazing opportunity because I learned all about the Underground Railroad, so it was a program called hidden Histories, and there was a historian who taught the kids all about the Underground Railroad and Frederick Douglass, and then I came after that and I would do art projects related to it. So in doing that, of course I'm learning so much about the Underground Railroad through the historian and through this program. These two things really did assist me in creating roots after I graduated.

So the next thing was like my studio, now if you know, the art studios at UMass for the grad program and the seniors, are, were at the Star Store Building. The Star Store Building is beautiful. Our painting studios were on the fourth floor, you could see the sea, it was big, beautiful. And of course, when you graduate, you have to leave your studio behind. So that was a bit depressing, take all my stuff, pack it into my little apartment, I turned my bedroom into my studio and I lived in my living room. That wasn't working because I was not motivated to work. And then one day my sister came to visit me. I'm the youngest daughter of five girls, and she's my eldest sister. And she always supported me, she was always my number one fan, she and my parents, my other sisters, but my parents, definitely my mother and my sister, they were like my cheerleaders right. I used to call them my managers. So she came to visit me one day, we were having a great time, and I take her to the Cummings building, which actually is the building I'm in. But upstairs had studios for artists and my friend had a studio there so we went to visit her and we looked around the other studios, and the ones that were available were open. And there was the smallest one, but it just had a great energy. It was long, slim, lovely window, you could see onto Purchase Street. And I was just in love with this studio but I couldn't afford it. And so my sister's like okay you need this studio. I'm like, yeah but I can't afford it. She's like, I'm gonna pay for it for six months and then you're on your own, you know, you have to do that after. And so I'm like huh, okay, okay let's do it! And I remember telling my mom and she was like what's gonna happen after the sixth months, are you gonna be able to pay for it? I was like yes, I'm gonna do it. But it's something when you have like the heat, the fire under you to make things happen, you make it happen, believe it or not.



But, the funny thing is, so she gave me the money, I got the money, I had the studio, and it really catapulted my career, because now, you know, collectors could come to my studio to see my work, I could teach art from my little studio, I would open it out on AHA nights, art, history, and architecture nights, every second Thursday, you know so, it now gave me this energy, where I could now give back. And so, it was just interesting because in life, when you keep thinking about the next step, the next step, where am I going now, what am I going to do next, you tend to forget, like you know people who say, I want to do that, vision boards, you write it down, when you look back after years, all those things that you got and you didn't realize, so it is so important to be grateful for the little things, and the reason I say that is because last year I remember cleaning out a bookcase. And I already have the gallery here, I clean out a bookcase and I find this envelope with a letter. And it's from my sister, the same sister, and it was the letter that enclosed a check, and she said, Alice, Alice, that's what she calls me, Alice, this is a check for six months of your studio rent, fly eagle, fly. And she called me an eagle, just like, you're an eagle, you're gonna fly. So she gave me that check and I forgot. So now, here I am, in my gallery, not my studio. So that was my first studio.

Actually, three years after that I moved to another studio in the same building upstairs, but it was a little bigger. I paid for it myself, and then three years after that I opened the gallery down here, much bigger and I'm thinking about, I'm just moving, moving, and I didn't take a minute. When I read that last year, I cried, because I'm like, oh my god, look at where I came. I had to call her and thank her, I mean I thanked her a million times. These are the stories to keep reminding you where you came from. They keep reminding you of the people who have been in your court supporting you. My sister has always been there, my family has always been there. And then, I'm thinking of all the other, you know, the other steps that I took forward after having that studio, where the community stepped up and supported me. Times, when I raised money for different things, you know, and they were there, they were there always supporting me, buying my work, advertising for me, you know, wanting to see me go forward, rooting forward for me, and every step of the way, you know.

I remember I got, from OPT I went onto getting an artist's visa, which I think it's just, it's even better than a work visa, because you're an artist, you have an artist's visa, it's a romantic thing. But the community came out again. I remember having a studio sale, raising money for that, so that I could apply for that, all the legal forms and stuff, and they again, the community came out supporting me, professors, collectors, my past collectors, my friends who went to school with me at UMass, art students and artists who don't have much money but they were still there, buying little pieces of work, supporting me, being there, just support, and that's what it's all about. The arts community has always been rallying around each other and they rallied around me, even though I was an outsider, I was once an outsider, I don't feel that again because I felt like I was brought in, and that's how it's been going, and since I've had the gallery, I've felt like that. So, you know, a lot of people ask me and I tell them this all the time, New Bedford has been good to me, it has really been good to me, and it is my home away from home, my second home, it fills me with a lot of love and light, and just to see how people band together and support each other, and I'm happy to be here and I'm happy to be in my happy little place in my gallery, and we'll see, what happens next, where we go, you know, never make heavy plans, you make a plan and you keep going, and you trust, that god and the universe will guide you to the right place, I didn't know I was going to open a gallery sixteen years ago and here I am, so let's see what happens in the next sixteen. Thank you.