



# REFLECTIONS

## Amazing Stories: the Beautiful Journey of Ashley Lyn Olson

Ashley Lyn Olson always had a passion for writing. Long before a horrible car wreck paralyzed her and took the life of her father, she was espousing about the world around her through the written word.

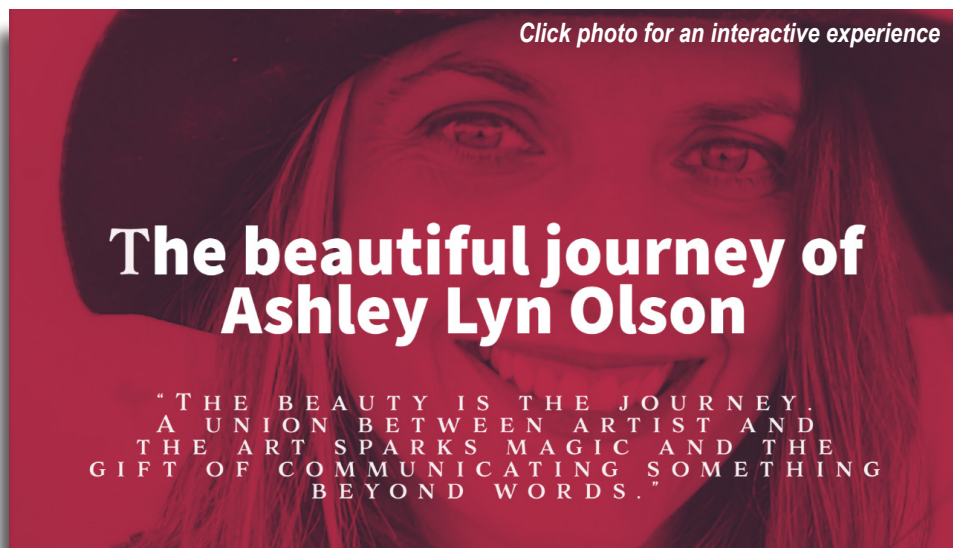
"Words are just constantly coming to me. The words that really shine or stick to me . . . I'll save them, put them in my notebook, and maybe there will be more words that flow after them."

Her love affair with the written word started around second grade with the creation of her first poem, Rappin' Roger Winkle Worm as part of a school assignment. It was not until fifth grade that she earnestly took up the practice. "It was during that time I started writing poetry. I remember doing short stories. I was inspired by people that I knew in school and whatnot and would build characters from those experiences."

Writing is not her only creative outlet. Olson realized at a young age she also had a knack for painting and drawing. She often created artwork to accompany her stories.

"In terms of painting, I've always absolutely loved art," she said. "I remember being in Kindergarten and just loved getting lost in drawing time. I always wanted it to last so much longer but they would only give us 30 to 45 minutes. It never seemed long enough."

Freshman year of High School, she took water coloring classes, and later in college, her sister bought her some acrylic paints one year for Christmas to encourage that she paint again. She enjoyed painting with



Acrylics and practiced acrylic painting through most of middle school before taking a hiatus from the art.

When possible, she would take as many arts and writing electives as she could in her school schedule to fulfill her need to create. She continued to pursue her love of both the written word and artistic designs through summer schools and special sessions. "I would definitely pursue as many arts classes as I could get my hands on."

She continued to create and pursue her creative nature until high school, when she suffered a tragedy that would help shape her future path.

### *Transforming her world*

When Olson was 14 years old, her world changed forever. Her family was involved in a serious car crash. "That one moment transformed my entire world," she said. Her father was killed in the accident and

her mother and younger sister were seriously injured; her older sister was working and not in the car. Her mother continues to live with disability from her injuries. Olson also sustained permanent injuries from the crash, which left her a paraplegic.

While the moment does not define who she is, it did propel her toward a new lease on life. It provided future inspiration for her writing, her artwork, and her desire to [make travel accessible](#) for all.

In the short-term following the accident, Olson had to reshape many of her expectations to fit into her new reality. "I had to regroup and focus. I was set on getting a basketball scholarship, but then I was like, 'OK, what am I going to do with my life?'"

She refocused on her academics, knowing that without her basketball skills, she would need them to pursue higher

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education. With her newfound focus on academics, she also pushed her arts desires aside. It was a tough decision, but one Olson resolved herself to making at the time. “I loved art and everything, but I knew there was no way I could make a living from it and that I definitely needed some other skills. So, I kind of pushed it aside, but kept writing poems. No matter how tired I was, I’d find moments to get them down on paper. It was like taking medicine or detoxing; what I was doing wasn’t sunshine and rainbows but I knew I’d feel better after. Whatever was inside of me had to come out.”

### *Refocusing on the arts*

It was a gift from her sister while she was in college that eventually got Olson refocused on her hunger for the visual arts. “She got me my digital camera and I had a lot of fun with that,” she said. “I would just have fun photographing different angles of things and textures and the beautiful aesthetics of everyday life.”

It reminded her how much she loved creating art of her own. Still, she knew she could not support herself solely on her talent as an artist, so she continued her academic path while dabbling a bit in photography to satisfy her urge to create. She graduated with honors and started a career as an executive marketing and production assistant at Wentle Vineyards.

In 2009, she left that job to pursue one of her current passions: [accessible travel](#). Travel always was something Olson enjoyed. It became a bit more challenging after her accident because not every destination and mode of travel is wheelchair friendly. Olson created a website called [wheelchairtraveling.com](#) in 2006 that provides tips and resources for people with limited mobility to experience the world of adventure and leisure travel. She was only working part-time on the project until she made the decision to quit her job at Wentle Vineyards to focus on the

effort full-time.

As she traveled and worked on her website, Olson’s passion for the arts was reignited. She would see beautiful places and meet amazing people and was inspired to capture those moments. She writes guides and creates videos for her website to help other wheelchair travelers enjoy the same experiences. She would always take aesthetic photographs on her travels and often write poetry about what she was feeling at the time. It was a great way to combine her career with her passion for the arts.

When she began dating her current boyfriend, his grandmother taught oil painting. The medium piqued Olson’s interest enough that she once again took up a paintbrush. “She was an amazing art teacher,” she said of her boyfriend’s grandmother. “I immediately fell in love with oil painting. There was just something about the way the colors blended... and the layering, and the different fades. I just fell in love with it and I haven’t really looked back since.”

### *Mixing and matching*

With her newfound delight in oil painting, Olson began to orchestrate, and sometimes mix, her art mediums and interests. She will have an oil painting or two or three going, along with a multi-medium piece and digital media creations brewing. The colors, contrasts, light rays, shadows, and of course the people and experiences from her travels inspires her artwork and poetry. When visiting a place for [wheelchairtraveling.com](#), she often writes a poem, and then later at home paints something “artsy” she photographed.

One of her recent favorites is a painting of Hawaii with a poem based on the experience. “It is a flashback to the first time I traveled after my accident,” she said. She recently returned to the island with her boyfriend, where she enjoyed studying the geology, noting the extreme contrasts between life and death happening simul-

taneously on the island. “There is just something about the main island. That island was so powerful. It felt like being in the womb of creation, where everything was being birthed and destroyed at once.”

Olson also is exploring new writing styles as part of her growth phase. In addition to writing a modern-day memoir, she currently is working on a screenplay that is a modern-day take on The Ugly Duckling tale. The story follows a butterfly who does not fit in and goes on a journey to discover its place in the world. By the end of the story, the butterfly has a life-changing revelation.

The screenplay was a gear shifting for Olson, who said the idea for it kept playing in her head until she sat down with it and began a rough sketch. She quickly drafted a storyboard with her idea. The best part of this new adventure was writing the descriptions for each scene. “I could hear the music for it, too, and see a modern ballet of dancing butterflies,” she said. “I just couldn’t get the music and dance out of my head, so I had to stop working on website work stuff and sketch out a rough storyboard.”



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### Striking while the brush – or pen – is hot

Olson said one thing she has learned is not to ignore the muse. Whether it is an idea for a poem, short-story, painting, or a screenplay, she always strikes while the inspiration is hot. “I definitely capture it for what it is. I write it down, type it into my phone, put it in my journal or whatever is handy. Writing down the ideas and any supporting information that flows with it is key.”

Like most creative people, Olson has an “ideas in waiting” file. It plays host to all her thoughts and inspirations that still are waiting to take final form. She said one thing she learned early on is to “go with the muse” even if that means stopping a project midway through to focus on a new vision. “Sometimes I know the painting is asking for something, but I don’t know what, so I have to wait. I just remind myself there is time to do what the art

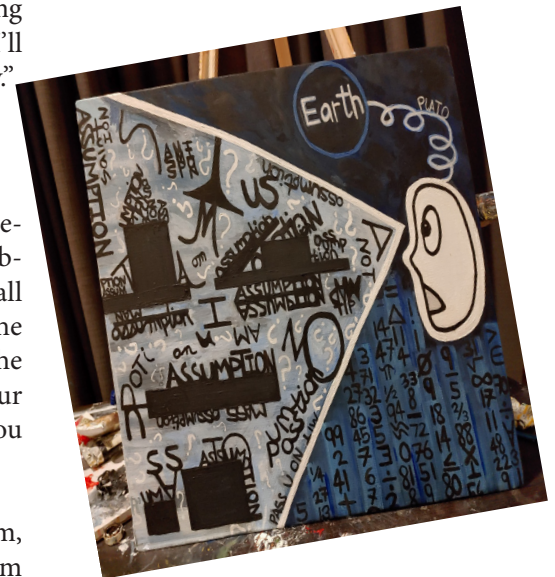
requires of me. I’m just one human being and with the time and space I have, I’ll keep creating with the best of my ability.”

### Inspiring others to create, dream, and do

Whether she is writing, painting, or reviewing a travel destination for her website, Olson gives herself grace above all else. “With anything in life, patience,” she said. “Nothing happens immediately. The key is to be honest with yourself and your time so that when the muse comes, you can act on it.”

She encourages others to create, dream, and do, no matter how long it takes them to get there. “The beauty is the journey,” she said. “Don’t obsess about the outcome. Let artwork breathe, speak, and evolve beyond your original idea. A union between artist and the art sparks magic and the gift of communicating something beyond words.”

Follow Ashley on [Instagram](#) for more art.



***“I immediately fell in love with oil painting. There was just something about the way the colors blended...and the layering, and the different fades. I just fell in love with it and I haven’t really looked back since.”***

## Email Marketing 101: Tips and Tools for Success



*For this issue of the newsletter, we talked with email marketing expert [Yomi Gerard](#) about the how and whys of a successful email marketing campaign. Businesses that have not yet incorporated email marketing into their digital marketing plan must reconsider that decision immediately. Email marketing is super effective, boasting a 40 percent open rate compared with social media advertising campaigns. Mr. Gerard specializes in email marketing campaigns in the small and medium B2B and B2C businesses in the fashion, e-commerce, health-technology, and travel niches. Following is some of his best advice for launching a successful email marketing campaign.*

**Q. Why do businesses and organizations need to conduct email marketing campaigns?**

It's quite simple; get in touch on a more personal level.

Think of it this way. When we used to have our mails posted and we pick them up from the mailbox, the chances we are going to open and read it is high! Why? Because we look forward to it!

So, it's the same thing with emails. We open our inbox expecting to see something good.

That is why emails should be personalized as much as possible. Tailor your email to fit your customer. Let it address his or her needs and position their product or service as the solution.

**Q. What is the benefit of email marketing campaigns?**

There are many benefits of email marketing campaigns.

Emails are inarguably the most effective tool for conversions. Social media is good and is an important tool in customer acquisition – it is always the first step in leading potential customers down a marketing funnel. Social media helps to build relationships with prospects and offer value. When it comes to the acquisition and retention of a customer, you will need email marketing. The advantage of email marketing is it's ideal for small businesses or startups with budget restraints to utilize email marketing because it is cost-effective and has a higher return on investment (ROI).

- Emails meet prospects on a personal level. Businesses can get in touch with customers via personalized emails tailored to fit customer traits.
- It is trackable and measurable. Nothing is as helpful for marketers as metrics! Being able to monitor your progress and the effectiveness of your strategy is crucial to a successful long-term marketing plan. With this, you can pinpoint what is working and what's not.

**Q. How do you help clients build an email list if they do not already have one?**

Well, every business started here at some point. Thankfully, building an email list isn't rocket science! The business goals, its niche, and target customer determine the type of strategy to be adopted to build an email list.

What businesses need, basically, to build a list that will be a lead magnet. We call it a lead magnet because it attracts and retains leads. But explicitly, lead magnets are strategies businesses use to attract

customers, obtain certain information from them (like name and email address) in return for something valuable.

Lead magnets can be a social media contest, giveaway, free e-book, a webinar, conference ticket, coupon, anything really. This will drive people to their lead capture on their website and in the long run build their email list.

**Q. What method is the most effective for building an email list (marketing funnels, social media contests)?**

There really isn't a "best" or "most effective" method for building an email list. From my experience, the method you choose to adopt must suit your audience. So, for example, a clothing giveaway might be the most effective method for a clothing brand, while a healthcare brand might go for a webinar or a podcast.

**Q. Why should businesses never purchase an email list?**

Let's think of it this way. Say you are having a good chat with your family. A stranger barges in and demands your time and attention. You probably would not receive that interruption well. It's the same for emails. Since they are so personal, recipients get extra sensitive if they receive them unsolicited from your brand. Spamming in this way increases the likelihood email servers will label your messages as spam in the future, dashing your hopes of reaching new customers.

**Q. Which platform is best for email marketing?**

Right now, I have a couple of favorites:

- [Getresponse](#)
- [Mailchimp](#)
- [Aweber](#)

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Which option you choose depends on your marketing budget. Some of these email marketing platforms are more affordable than others. For better integration, more features, and ease of use, I'd use MailChimp. It's my go-to email marketing software/service.

***Q. Is there an email marketing campaign strategy for every budget?***

Yes. The only thing I would probably consider is the platform you choose to run your campaign, the service of creatives, and if you decide to give the campaign to a marketing agency to run for you. But your strategy doesn't exactly change.

***8 Quick Tips for Better Email Marketing***

- Optimize your subject line to increase open rate. Most email platforms like Mailchimp will automatically rate your subject lines.
- Use a real person as the sender and not your company name. Doing so helps to personalize the email.
- Make your subject lines actionable to motivate your audience.
- Include a number or statistic in the subject line to increase clicks and replies.
- Curiosity killed the cat, or so says the adage. Using the curiosity gap leverages a recipient's natural instincts to explore. Tease your reader with hints of what is to come if they open the email.
- Avoid using all caps, since doing so is generally interpreted as shouting.
- Experiment with emojis in your subject lines help boost open rate.
- Make it simple to subscribe or unsubscribe to your email list.

Is your website content staler than a loaf of day-old bread? Is your social media feeling like the road less traveled by...well...everyone?

If leads are no longer converting, it might be time to breathe some new life into your content. Not everyone can write compelling copy (nor should they try). Well-written, SEO-rich content is the best way to grow your audience and build brand ambassadors.

Reach out to The Write Reflection to start 2021 off right with the power of quality content.

**What others are saying about The Write Reflection:**

Great understanding of what I wanted. Really happy with the end result.

Shari killed it. Thank you!

Very impressed. Love your approach and style Shari. Great work!

Entertaining, informative and on brief. Thank you, Shari!

Awesome work on this article Shari. Your research is also fantastic :)

Great article covering off the topics we need. Thanks, Shari!

You really pulled this one off, Shari. Thanks!

You've outdone yourself with this latest round of blogs, Shari. Well done!

Contact The Write Reflection