

Carlisle Family

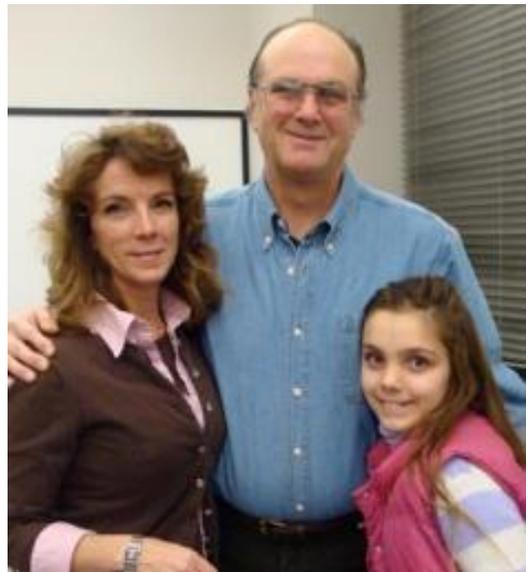
I like tactile learning and from an early age it was obvious that if you could involve children in that process then they are going to benefit from the experience. There were times when Kelly did not necessarily connect the dots between an exhibit versus application in Martin ArtQuest, but we could leave Martin ArtQuest and go back to the gallery and we could make those connections. –Joy Carlisle

Joy and Kelly Carlisle made their first visit to the Frist Center for the Visual Arts the weekend it opened in 2001. Joy recalls that she and her daughter, Kelly (around one year old at the time), sat and made little fashion and paper dolls together. A native Nashvillian, Joy noted that she visited the Frist Center because it was “big news” and that she was sure it would be a “positive influence in the community.” Joy also recalled that after their first visit to the museum that day, she “knew that the Frist would be part of Kelly’s life, but didn’t realize it would be AS big a part of her life as it has been.”

Joy describes herself and her husband, Bill, as “art appreciators.” Some of Joy’s most enjoyable outings are visits to art museums and other cultural institutes. Joy explains that while Bill appreciates art and often reads to Kelly about art history and the influence of art, he is less interested in the “hands-on” part of the experience. She added that “while Bill will help and applaud Kelly to develop that part of her education, it is typically just she and I” that visit cultural sites like the Frist Center. This sentiment is repeated during the family’s first accompanied visit to the Frist Center when Joy says that Bill tends to stay in the café when she and Kelly visit Martin ArtQuest. Bill confirms this pattern of visitation, saying: “generally I have work to do, so, I go into the café, grab a coffee, and work on the PC until they are done. I would not do that if they did not come as often, but I have to do some work.”

Bill does display many art-related talents, including playing music and experimenting by “playing around with things and turning them into something else.” On several occasions, Joy mentioned that Kelly is very much like Bill in her ability to experiment and think creatively. As a homeschooling parent, Joy explained how she feels that traditional schooling limits self-expression and exposure to varying paths. Kelly, now ten years old, participates in many art-related activities, including drawing and sketching. She also has an interest in architecture and is considering it as a career. Outside of the arts, Kelly also participates in diving and soccer. Activities that the Carlisle family enjoys doing together include taking long walks and generally spending time together as a family.

For this study, the Carlisle family made three accompanied visits to the Frist Center and three to like sites: one to Cheekwood Botanical Garden & Museum of Art and two to the Parthenon



Carlisle Family (from left): Joy, Bill, and Kelly.

in Centennial Park. During their three visits to the Frist Center, the Carlisle family followed the same visit pattern: exhibitions first and Martin ArtQuest last. On the first visit, Bill joined Joy and Kelly. The second and third visits more closely resembled what Joy described as a typical visit, with only she and Kelly being present. Similarly, Bill did not accompany Joy and Kelly on any of the like-site visits. Joy and Kelly's motivation for visiting Cheekwood was partly due to its location (close to their home) and the weather that day (which was great), but mostly it was due to Kelly's interest in the site. Joy explained: "you want a happy student so you have to pick your major directions and give some flexibility." Location and interest were also motivators for the family visits to the Parthenon. In addition, Joy viewed the Parthenon as a great field trip, as it supported Kelly's studies in Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, and Modern art and history. Important to note is that all the off-site venues included art spaces where art was either on display or created within an environment.

Visits to the Frist Center for the Visual Arts Galleries

When both Joy and Bill were present on the first visit, the family only looked at the first artwork together before splitting up and wandering off in their own directions, spending a few seconds at each artwork before moving on. Not much conversation took place between the family during this visit, although they smiled at each other and exuded an overall sense of well-being and comfort with what they were doing. When they did speak to each other, they almost always did so in whispers. On other visits, when just Kelly and Joy were present, the two tended to stay more closely together; although, there were still times when they viewed artworks on their own. Both mother and daughter read the labels, often doing so aloud so that the other person could hear. Joy and Kelly engaged in frequent dialogues and conversations about the artwork on all visits. Overall, the conversations were very back and forth, with each person asking and answering questions and moving the conversation forward. At all times, Joy displayed a great deal of nurturing towards Kelly, asking questions that would enable her to work independently. The bond between the mother and daughter always seemed very tight, natural, and organic.

Visits to Martin ArtQuest

While in Martin ArtQuest, Kelly tended to focus on anywhere from two to four stations during a visit. Sometimes she worked alone while Joy (and Bill on one occasion) observed, and at other times the family worked together on an activity. While creating artwork, the family tended to work quietly, with Kelly sometimes humming or talking quietly. On a few occasions, Joy sat and read quietly while Kelly created her artwork. Kelly and Joy also enjoyed conversing with the staff in Martin ArtQuest, as the staff always remembered them and would comment on Kelly's development. A lot of warmth was shown to the Carlisle family, and Joy often spent time talking with staff while Kelly created her artwork. Joy thinks the link with staff is important in creating a sense of well-being and security in the environment as well as having staff offer advice and support in creating the art.

Visits to Like Sites

During their off-site visits, Kelly always brought a journal or notebook of some sort and used it to write notes, draw pictures, and generate discussions about her learning. Kelly and Joy walked around the off-site venues together reading labels or texts out loud to each other. They often exchanged questions about the text and linked what they were reading with what they were

seeing. Similar to their behavior in the Frist galleries, there were times when Kelly and Joy would split and observe works of art on their own. In an instance when the two charted their own, individual paths through a sculpture garden, Joy explained how they had seen the sculptures several times and that they already “knew each others’ thoughts of the work.” Similar to their patterns in Martin ArtQuest, when Kelly engaged with an interactive exhibit at Cheekwood, Joy sat back and observed, offering support and guidance when needed.

Overall, like their visits to the Frist, there was an organic naturalness between Joy and Kelly as they explored each like site. The family appeared interested and engaged, often expressing wonderment and excitement about what they were seeing. Humor also played a key role in their visits; the two frequently shared stories about their life experiences, which were often triggered by what they were seeing. Kelly and Joy often approached what they were doing as if discovering something for the first time.

Although Joy and Kelly did spend the majority of their time together while at the off-site venues, there was a strong sense of Kelly’s independent nature and spirit. In addition, Bill was never far away from their thoughts during these visits. Kelly and Joy often pointed out objects and talked about what Bill would say and seemed genuinely excited about sharing or recounting their experience with him back at home.

Motivation & Values

In talking about their motivation for visiting the Frist Center and Martin ArtQuest, Kelly and Joy emphasized the hands-on nature of the learning and how that type of learning creates an “opportunity to hook [children] on the next level of learning.” Joy also referred to Martin ArtQuest as being a “bargaining chip or carrot” that gets children into the galleries. During their first visit to the Frist Center for this project, Bill and Joy explained that Martin ArtQuest “is a great place for recreation and learning” and that “sometimes [Kelly] gains both and sometimes just one element.” Bill also added: “that does not bother me; I don’t want to push her.”

When asked what they enjoyed most about their visits to the Frist Center during the study, Kelly said she enjoyed the watercolors and some of the exhibition artwork, including the Mark Twain/Thomas Hart Benton Illustrations and the *Carnival of Autumn: M. Hartley* painting. Joy hypothesized that Kelly was more interested in the *Georgia O’Keefe and Her Times* exhibition because it was “kid friendly.”

Shared Characteristics—Art Museum & Like Sites

As a homeschooling family, Joy views off-site visits as field-trips that enhance and inform Kelly’s learning on every level (aesthetically, conceptually, visually, factually, and practically). She explained: “We homeschoolers do not have the same field-trip opportunities, but we have them more frequently.” Joy was very conscious of nurturing Kelly’s continuous learning by presenting environments that translated the learning from textbook reading into tangible experiences.

Joy thought the similarities between the Frist Center and the off-site venues were the types of exhibits themselves. Joy felt the off-site visits lacked the Martin ArtQuest environment and while

having journals and note books helped, Joy perceived that sitting down and having hands-on activities that are guided, as in Martin ArtQuest, better “supports the learning gained from the exhibition and allows for the creative juices generated in the exhibition spaces to flow freely.”

Connections & Effect of Participation in the Study

As homeschoolers, visits to cultural sites such as the Frist Center and the other like-site venues fit squarely within the Carlises’ larger learning agenda. As mentioned, Joy refers to these visits as “field trips,” often incorporating different subjects and lessons and connecting the experience with other, more “formal” learning experiences.

For example, between the Carlises’ visit to the Parthenon and their visit to the Frist Center, Kelly spent time revisiting books she had on Greek mythology. Later, at the same time they viewed the Mark Twain illustrations, Kelly was also reading Tom Sawyer. Kelly explained how linking what is read in textbooks or literature with real experiences “opens up fabulous lines of historical perspective and connections in space and time.”

During a discussion on the way home from visit 3, Kelley talked about Martin ArtQuest. She talked about the painting she had done and said that she was sorry she could not do everything in the space but was glad she had something to look forward to when the family goes back next.

When looking at the benefits of participating in the study, Kelly said one of the main highlights was having the opportunity to spend time talking with the research assistant. Joy and Kelly both mentioned spending time with the researcher was an exciting addition to their normal visits. Conversations between the family and the researcher ranged from discussions about the artwork they were creating in Martin ArtQuest to casual conversations about their daily life and other experiences the family had between visits.

VISIT PATTERNS

	Frist Center for the Visual Arts	Like Sites
Average time spent	73 minutes (Entire visit) 41 minutes (Martin ArtQuest)	110 minutes
Timing of visits	Visit on weekdays during the afternoon, roughly 12:30-3:30 pm.	All visits on weekdays with first and second taking place on Tuesdays and the third on a Friday. All visits started mid to late morning into the afternoon.
Order of visits	On each visit, the family viewed art in the galleries first and then ended their visit in Martin ArtQuest. Bill attended the first visit but was not able to make the second or third visits.	Bill was not able to attend any of the off-site visits. Two of the visits were at the same site (the Parthenon) because during the first visit to the site the building was closed for a video shoot. However, the main doors to the building were open, allowing the family time to observe the interior of the building from a very different perspective.

Snapshot

THREE VISITS TO THE FRIST CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

Visit 1

No photograph available

January 2009
1 hour 5 min.
Paint Made Flesh

Visit 2



June 2009
1 hour 25 min.
Museums in the 21st Century

Visit 3



October 2010
1 hour 10 min.
Georgia O'Keeffe and Her Times

THREE VISITS TO LIKE SITES

Cheekwood Botanical Garden & Museum of Art



April 2009

Parthenon, Centennial Park



June 2009

Parthenon, Centennial Park



October 2009