

Social Soles

Interview by Faith Bennett



The Social Soles interview series is based on the saying, “You don’t really know someone until you have walked in his shoes.” We thought it would be interesting to begin each interview asking our guest to bring a pair of shoes that are significant to him. They can be the pair he wore when he graduated with a degree in engineering, the pair he wore when he created his first public painting, the pair he wore when he left the career he studied for – for a career he is passionate about, . . . What shoes will he bring?

We associate shoes with memories: good and bad. This question steers the path of our conversation. This route will show us a side not always seen in the one we are talking with. A more personal side. We are excited to see in which direction we are lead – by the choice in footwear and the memories stirred. Come. Let’s take a walk . . .

August is all about getting outside. We thought it would be cool to feature a street artist who we could get to know through interview, and then list his street art locations for readers to take a day, weekend or more to visit them all, getting to know the artist on another level. The artist of choice is Jeremy Raymer, Street Artist and Muralist.

SBM: What shoes have you chosen to share with us today?

Jeremy: (Pulls out a red pair of high tops) The shoes are Vision Street Wear, they were a Skater Brand. They re-released them a year or two ago. The announcement popped up on my Amazon Prime Feed. It brought back really fond memories. I had them back when I was in fifth grade when the skating culture was becoming big. I can remember vividly getting these same red ones, and I really loved them, I had those

and a pair of Skidz pants back then. When I saw the shoes in my feed, my birthday wasn’t far off, so I decided to get them for myself as a birthday present.

SBM: (Awe) So, you paint in them?

Jeremy: (Smiling) Yeah, I do.

SBM: So you don’t have “paint” clothes and shoes and “non-paint” clothes and shoes?

Jeremy: No. Not really. Not anymore. Pretty much everything I have, ends up with paint on it.

SBM: (You wear your heart on your sleeve, then, so to speak . . . and on your back, legs, . . .) So what kind of memories do the shoes stir?

Jeremy: Good memories, for sure. One Easter I got: the shoes, the Skidz pants, a neon orange skateboard, and deck tape - and I remember going out with my friends down to Elizabeth Forward School in Elizabeth, and being really happy, because my friends got their skater gear earlier than I did, and I was then able to hang, with my new gear.

SBM: Did you paint back then? Like skater graffiti?

Jeremy: We lived in a nice area, and we weren’t seen as a nuisance, so no graffiti. The very first memory I have of painting interest - you might find surprising - it was watching Bob Ross at my Grandma’s house. I also remember my Mom painting with stencils for people who renovated older homes. She was always artistic and creative. I grabbed those and played around, nothing serious. I always liked drawing, but never got serious early on.

SBM: (Giggling; No offence to Mr. Ross, but he wouldn’t have been my first guess as an influencer for street art!) So, how did you get to what you are doing today?

Jeremy: This May 6, I actually resigned from Westinghouse, where I was an engineer. So “doing this” full on, is pretty fresh, although I’ve been painting, while keeping my day job for years.

SBM: Were you nervous about leaving something as stable as engineering for art?

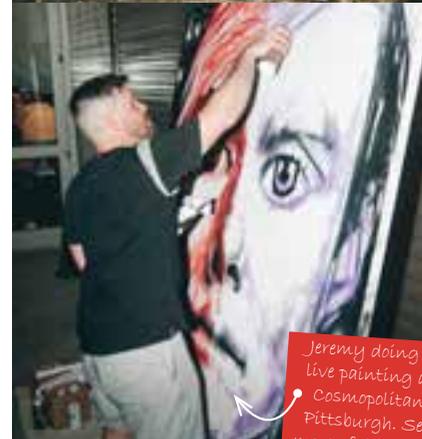
Jeremy: Not really. I was so ready for it. I did think about it a lot. I had my annual review in April, and up until 5 minutes before I went in, I wasn’t 100% sure I was going to go through with it, but when I realized during that meeting, that a big project wouldn’t allow me ANY time for painting for quite a while, I had to do it. I gave my notice and finished there in May.

SBM: So you didn’t paint early on in life, you dabbled in art, you had a successful career as an engineer, while painting on the side, and now you are no longer a practicing engineer, but a busy, sought after muralist and street artist, how did all of this evolve?

Jeremy: I always liked to draw, but my first classes came when I took four art elective classes, while studying bio (chemical) engineering. They were very technical, and didn’t feed my hunger, but one of my drawing teachers took notice and told me that I drew like a painter. He told me I should take another class. I did and liked it.

SBM: And that was it? You found your passion?

Jeremy: I did, but I wasn’t ready to drop the day job. For a short time, I took a position as a thermo physical engineer in Penn Hills. After 6 months I resigned, not able to do anything creative. I moved to California with my dad to a small coastal town called Bolinas in Marin County California, above Stinson Beach, in Mill Valley outside of San Francisco, an old school hippie town - nothing to do, so I took out my paints and started painting in public.



Been painting ever since. Now the live painting is a mainstay for me, creating in front of people.

SBM: After Bolinas, you returned to the Burgh?

Jeremy: Not right away, after Bolinas I stayed in Cali, but moved to the Upper Haight District, two blocks from the Haight Ashbury intersection where Waller and Belvedere cross. There was a Soup Kitchen right there and I always had a captive audience. I would run an extension cord from my window to play music and I’d get busy painting my canvases right there, out on the side walk.

SBM: They are some pretty cool memories.

Jeremy: Yeah . . . it’s taking me back, talking about it.

SBM: What made you start to paint in front of others?

Jeremy: I saw a guy do it once, and I saw how people responded to it. How I responded to it. So, I wanted to try it. When I moved back this way, I went to Pitt for more engineering classes, and I started painting on campus, then on Mt Washington, over by The Phipps Extension in Shadyside - with oils at first. It was fun seeing the reactions as people witnessed the process. Studio is nice too, but . . .

SBM: And it keeps you social!

Jeremy: Yes it certainly does! Every time I’m out, I make more connections, get more commissions. Get more exposure.

SBM: As a live artist/painter. Observers get a performance. They get to witness the process and see a finished piece. That’s pretty awesome.

Jeremy: I think so too.

SBM: You mentioned that you began painting with oils, when did you start using spray paint?

Jeremy: It all started with a visit to Florida to see my sister. She lived in the West Palm Beach area and we visited a place called Wynwood Walls, outside of Miami. My understanding of the place was that a realtor brought in street artists to create murals and to bring back vibrancy to the area, which had great geographical location, but had been forgotten and had become run down. The area features huge street murals from all over the world. From there, life starting happening again. There is a pretty big festival every year.

(TheWynwoodWalls.com) I saw that art work. Felt moved to try it.

SBM: And you brought your love to the Burgh?

Jeremy: I wanted to do large scale and starting looking around while bike riding. Pittsburgh didn’t have much of a street art scene yet . . . art brings impact when it’s so large scale. Spray paint is what is needed for such large spaces.

SBM: Did it feel different? From oil to spray paint . . .

Jeremy: Yes . . . my engineering came in handy to help me to understand the tips and pressure types. My first live spray paint was for a Gallery Crawl. There was definitely a learning curve. My skills developed

while learning the tool, pressure ratings, different cap types, experimenting with different pressure types for different looks. Leaving my day job, I have time to practice.

SBM: How do you choose subjects?

Jeremy: Depends on the project, if it’s commission, free reign, . . . My personal preference is combining my art with my knowledge as an engineer, and painting innovators, people, whose stories I admire. I like classic beauties of the big screen, too.

SBM: Do you think in themes when you’re live painting is for an event?

Jeremy: I definitely try to incorporate a theme, for context. I did birds in Allentown because birds make it work where ever they end up. They can live anywhere. They rebuild, when needed. It was pretty cool too, because there were birds’ nests all above where I was painting, and they were in and out, doing what they needed to get done while I was painting. Seemed very symbolic.

SBM: What do you think about people who paint on other people’s property?

Jeremy: Its grey space to me. I am an investor of property and I am also a painter who knows that there is some good work out there. It’s tricky. I guess I would say my way of gauging if somewhere is okay to paint, is to ask: Does it add to the community? And I always feel that permission should be sought, if possible.

SBM: Have you ever graffitied (is that a verb?) and gotten in trouble?

Jeremy: Yeah. But kind of by mistake. I painted my sidewalk in Lawrenceville. I painted a herd of buffalo. Everyone loved them, but one person complained. I got a violation, so I had to comply. The graffiti task force cleaned it and I wasn’t fined. Having a purpose and beautifying an area is always my goal.

SBM: What is your favorite color?

Jeremy: Blacks, whites, sepias, purple tones when I’m painting the classic beauties. More color when I’m doing animals. It depends on the content. I FEEL color as much as I SEE it. It has to FEEL right.

SBM: If you could walk in anyone’s shoes, whose would they be?

Jeremy: He’s not so much an artistic influence, but Nikola Tesla. I painted him for the Cultural Trust. He lived in Pittsburgh for a short time and worked on things with Westinghouse. His mind was amazing. He fascinates me. He had ambition, and I feel that kind of drive.

SBM: If your shoes could talk, what would they say?

Jeremy: They would say: Jeremy is going places . . . He is motivated . . . Jeremy goes after what he wants . . .

To follow **Jeremy Raymer**, find him on **Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Vimeo**

Social Soles

Plan your Street Art Crawl!

Jeremy Raymer Style

Jeremy's murals can be found throughout the city of Pittsburgh. He also regularly does live paintings at events.

HERE'S WHERE WE WENT ON OUR DAY TRIP:

- 1.) 2314 East Carson St, Southside - Rear courtyard Cupka's Cafe
- 2.) Wholeys Strip District - Squid
- 3, 4.) Food truck next to Pgh Sports - Edie Sedgwick
- 5, 6.) 27th and Penn Blumengarten - Gene Tierney with Floating Roses
- 7.) 35th and Charlotte - my Lawrenceville House, front and side and fence covered.
- 8 - 14.) Warehouse at 35th and Charlotte, side and alley covered with 6 pieces. Anything to the left of Yoda was done by my brother when I was giving him a spray paint lesson.
- 15 - 19.) Butler St between 35th and 36th - Courtyard next to Sapling Press, 4 large Murals
- 20.) Approximatley 178 42nd (Can't remember exact address) St, Stephen foster on brick sidewall of residence.
- 21, 22.) Dresden Way at 51st (4 or 5 houses in) - I painted the front stoop pink and powder blue, and on the wall that wraps around, Warhol on Chimney
- 23 - 26.) My house 2042 Tustin St, Uptown has several pieces on it.

BUT THERE ARE MORE, AND THE LIST IS GROWING!

- 829 Industry Way, Allentown - Bird on garage door
- Voodoo brewery east 9th Ave, homestead Tesla on the ceiling
- Stout Training on 17th (right next to Wholeys) Lions Roaring mural and also 3 Pink Elephants mural
- Pgh Sports on Penn ave near 18th Sidney Crosby and Troy Polamalu on rolling garage doors (only visible when closed)
- Rolling garage door of Mo Gear and rolling garage door of Wolfpack electronics, on Penn near highland, right by your offices. Again visible only when closed.

