



# Heather Rogers **Doodler** **Extraordinaire!**

BY JENNA CAPUTO  
PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY HEATHER ROGERS

When you talk to Heather Rogers, the first word that comes to mind is “energy.” She’s upbeat, passionate and wants to make a difference, but her positive energy also shows in her artwork. The energy flows in every line, every color, even in the wording of every fact. For most of us, doodling means little squiggly lines on the side of the notebook while working on something else. When Heather doodles, it’s art!

Born right here in Niskayuna, Heather lived in Schenectady until first grade when her family moved to Galway where her dad built a log cabin. Heather always liked drawing, but when it came time for college, she picked graphic design. “I never looked back!” she says.

Since earning her BFA, Heather has been a part of several communications and marketing teams. It has been a challenging and rewarding career, offering her opportunities to create and problem solve with colleagues who make her laugh in a thought-provoking atmosphere that has ideas ricocheting around her head each and every day. To contrast the constant collaboration, Heather needed a side project that would allow her creativity to just flow without too much thought or expectation. The answer, oddly, started on a playground.

“In the early 2000s, I realized how little I knew about our presidents. On a whim, I decided to read a biography about each. When my son, Miles (now 9), was in kindergarten, I chatted with a dad I’d just met on the playground and mentioned my goal. He asked a simple question – but my recall on what I’d read was terrible and I was kind of embarrassed that I didn’t have a profound answer. A perfect storm of inspiration struck around that time. I went to a design conference and attended a few talks about the importance of a personal project. I went to a



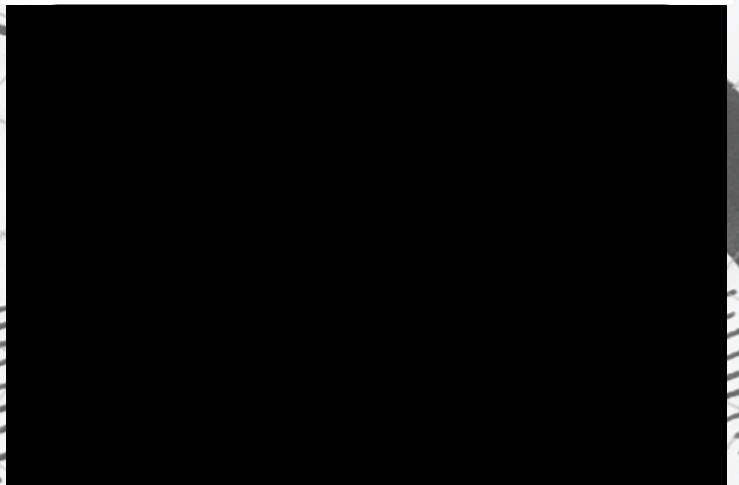
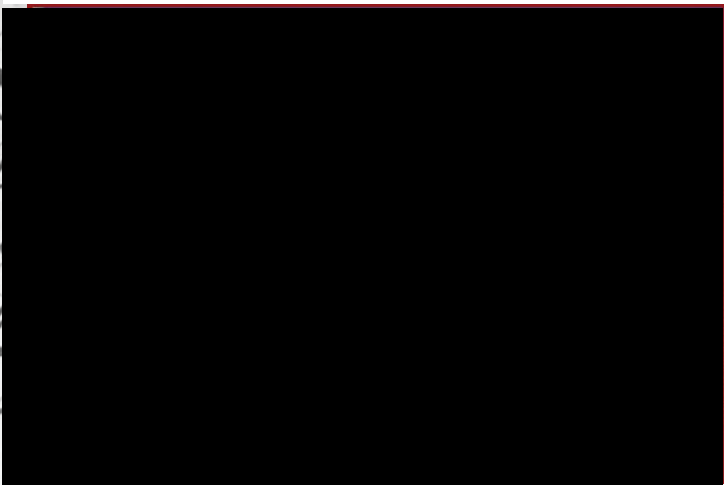


She began keeping a sketchbook, making notes and drawings as she read about each president. "I make a conscious effort not to be precious – no pencil! No preplanning spreads. I just wing it," she says. She started to notice themes and patterns. She retained more of the information she read. "I spew out my POTUS trivia bombs unapologetically on a regular basis," she jokes. "It also comes in handy during our Pandemic Trivial Pursuit game we now play with friends every Sunday evening over Zoom. The first ever Medicare card? It went to Harry S. Truman!"

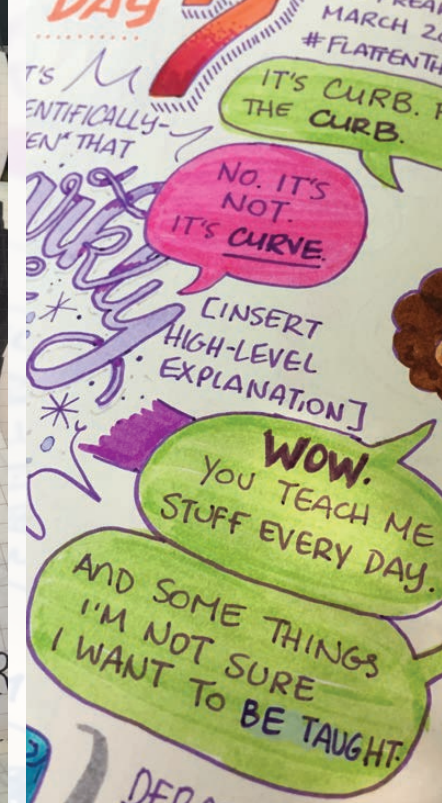
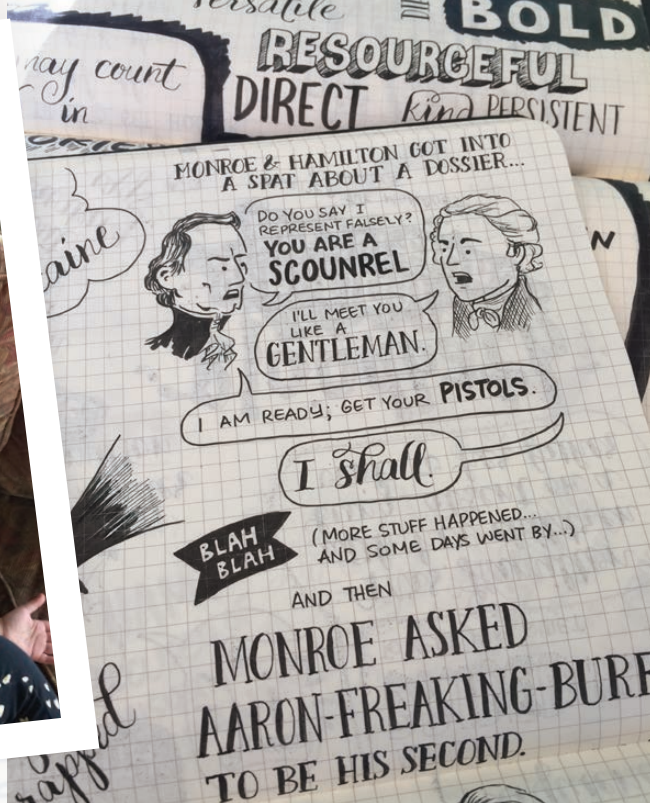
The side project became a mission that continues to grow. A few

As the pandemic hit and she found herself with more time on her hands, Heather's side projects took off. She is now on the 40th president out of 44 (yes, 44 *different* presidents, not 45, because Grover Cleveland actually served non-consecutive terms). Along the way, she documents the facts she finds interesting, which often tends not to be the sophisticated and cerebral stuff one might learn in history class. "I focus on what makes them human," she says.

She's also designing related novelty materials as well. "Instead of spending money on gas, clothes and going out, I've been splurging on various presidential giveaways. I designed presidential packing tape, a few different stamps and stickers. I bought tons of envelopes and markers. To stay connected, I've been sending a lot of mail. I ordered 250 stickers with election-themed doodles and I mail them to whoever raises their hand on social media in fancy presidential-themed envelopes," she says.







As she continues her research, she has learned to question the things she had learned previously. "History is so nuanced, and we take for granted that what we are taught is true or the full story. It's so much more than that. Somewhere in my sketchbooks I jotted down an insight I'd read that often the truth is in what is *not* written – the portions that historians or biographers make a choice not to document."



Her obsession with presidents has passed on to her daughter, Isla (6), as well. Isla's favorite president is Teddy Roosevelt because "he had an owl and a handsome mustache." She even requested Teddy Roosevelt themed birthday parties two years in row! Heather, however, feels that he is overblown into a mythical being.

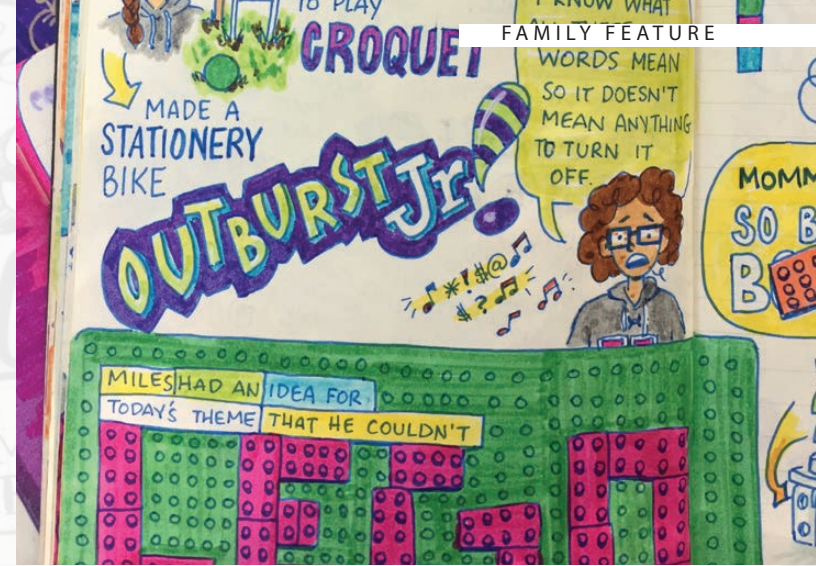
Heather's favorite president is Barack Obama because she felt safe when he was in office and feels that he truly cares about our country, but President Hoover is the one she finds the most fascinating. Hoover made many suggestions that could have helped avoid the Great Depression, but most of these were ignored.

"I think he got a bad rap," she explains. "Americans, if we think of him at all, tend to associate him with the Great Depression and blame him for it. I think that's both undeserved and also only shows a tiny sliver, negating his many contributions and achievements. After he and his wife, Lou, graduated from Stanford as geologists, they traveled the world. (Lou was the first female geology major to graduate from Stanford!) They survived the Boxer Rebellion in China, counting 2,000 dead bodies floating down the river. Through his worldwide humanitarian efforts throughout his career, he was credited with saving more people than anyone else in history. He and another official took control of the 1919 Typhus outbreak, when 100,000 people died every week during the peak. Within 6 months, it was under control. The people of Finland coined a word in his honor – 'Huuvere.' It meant 'charity' and 'loving all men as brothers.'"

In addition to her presidential research, Heather keeps a COVID journal. Not only has it been cathartic, but it's a way to stay connected to others as well. "I started it to keep me busy and keep my mind occupied. Partially to document things, partially to feel connected. I share it on social media every day. It also gives me something positive to focus on. Even on the worst or scariest days, I can see that we'd had fun doing whatever. And as the days of doing the same limited things over and over seem to feel a bit monotonous, my journals show the special moments. The funny things the kids said make me laugh whenever I go back and flip through! The phases of quarantine are captured."

With both of her doodle projects, Heather makes it a point to just let it free flow – it's all part of the process. "What I love about my side projects is that it's just me," she says. "I don't try to be perfect. Nothing is precious. My work is riddled with errors. Most of the time, I purposely don't use pencil because I just want to be quick. So, my presidential faces may be too smooshed or distorted. My lettering is not perfect. I constantly run out of room. But that's not the point. I like that I can be fast and move on."





They've been going on a lot of bike rides lately, often to the Rose Garden or Blatnick Park. It has been a fun way for them to get out and about.

Pre-pandemic, Heather often organized "Giant Hillside Playdates." She'd scribble and text out a quick flyer, and everyone would come to the playground with food to share. "It was a great opportunity to get to know some new people and catch up with friends while the kids all played. I miss this so much!" she says. "The playground was such a great place to connect."

For the past 10 years, she has also been active with the American Heart Association Heart Walk and served in various capacities from team captain to the executive leadership team. She's even used her presidential project to fundraise for the cause.

When she's not working or playing with the kids, she's exercising, reading, listening to podcasts or enjoying date nights with her husband, which right now is just takeout after the kids go to bed.

Her wish for the future is that we can "feel like we're not trapped in the 1800s, in terms of race relations. To feel safe and know my kids are safe. To be able to hug people again and gather in groups. And lots and lots of time to doodle!"

After all her research, she has learned so much, including the ability to see trends and patterns. With this experience in mind, she has one message for the community – "Be sure to vote. We *can* do better!"

To see Heather's submission to *The Sketchbook Project*, visit <https://www.sketchbookproject.com/library/S247006>. Follow Heather on Instagram at @project\_potus\_pages to see her journal postings.

Family is important to her. In fact, that's what drew her to her husband, Robert, who she met at her first post-college job at First Albany Capital, an investment bank. "I was a graphic designer in the marketing department, and so painfully shy I would rarely turn away from my computer monitor. Anytime he came into our area, I got so sweaty and nervous. A colleague joked that he was a "player," so it never occurred to me that we'd end up dating, let alone be together for more than 20 years! I met Robert's son, Isaiah (now 23), when he was 2 ½ and Robert brought him into the office. Seeing Robert as a dad was awesome. I think that's part of what attracted me to him. I had no idea he was into me – we went out to eat and to the movies several times before I had any idea he liked me. As amazing as Robert was, I think Isaiah was the selling point. I had so much fun getting to know him. It's unreal that that little curly-headed toddler is now a fully-grown adult!"

Her kids love to play Lego. And yes, Miles stresses it's *Lego*, not Legos. They also enjoy bike rides, climbing their chin-up bar at the top of the door jam, watching TV, playing soccer and EATING! Robert's a fantastic cook – Heather's favorite is his pizza – and he loves to golf.