



Remarks by Kris Rodolico, Follow Your Art Community Studios Founder and Executive Director, on the occasion of FYACS' 5th Birthday Celebration and Fundraiser
June 7, 2024

Thank you to current and former board members, many of whom are here tonight, thank you to the incredible Big Yellow House staff who are also here tonight

Thank you to The Kitchen, Sweet and Spices by Glo, and Sips with Liv for taking care of us tonight, to all of the people who have been working tirelessly to make this evening so special.

Thank you to The Peanut Gallery, to Rilda, Kerry, and Sheri for sharing their stories, thank you to the Artists who donated their work in the auction, thank you to Chris Robinson for tying things together, and thanks in advance to the generous and talented Mark Erelli!

I'd also like to thank Tony Colella, Kellscraft Construction, Matt Roman, and our volunteer garden team led by Austin Frakt, as well as all the brick donors (it's not too late!).

So. Many. People. To Thank. And with good reason. Building this kind of community resource requires people who care about it and want it to succeed enough to get involved, in big and small ways.

Those of us who basically live at the BYH often hear some version of the following from our community. Folks say "I think what you're doing is great, but I am not an artist." These are fighting words for the FYA team, because we are stewards of a culture that honors the artist in everyone.

But I'll tell you, over the last 5 years, I've come to think about this a little differently.

I don't want to convince you that you are an artist. I want to talk about what it means to be creative. It is my favorite word, because a multiverse lives inside it.

In my life, creativity has taken many forms- drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, singing, cooking, *parenting*, friendship bracelets, decorating shoes – each creative outlet fits a need in a moment in time.

That's what creatives do, in essence: we make things up. We put something in the world that wasn't there before. And everyone, EVERYONE has the capacity to create.

So tell me you are not an artist, you are not a musician, you are not a writer. It's a valid feeling, especially if you haven't learned the skills, been taught to use the tools, or engaged in the hours of practice required to hone an artform. But tell me you are not creative? I will challenge that, and I will work with you to find an outlet for that creativity.

The last 5 years have taught me that the best creative work is collaborative. That's why I show up to The Big Yellow House each day. I create connections and collaborations to make space for others to be creative. That's my commitment to this community. I feel like I'm just beginning to get the hang of it.

It's hard to explain succinctly what all had to happen in order for The Big Yellow House to exist, so I'm not going to try. This is a magical place, but *becoming a magical place is not magic*. It takes a lot of intentional big and small actions.

It took Austin telling me to call Michael McCormack to "get his advice" when I came home and said "I found a home for an arts center." It took the trust of the Brincheiro and McCormack/Christopher families that somehow investing in The Big Yellow House was a good idea.

It took the intelligence, humor and grace of the founding board members, bringing ideas that I didn't have and skills sets I lack in abundance to form the rough outline of what the BYH could be. I am incredibly excited to work with the current board on the next chapter.

It took the infinite energy and imaginations of our staff, both those who have moved on but left their indelible mark, and the current team which is collectively the hardest working, most creative, flexible and passionate group of people I have ever met.

It took Chiara, our graphic novel teacher turned Program Manager. Chiara needs her own section in this speech, but I'm pretty sure that's all I am allowed to say without making a mess of both of us or her quitting.

And it's going to take all of you.

The Big Yellow House has one origin story that refracts into a rainbow of stories belonging to many people. You may have heard my version because the story of FYA and the story of my life are so intertwined that by default my story becomes the narrative.

So tonight I'm asking you to get another perspective: Ask the staff, past and present, what the Big Yellow House is all about. Ask the artists and writers who use these rooms as incubators for their creative expression.

Ask our small friends who come through the doors to use scissors and glue, paint and clay to improvise worlds of their own. Ask their grown ups what it is about The Big Yellow House that returns their children to them full of acceptance and creative fire that spills into the rest of their lives.

Ask yourself, what do you want to create in your community? How do you want to be a part of this place? Because I promise you, there is a place for you here.

We are Building Creative Community. That's more than a tagline, it's as close as we get to a creed. But now we are going to flip it on its head, because the Community Creates this Building.

That's why we're here. The funds raised today are helping Follow Your Art Community Studios take ownership of The Big Yellow House. It's going to take some time, but that's okay, because we're not going anywhere. We're starting tonight to lay the foundation for the next 50 years. Maybe, *maybe* by then I'll be ready to find another creative outlet.

And with that, I'd like to introduce our final act of the night. I learned today that Mark and I share something in common - we are both turning 50 imminently, so Mark, Happy Birthday to you!

Mark has been writing and performing songs for over 25 years and has a rich, varied and gorgeous body of work both solo and collaborative and I won't do it justice and you need to just go to his website and learn all you can.

But this is what I will say here: every time I have reached out to Mark on behalf of The Big Yellow House – for advice on hosting music, for thoughts on building a community space, for sound equipment and expertise, and to donate his talent – he has said yes. I am so grateful for his generosity, and that he is our back door neighbor.

June 7, 2024