

Conversation with Amberlee Boulton and Iris discussing Thundertaes Program to
commemorate Arts Health Antigonish's 10th Anniversary.

Transcribed by: Amberlee Boulton

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Amberlee: All right. Hi everyone and thank you for joining our podcast. Iris and I are joining you from Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Mi'kma'ki territory. And we just like to say that this podcast is a chat about our experiences with **Arts Health Antigonish (AHA)** as an organization, and when they started a youth program 10 years ago, that impacted us both deeply in wonderful and different ways. I'm just so pleased to have Iris join me here as a friend and a fellow art, enthusiast, and artist in their own right after these 10 years.

Amberlee: So, to commemorate **Arts Health Antigonish's 10-year anniversary**, we thought we'd just have a conversation about how we came to this program, which I'll explain in a minute, as well as just the impact of having something that gave myself, and I think, a number of the youth that were involved a chance to explore art and self-expression and see the world through...um...I don't know, you here, Iris, maybe you can help me with this. Like, through their own lens of...um, hmm...what's the right word here?

Iris: I think a lot of it was sort of giving kids the tools and the atmosphere, and just the place to have conversations to build their own sort of creative understanding of their inner and outer world.

Amberlee: Lovely. Yes! Thank you. That's exactly what I was trying to get to, and kind of got lost in the language. So, thank you, Iris. This is why I'm so chuffed to have you here today.

[Both laugh]

Amberlee: So, I will start in talking about my experience and coming to Thundertales. Because I guess that's where some of this starts in a way. Arts Health Antigonish received a small grant through the Heartwood Foundation, based out of Halifax. Which is a foundation that supports youth programs and youth advocacy. And what they were trying to do with the program was have storytelling with art for teens. And that was kind of the poster that we put up. And the basis for what we were really trying to do.

Amberlee: So, I was very lucky to be told about this program. Just, I think I'd been in Antigonish about 6 weeks. So, I moved back from Ontario with my partner at the time and was searching around for a job and had had lots of experience working with children, youth, young parents, and infants, but was really struggling to find my way in this small town as somebody that was a transplant from Ontario. And as Nancy Turniawan will remember in my interview, I even said, "well, if I don't get this, I'm looking at the Superstore or Tim Hortons!"

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: Yeah. Just needing to feel like I could work and contribute at that point. And then was so lucky to stumble on this program that they were offering for the summer. So, fortunately, I was given pretty free reign as far as how to organize it [Thundertales] and the People's Place Public Library was incredibly supportive in giving us space to set up twice a week and meet for a couple of hours in the afternoon. And we went from there. So, we invited in different artists from the

community to do different sessions and kind of, like, have...um...what's the word? Like, kind of an overview of all sorts of different types of art that were offered in the world of visual and performative arts. But also honor who we had in the community as emerging and professional artists that were staying and choosing to stay in the community and practice their craft here.

Amberlee: So, that was also kind of part of the program, too. To be able to show youth that there was vibrancy and there was access to art and our inquiry in these rural spaces. And that if that's something they wanted in their life. Then, that could be there.

Amberlee: So, I think, always the goal of part of the program, was to affect mental health and positive outcomes and positive sense of self really, really well, and give youth another chance to have a sense of groundedness in the community. But that wasn't ever something I feel like needed to be said explicitly, because it was so much about just, yeah, participating in the library and having fun and trying out different activities to see what people liked and what could kind of be found in them.

Iris: Yes. I think that the shining light of the program really was that aspect of showcasing the people that were here and the things that people were doing here. Because I think when you're a kid, or a teen, or youth, when you grow up in a rural community, or just a very small community, you feel this feeling of always looking outward. Looking to the city, looking to a different country, even. Because it feels like nothing can happen here. So, I think that was really special.

Amberlee: Awesome. Yeah, that's so well said. And thanks, Iris. And you come from such a great place of knowledge with that, having grown up here and having such rich insight to that. I think, because of your lovely family identity. And yeah, kind of, I mean, I'll let you talk more about that. But I just have always appreciated your insights with that, as someone who is not just a white settler, transplant in many ways, but a white colour transplant down into Antigonish.

Iris: Yeah.

Amberlee: And Nova Scotia from you know, like the province that's the big city.

[Iris laughs]

Iris: I guess that sort of leads into how I got involved with the program. So, I think I'll speak about that a little bit now.

Amberlee: Wonderful.

Iris: I grew up in Antigonish. For the most part. I moved here in 2009 because my mother is from here. And as Amberlee said my mother is White and my father is a Black immigrant to Canada. So, it was like, a really meaningful experience for me to become involved with the program. Because I felt that as a kid, I didn't really see people in a lot of creative spaces in general. But when I did, they were not people who really looked like me. So, it was really difficult for me to

feel sort of welcome in those spaces. And I come from a very...um... my family's not very well off. And we always had a lot of food insecurity and money insecurity.

Iris: And to be a part of a program where I could just come, and I didn't have to worry about paying a fee or any kind of admission fee at all. It was really, really, really impactful on my life. Because I'd never been in an organized program of any kind before. Because it just wasn't feasible for me.

Iris: But the way I found out about it [Thundertales] was, my favorite thing to do as a kid was to go to the library. Because it was one of those free access points that I could depend upon and have fun and sort of lose myself in. And I would just go like every day pretty much.

Iris: And I just saw a sign talking about an art group for kids and teens. And it said free, and it happened to be that day. So, I came into the room with my little bike helmet and my backpack. Because I had biked there. And that's how I got involved. And that's when I met Amberlee.

Amberlee: Oh, that's so lovely. Thank you, Iris. I'm just yeah, I remember meeting you too. You know, it's very distinct, because I remember being at the library and thinking, "Oh my gosh! I don't know any kids yet in the community!"

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: And being like, "Oh, how am I gonna do this?" And having met the staff at the library, was so great. And they were so lovely and accommodating too. And I remember being like, "Okay, we've got a couple of kids here." And going out to the Outreach librarian Elizabeth. And being like, "Do you think there's anybody else that might be interested in joining?" And yeah, her going over to you. I think you were playing on the Xbox in the youth room. And being like, "Hi, would you want to come and do this?" And you were like, "Oh, yeah, sure." And then you grabbed your bike and your bike helmet and came down and entered the room.

Iris: I have a very distinct memory of like walking in very awkwardly with my bike helmet. And like, not knowing where to put it.

[Both laugh]

Amberlee: Yeah, it was a big deal. Like, that first time that we all met. It was so interesting. And we had so many iterations of the group after that, I should say, the group went on for what? Another 4 years?

Iris: Yeah, in different iterations. Yeah, and doing different things in different spaces like.

Amberlee: Yeah.

Iris: For a while we were based out of the Chan Centre. Which sadly, no longer exists. And we did much different stuff to what we did in the library and etcetera, etcetera.

Amberlee: Yeah, it's so true. It really grew with the group. I felt like there was this really wonderful core group of youth. And you were all kind of the same age and kind of, I don't want to say all going...you are all going through very different things. And very different parts of your identity and all were so interested in very different aspects of art.

Iris: We all also just had very different personalities.

Amberlee: Yeah.

Iris: Which is interesting.

Amberlee: It really was. It made it really fun. And I think it really held people accountable in that space to just supporting each other too.

Iris: Hmm-hmm.

Amberlee: Like, I remember the different themes that we would kind of choose at the beginning of each Thundertales session. Like, whether it was at the library in the summers, or as an after-school program, or when we moved to the Artist Run Center [ASAP], or the Alayah Chan [Centre]. It was like, how do we, how do we start this? How do we form as a group? How do we make this a group culture that's supportive of each other?

Amberlee: And it's like, I remember one time it was like a Percy Jackson theme. And how do we make this our camp cabin? And another time it was like dragons. And so, "Don't, breathe fire on each other." And like, it was one of the rules so you can't, you know, troll anybody in this space.

Iris: Hmm-hmmm.

Amberlee: And what were some of the other ones? We did a manifesto!

Iris: Yeah!

[Amberlee laughs]

Iris: I think that when even that there is many different iterations, we always sort of, when we started a new one, we always sort of, had a meeting where we created like, a group vision. And even though it was different every time, we were sort of really accountable, as you said. And like, we sort of set out a plot, or like a plan for this cohesive, collective like week, days, months of activities.

Amberlee: Hmm

Iris: All of them are, even when they were separate, it felt like those separate pockets were all like, very much their own thing in a very strong, potent way.

Amberlee: Wow. Yeah, that's right! I totally forgotten that. So, part of us making that contract as a group was also visioning what we wanted over the time.

Iris: Hmm-hmm.

Amberlee: And how much energy and time we wanted to give to like, each activity or visiting artist or art medium. Yeah... Yeah, I totally forgotten that that was part of what we did. Which was so cool too. Because then it was like everybody got a chance to speak to what they wanted.

Iris: Hmm-hmm. It sort of reminds me when people do like, improv, almost. When they're like, okay, this is our setting, this is our atmosphere, now let's go.

Amberlee: Hmmm.

Iris: I felt like every time we had a different setting, but we were playing with the same cast of characters, so to speak.

Amberlee: Oh, I love it. Yeah, it's so true. And improv was one of our most successful pieces. Like, I remember that one session where we were trying to like, walk across the room.

[Both laugh]

Amberlee: And I think I've got a photo of the victory photo. Of like, [laughs] after everybody had made it across the room. But and it was like just a room with tiles on it, but how everybody made it across the room to the other chair was so good. And it was like trying to help someone sit on the chair or like, get off the chair.

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: And it was so funny. And it was also like, the playing field was like, totally leveled. Like, everybody could just be so silly in that space.

Iris: Hmm-hmm.

Amberlee: And they were all helping each other and just communicating through movement.

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: Oh, I'm trying to think. Like, what are some other highlights for you that you remember kind of over the years?

Iris: I think that for me, my biggest take away in general, is just all the people I had the opportunity to meet.

Amberlee: Hmmm.

Iris: Like, Adele. And like, all these artists that I like, work with now!

Amberlee: Yeah.

Iris: And then I like, in a way, was able to just make connections with people that now like, 10 years later, like helped me get work.

Amberlee: Hmm.

Iris: Stuff like that. I think, like I, it gave me a deeper understanding of the community I live in. Because when I go about my life in town, like I walk somewhere with somebody, like my mother or somebody, anybody really, they'll be something, like a permanent installation where I'm like, "oh! So-and-So made this!" "Oh, that's looks like the work of So-and-So."

Iris: And to see the impact that all these people I've met over the years have had on the community in a way that maybe not everybody has the eye to spot and appreciate, has been really enriching. And I think it helps sort of quell that inner child I mentioned earlier that always looks outwards.

Amberlee: Hmmm.

Iris: Into somewhere else. And it allows me or anybody to appreciate the place that I've spent so much time in.

Amberlee: Oh, my goodness. That's so powerful and so beautifully said. And yeah, thank you. It just that, yeah, it made me like, I'll think of the rolodex of all the wonderful people we had in the group. And the artists like, Adele, who has her bear mural up on Main Street now. And yeah, Fenn, who eventually became my partner, as well, for transparency, I'll say that. But yeah, all of his installations around town and the times that he came in and worked with clay in the group.

Amberlee: Peter and his photography. Sarah and comics. Noella and acting and improv. Oh gosh, who else? There was so many. It was so cool. Rebecca, with music. Corrine came in and filmed. Brendan came in and did writing exercises. We based a whole Antigonaight performance, which is an annual art-after dark festival, we made all these papier mache puppets based on, Anne's story.

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: Oh, my gosh! Those heads freaked me out because I am so terrified of those kind of puppets.

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: Because it was so great.

Iris: And we had that whole like, near like performance-art piece game here at Antigonight. Where we did like, an Alice in Wonderland theme.

Amberlee: Yes.

Iris: Like, life-sized board games.

Amberlee: Oh, that was so fun! And everybody dressed up as different characters. Like, I remember one of the other Thundertalers youth had a sleeping bag that they had tied in different sections.

Iris: Yes, yes!

Amberlee: They looked like the caterpillar.

Iris: Yes!

Amberlee: [laughs] And yeah, and they led people around on these on this tarp with those cards. Oh, that was so fun. And yeah, we did, we participated in, I think, 4 Antigonights.

Iris: Hmm-hmm.

Amberlee: In performances or different ways of supporting it. Which was also really cool. I think that was so awesome that everybody felt confident enough in that group, or at least enjoyed their time enough to participate in community events too. Like, that it wasn't just an insulated group.

Iris: I think as well like, for me, I was such a shy kid. And to like, be, to go into that sort of event, and like be comfortable because the people I had spent so much time getting to know were going to be there. So, it felt like I had the space to be like, "Yeah, I can go, and I can talk to people because they know me! And they'll be happy that I'm there." That was really nice.

Amberlee: Hmm. Oh, that's so lovely. Yeah, I mean, I know I keep saying that I'm just like, it's just so neat to talk about it. Because I also, just as you're speaking and to hear somebody else's perspective. I just, recognizing how much Thundertales meant to me as far as a position, and being somebody new in the community as well. Well, I won't, I won't say as well, but I mean as far as finding my way in the community, because I had all of you as youth to be to be brave for, and to have to put myself out there and ask people to come in for it.

Iris: Hmm-hmm.

Amberlee: It launched me into the community in a way that I never would have been able to do without having the programming and all of your sincere enthusiasm behind it.

Iris: I think it's very interesting to have this conversation, because we experienced it in such different ways, but yet, very similar ways.

Amberlee: Yeah.

Iris: Because for me, it was so awkward with things as I came from, and come from a very like, troubled home. Where I didn't really have support. And the support I found through the group and through you as an individual, and also as someone running the group, was like, completely invaluable to me and my life then and now. And I really cannot imagine what my life would have been like without having that or not, even just emotionally, and through friendship but through just like, my interest.

Iris: I never really had support in the fact that I had, that I liked art. Because it was not really something that people in my family did, or understood, or tried to understand. And to have adults and other people my age, peers encouraging me and telling me "It is okay." And giving you resources to explore that, and like, meeting other creative people who are older than me, was completely and utterly and valuable and enriching. And it was like a, big, glowing light for me going on.

Amberlee: Oh, that's so meaningful to hear. And just, yes! Preach, friend!

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: Like, I feel very similar. Like, I came from a pretty troubled background as a kid and was a musician up until I was 13 or 14, with pretty decent success in in my community. And then, really because life was so unstable, I had to put that a lot of that away. And just felt like I couldn't look at the arts anymore, because I had to be very pragmatic and practical.

Iris: Definitely. Hmm-hmmm.

Amberlee: Make money and stopped, and because so much of my youth was around expressing myself angrily, I just never felt like I had the opportunity outside of youth activities, actually, that I was doing. I was part of an extended kind of use group network that was connected to the Anglican diocese I grew up in. My dad was an Anglican priest until I was about 14 and then he became an atheist. And has since renounced his vows. Which it has also been a very interesting journey, but kind of a side note. But that's how I was connected to youth groups initially. And they saved my life. And they also gave me a place to express myself and to explore my sense of autonomy and agency and leadership.

Amberlee: But yeah, there was still, this deep loss around anything to do with arts-based material, and not feeling like I was an artist, or not understanding, or having a chance to be in that world because it just wasn't available.

Iris: Yeah.

Amberlee: Yeah.

Iris: So much of that is like, very relatable to me. And I think that, one, I as a kid, I always wanted to participate in arts-based things. But they just were not accessible to me. I had always had an interest in dance, which is incredibly expensive.

Amberlee: Hmm-hmm.

Iris: Just like, not even a possibility in the house I grew up in. I always had interest in music too. But again, it's an expensive thing. And even though I was able to participate through school band like, even that, a lot of years I just couldn't do it because it was, I couldn't afford it.

Amberlee: Yeah.

Iris: And even the house I was in, to participate in Thundertales, it was this total shift of me mentioning a creative thing or a thing I was interested in and being met with, "Okay?". Verses participating in the group and being met with, "Oh, really?! Tell me more about that." And even that in itself was just life altering.

Amberlee: Yeah, it it's yeah, I really felt that way about Thundertales too. It was just very much a "Yes/And."

Iris: Yes!

Amberlee: And even yeah, yeah. [laughs] Great principles right from the beginning with that. And yeah, I think, as, you know, the quote unquote leader of the group, I always I always felt very supported by you as a crew as well in that. Because I think it was very much a mutual "Yes/And." Or even you were all so good at articulating, "Yes, but with this boundary."

Iris: Hmmm.

Amberlee: Or "Yes, I'll try it this far, and then we'll see, and let's check in." And I think you, in the group, and you stayed a common thread through the whole Thundertales experience. And then there were, you know, probably 5 others that did, too. And I think you just modeled that so beautifully to me as an adult, or a burgeoning adult. I should say I was, you know, a young adult at the time and just to each other about like, "Yes, I will do that. And this is how far I want to go

with it.” And everybody saying, “That's okay.” Or I’m trying to think of an example. But it just felt so integral.

Iris: Yeah. And I think that part of that, too, is that even though you were the leader of the group, and you were the adult, in a lot of the cases you've been that generally there is like 3, 2 adults there. You being like, the main consistent one. I felt like unlike a camp counselor-type figure or something like that. It never felt like, or like a teacher and student. It never felt like, “You're the teacher, I’m the student. I’m in charge of you.” It always felt like we were a team, and you were the captain.

Iris: Rather than like, it felt like, even though you were the one that was in charge, like I felt like we were on an equal level. It never felt like, “I tell you what to do.” It's like, “I direct us and then move as a unit.” It felt like that. It felt like you were a friend.

Amberlee: Oh.

Iris: Even when I was really young. So, I think that was very important to the dynamics we were able to have. And important to the fact that people felt comfortable telling you like, “Yeah, but.” Or “Yes, and this is the extent to which I will go with that.”

Amberlee: Hmm-hmm. Yeah. And I, as you're saying that I even remember different times when there were different people in the group that were struggling with different aspects of their own mental health. Or and just trying to even say like, I remember there was one person, and they, they'd had a bad day, and they were just, you know, had a lousy attitude. And they were coming in and being really disruptive. And then I think they said, “Well, I can't help it. I've got ADHD.”

Amberlee: And I remember the group being really great about responding to that person. Like, “Well, I have that too, and that doesn't mean I get to be a jerk.” Like it was very much like peer-to-peer in that.

Iris: Hmm-hmm.

Amberlee: Which I thought was also really cool. And I really appreciated that there was a space in that group to do that as well. Because I think, again, me coming in and saying, “Well, that's not good.” I mean, yes, to model that and say, “This behavior isn't acceptable,” as far as treating other people. But the impact that it made, and the safety of the group was made by all of you speaking about your experiences and suggesting how we could go forward as a group still including this person. But holding them accountable to their actions as well.

Iris: Yeah. I think that we were really good at adapting. I think there was a lot of times where one person or the other might have been like, we might have been outside doing something, and “I’m just like not having a good day. But like, I am not unhappy to be here. But I’m just not somebody that maybe you guys want to be around right now, or that I want to be around you. So, I’m going to stay, but I’m gonna sit over here for a little bit and do it solitarily for a bit. Just so I can still

participate, and you can still participate. And we can kind of co-exist in a way that works best for us.”

Amberlee: Yeah.

Iris: I think that even as kids surprisingly, everyone was really understanding that we were all coming from very different places, in many different ways. And I don't know, I felt like even when somebody had a bad day, or maybe they said something that wasn't the nicest. I felt like we always reached a fair or like, satisfactory conclusion where we all kind of reflected on why things went that way.

Amberlee: Hmm-hmm.

Iris: I think that you cultivated a really good environment for that.

Amberlee: Oh, thank you. I, um...yeah, and I mean, I think, I think more and more people of, like, this sounds funny, of your generation, like Gen. Z.

Iris: [Laughs] Yeah.

Amberlee: Have gotten really good at advocating for that. And I was still kind of sad that the last kind of leg of our Thundertales journey, everybody was getting a bit older, all the social media platforms were shifting, everyone was kind of moving to high school, and I was transitioning to a different job. And I just felt like we kind of left some things unfinished with that. And I know that there, you know, there was a group conflict at the end. That was, that was really hard to address. Because I think it was, it was painful. And we weren't, and the group was kind of just starting to float a bit. Go in their own direction.

Iris: Hmm-hmm.

Amberlee: And when you're talking it just made me think of that. And that was kind of, one of my regrets. That we didn't we didn't get to resolve it. And I don't think it hangs over the entire piece. But I think it makes me sad because we were so good at it.

Iris: Hmm-hmm.

Amberlee: And not just like, good, the self-congratulatory good, but like up for the challenge.

Iris: Yeah! I think that it did sort of fizzle at the end. It wasn't like a closed curtain. It kind of just flickered out like a light.

Amberlee: Hmm-hmm.

Iris: Which is not ideal. But I do think, it does for me at least, I can only speak for myself. I look back at the experience and I do... What comes to my mind is the positive, good times. And I don't think that how things ended really changes the entire experience, as what the whole meant to me, me now. But then again, I can talk for myself. But I highly doubt that people have any grudges or negative feelings. I don't think it was so serious.

Amberlee: Yeah, yeah. I felt like those last few things like we could have come back from. But it was also, yeah, I think you're right, it was just kind of this gradual disillusion. And you know, it's interesting, because part of that was just us all going in very different directions. And kind of me really taking on a full-time job at L'Arche at that point and having very inconsistent hours. So, not being able to, you know, make the evenings, and the Alayah Chan [Centre] was starting to shut down at that point, I think. And our funding ran out. And so, it was harder to ask artists at that point to show up, if we couldn't give an honoraria for that. Or contribute their work in a way. And I think we tried to do some things to really focus as a group. To try, and, you know, make projects together. But again, it just, I think, we'd done so many of those things, too.

Iris: Yeah. I think a big part of it, too. Is that, like I said earlier, we were, we are, and we're very different from each other. Like, we have very different interests. And we had these very different personalities. We came from very different sort of socioeconomic senses and places in life, and different houses, and different cultures, even. And as kids, I think it's much easier to make friends with people and to get along and play. And I think that when you get older and you're so different from one another. It's... even though, I still have fondness, and I had fun with them for all those people. It's just like you drift. Because you're different. And that's okay. And I think that is also part of why it [Thundertales] sort of fizzled at the end. Just because we were becoming more fully formed older individuals. And we were very different from each other. And that's totally fine.

Amberlee: Oh, that's so lovely to hear, too. Because I think you know as a somebody going into their forties, I deeply miss my youth group that I had as a teen too. And I appreciate all of them for where they've grown and how they become different people as well. But it's funny the people that stick with you in that time as youth is just so...excuse me, formative. And so deeply embedded in my sense of self and creativity. And then in some ways, to get the privilege to then walk through that with all of you, I think, really launched me back into a sense of feeling creative and inspired. And feeling my own strength and capacity in a way that I hadn't in a long time. And it ended up, me being like, you crew were the motivation for me to go back and do my Master of Social Work. And really look at arts-based community development and kind of find these pieces that connected for me that I'd seen. But then, to just see so embodied through the group and see so much joy in was so, was so monumental to really deeply understanding that. And I think really to be taught by all of you about what it means to be expressing yourself as a young person whose gender queer, or who identifies with different cultures within and without of Nova Scotia. And the gift that you all gave and sharing so openly with that was hugely significant as well.

Iris: Yeah, it was just a space where it was so easy to just be earnest.

Amberlee: Hmmm.

Iris: It was so easy to just be like, “I feel like this. I want to talk about this. I want to share this aspect of my life, that maybe you guys don’t experience.” And I think as children and as you, it’s so easy to be so completely open to joy. And so completely open to creativity and to be silly. I think that when you’re around kids when you get older, that’s so like, it’s amazing the lessons that they can teach you in that way.

Amberlee: Hmm-hmm.

Iris: But it goes both ways when you’re a kid. Because I felt like being in that group, all of us really were shown ways where you can self-advocate. And just like, not have to, you don’t have to react to things a certain way. Like, you can say “No! This is my boundary, and I don’t want to do that.”

Iris: And as a child, in any kind of space, artistic or otherwise, a lot of times that’s like something you don’t know you can do so. Unless someone tells you that you can. Or you can say, “It’s not bad, but I don’t feel comfortable doing that.” I felt like being in Thundertales, because everyone was so respectful with boundaries and so much so, we cultivated this culture of saying, “I’m comfortable,” or “I’m uncomfortable,” or “Let’s all work as a team to make sure everyone’s the most comfortable they can be in the situation.” That in art and in life is a is such a valuable space to be in. To teach those kind of lessons.

Iris: I think it’s really lovely that on both ends of the spectrum, whether it’s like, the sort of mentor of the group or the people participating in it. That there was so much sort of enrichment going on and so much learning.

Amberlee: Yeah. I think you said it. That’s such a great summary of the group. And the feel, I think, for it. And just kind of where our conversation has gone and looking at the time, I’m like oh, that’s so beautiful and such a great place to end. Except for, I was thinking, and I could each do a lightning round of like, highlight of an arts-based activity that we did in the group like one last one.

Iris: Hmm-hmm.

Amberlee: And I want to give you last word. So, I’m going to take the liberty and go first here. And say one of my favorites, and I should say it was kind of like a double fold for me. Once we had Adele show up, and I’d never met her before. And she does quite surrealist art.

Iris: I didn’t even know her before that!

Amberlee: No. I had not met her. Reached out to her via email. The same with Emily and all of those great artists. Yeah, it was all through Thundertales that I met them. Yup.

Iris: Wow.

Amberlee: Every single one. including Fenn.

[Both laugh]

Iris: Oh my gosh!

Amberlee: Yeah. Which is really wild now. Sarah, as well. All of those people that were connected to the art scene. Nancy, Liz, Anne. Who were so essential in getting Thundertales started. Were all so generous and giving in that in that time. And still very much. Still, I mean Arts Health Antigonish is still going. And there's still so many arts-based activities as well. But for me, at that time they were, they were incredibly generous. And continue to be as dear friends now. Including you!

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: Good. Yeah. So, getting back to my, so thinking about Adele's piece. She showed a slide show of her art. And then I remember it happening about a year later with Peter too. And I'll go back to Peter in a sec. But when Adele showed hers, it was like everybody started jumping up and they were all touching the projector screen. And started interpreting her art. And like, finding eyes and finding stories in it. And like, people were like, climbing the projection! They were just so into it.

Amberlee: And then she did a bunch of different drawing activities with us. Which were just wild. And it was so fun. And Adele's whole thing is being wild and putting collages together, kind of putting different body parts, or like, animal pieces or patterns, and it was just so fun to see that all come together, and how she supported that. And everybody just like shouting. You know, like jumping and shouting.

Amberlee: And then the next year Peter came in. And Peter is a very quiet, easy-going man. And I was kinda like, "Oh, I don't know. If he doesn't have..." And it was the same with Adele. She's also very laid back and can be quiet. And I always kinda felt like, "Oh, the group's really like rowdy. Like, what are they gonna be like with these quieter people?" And Peter got in there and started showing us slides of his beautiful photography that he's taken kind of all over Canada. And this was around some icebergs. I think that he'd taken photos of in Newfoundland. And again, it was like people were jumping up and touching.

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: And you know, like, going and talking and yelling. And then eventually he [Peter] got everybody to start setting things up and taking photos in the room. And just said, "Just be in the room and see what you can find and see what stories you can tell." And by the end of the session, he was letting people use his \$20,000 camera.

[Iris laughs]

Amberlee: People were cuddling him. And like draping themselves over, like, wrestling with him. They were like, and you know, like getting right in there with the camera beside his face. Like, they just adored him. I was like, “Oh, my God! Peter could take over this group.”

Amberlee: [Laughs] But it was just so sweet because I think it was again, the people that like, and I mean everybody came in and had a great impact. And I know Fenn comes in and has like totally different energy than that. And gets people excited about building, you know, big clay projects that are like stories across a board, or people, or houses, or wacky things like that. But it was really interesting for me to think about like, flat photos of art eliciting that much energy. Because people just in the group, just loved telling stories. And loved finding stories and sharing those with each other and knowing that they'd be accepted.

Amberlee: And then just how someone like Peter could come in and just build that trust so quickly. Because he was just in the group, and just understood and supported everybody where they were at. And to see, like everybody so physically respond to him was just like a total highlight for me. As well as the freaky heads.

[Both laugh]

Iris: I think that people were able to have that instant trust too because within the group we just all trusted you so much. So, we thought that like, “Oh Amberlee is bringing this person into our group space. So, it'll be okay. And we can be open and creative with this person in this space that we're gonna create together.”

Amberlee: Hmm. Thank you.

Iris: My pick is much different. But it's my favorite memory. I think, just overall when we were a bit older, I think. We would spend those sort of evenings in the Chan Center up top. And you would make tea. And Brendan would read to us. He would read *A Wrinkle in Time*. And we would read chapter-by-chapter we would just draw.

Iris: And I remember like the, I remember the smell of the room. I remember like everyone having their little cups on the table. And I remember drawing. And I remember like, watching over your shoulder while you were drawing in this name. And I also remember how we had up in that space this big, huge bag of fabric clippings. We started making these recycled rugs just like we were all sitting on the floor with no shoes in sock feet, with our little cups of tea sifting through this big blue garbage bag of fabric scraps in this like beautiful, lovely space. There is even like a medication room on the other side that we would sometimes go in.

Iris: And something about that space felt just so safe, and creative, and fun, and magical. And I remember so, it is so, so distinctly because, sitting at the table, sometimes not even drawing, or just listening to everyone else draw. Or peaking at what they were drawing. Kind of just resting my head and listening to the book being read. And that's probably my favorite moment.

Amberlee: Oh, I loved, I loved reading *A Wrinkle in Time*, too. Brendan was so good at that.

Iris: So, so good at it.

Amberlee: What a treat. That's, oh, I'm so glad that you remembered that one. Because I remember having to clear all the fabric out of the closet downstairs. And then the ASAP Artist-Run Centre later on ended up giving me a hard time for that. They called it the "Fire Hazard Closet."

Iris: I remember going down and up the back stairway.

Amberlee: Yes.

Iris: In that old building with like boxes, like all the time.

Amberlee: Yeah.

Iris: I think the walls were green or something like that. And the stairs were all rickety.

Amberlee: Yes, it's true. It's so true. Oh, my gosh! That's so funny! And the robot that we built outside with Stacy.

Iris: Yes, yes! [Laughs]

Amberlee: I can't remember the robot's name. But he lived there for quite a while. And that was very cute.

Iris: We had this, I can't even remember the context, but I remember we had this late-night stint one night outside that building. We were like, making snow art?

Amberlee: Yes.

Iris: And I remember it because I think we were building these like, these really strange, like monsters or something out of snow. And there's a picture of me. I think I was like 12. And I'm just standing there in a jacket that's like 3 sizes too big for me. and I look very sensitive about it.

Amberlee: [Laughs] What I remember about that photo because I definitely have that one, I should send it to you. Was we were trying to use food coloring to dye the snow.

Iris: Yes, yes!

Amberlee: It was kind of working, but not really. And so, we were just joking that it was like totally abstract lines. [Both laugh] And then we went in and had hot chocolate and everybody. But that

was, yeah, that was the joy of it, too. It was just sometimes it was like, “Okay, we're gonna try this big are project and see what we can show the world!” And then it would be like “Oh, that was a complete another fail! Oh well!”

[Both laugh]

Iris: One of my favorites, I think this is a good closing memory. One of my favorite memories was we were supposed to meet. You had some kind of project in the summer once, one year. And I, we were supposed to meet at the library, I think, on the back patio. And I was there, and you were there, and we waited for like 20 minutes. And no one came.

Amberlee: Right.

Iris: And no one had told us they weren't gonna come. So, you like, “You know what Iris? We're gonna go, and we're gonna buy a waffle, and we're gonna split it, whatever.” [laughs]

Iris: So, you and I just had, we just sat down and at sweets together, and that was it. We called it a day.

Amberlee: And that's all that they needed to be. It was so good.

Iris: Exactly! And then next week we carried on. [laughs]

Amberlee: We did. Yeah, made lots of buttons and did lots of other good things for the community. It's true.

[Both laugh]

Amberlee: Well, thank you so much for joining me in this conversation, Iris. I'm sure it's a treat for *Arts Health Antigonish* supporters to hear it. And just such a treat to be able to reflect on that time with you too. And still be friends through it.

Iris: Hmm-hmmm.

Amberlee: And so, I think we'll conclude there and say thank you to our audience. And wish our tell *Arts Health Antigonish* a happy 10-year anniversary. Happy 10-year birthday. And I will be seeing you soon, I'm sure to split more sweets over Antigonight planning. We both continued. [Laughs]

Iris: I hope so!

Amberlee: Alright. Thank you, Iris.

Iris: My pleasure.

Amberlee: Take care.

Iris: You too.

End.