



Senses of Place

**OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE
SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY | 2014**

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Wallace Stegner writes "...the knowledge of place comes from working in it in all weathers, making a living from it, suffering from its catastrophes..." In her meditations on the *Poetics of Place*, Eudora Welty adds "...feelings are bound up in place, and in art, from time to time, place undoubtedly works upon genius..." From architectural regionalism to the notion of terroir, many of our human values and cultural identities are rooted in place.

"Senses of Place" examines the cultural and generational threads that weave through our place, Sonoma County. What gives this area its sense of place? How have its unique location, history, and residents defined it, and how has Sonoma County defined the lives of those who live here? Nineteen students of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Sonoma State University consider these questions through visual and literary lenses, resulting in this diverse body of work as creative witness to place in the region. Words and images in this anthology treat subjects of love, solace, nature, life cycles, escape, community, seasons, sensory experience, and loss—in short, the human condition.

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg, in his work *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*, shares the concept of "third places"(in contrast to first and second places of home and work). These sites of social activity, where adults gather on a regular basis, triangulate the social, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of contemporary culture. In its purest form, OLLI provides a third place for older adults while providing quality pathways for lifelong learning in the context of campus life.

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Carin Jacobs
Director, OLLI
Sonoma State University





Connie Mygatt | *Lavender Harvest, 2011* | Oil

Vineyard Wedding

by Kathleen Hesse Larsen

Ripe smells and luscious vines
Hanging fruit, round and full
Leaves of polished jade
Tangled embraces
Joining

Rolling seams and slanting sunlight
Burnt leaves, kaleidoscope of colors
Reaching upward
Changing

Lavender knolls and silent branches
Palette of purple
Thick and still
Unseen life below
Dormant

Barren vines and chilly air
Stark and bare
Stretched against the sky
Aging

Marching in unison
Bent with age
Buffeted by seasons
Dying

Pewter skies and grainy ashes
Sprinkled in the shadows
Silently feeding the soil
Reborn

Sweet 16

by Gale Brownell

“Let’s have a Sweet 16 party, and everyone can come as they were then. That should give us some good laughs. Won’t that be fun?” It was January and Aquarian birthday time. Lyndi, Franny, and I had begun to celebrate our 30-something birthdays together because we were all Aquarians. We jokingly called Lyndi, Lyndi P Brown. The P stood for Party. She often came up with the party ideas.

“We’ll rent Negri’s, and Fiz-Nik Rick can play. He’s an Aquarian too.” Over the years we chalked up our birthdays together with progressive dinners, 1950’s parties, and car rallies as part of the fun. A Sweet 16 party sounded good to Franny and me so we set to work, hiring the band, renting the room, lining up the extra entertainment, and arranging for food, drinks, and cakes. Each of us took a task or two to implement. All of the Aquarians would be asked to perform. Franny suggested that the three of us sing Sixteen Candles. We could do that!

Since we were spending money for the event, we would need to charge a fee to cover the costs. I volunteered to cover the door. It was a good way for me to be reminded of the names of the people that I didn’t know well. It would be a wider and wilder group of people who once lived in Camp Meeker and went to parties at Franny’s house on the edge of the Laguna at Abajo Agua, at the edge of the flood plain.

Off we went to cover our assigned tasks and plan our costumes. My husband, Phil, had 15 years of experience with the costume parties that were inevitable with the Abajo Agua friends. Parties always had some twist to them. Fiz-Nik Rick, Franny’s brother, always provided the live music, and there would be themed meals, treasure hunts, or costumes.

I had good memories of what I wore when I was 16. Since I lived on an island in Alaska in my teens, I usually made my clothes or bought them from the Sears Roebuck catalog. The styles for girls in 1960 trended toward white blouses, straight plaid or pleated skirts and a cardigan sweater. Heck! I was the queen of thrift. I still had some of those very same clothes! I’d wear the red plaid skirt and a red cardigan. I could probably even find the glasses I wore back then.

Phil, on the other hand, was a different story. Phil wanted to go to the parties, but the costumes put him into a twitter. He would find a token piece of clothing or accessory and “make do”. When I told him about the party, he didn’t have any enthusiasm for the details. “Just put it on the calendar” he grumped. I offered to help him put together a costume, but he wasn’t interested. “I’ve got plenty of time”, he mumbled. I let that go, but mentioned that we would have to go separately, since Phil was known for being chronically late, and I had to be there early to cover the door. I suggested that he could finally find a use for the wig his mother had given him for Christmas several years ago to cover his baldness. She didn’t want to have a bald son giving clues to her age, especially since she was married to a younger man.

Saturday night arrived and I was looking good. “Sweet 16 and never been... lacking for wardrobe items! They could have taken a picture of me for the yearbook and it would have looked right. Phil was just now thinking about what he would wear, but I couldn’t stay to help him. I had to cover the door.

When I arrived, it was fun to see the friends who were already there in their Sweet 16 outfits. I wasn’t the only one who had cool 50’s clothes hanging in her closet. Everyone looked neat. As people began filtering in, I greeted them and took their contributions. Often they told stories about when they had last worn a poodle skirt or their school sweater, or what they had done when they last wore saddle shoes. Sometimes if I didn’t know them, I had to ask who they were. Often, I got a story of how they knew Lyndi, or Franny, or Rick. Sometimes they hurried on in to talk to someone else.

The party was getting underway and I was anxious to join my friends, but there were still a few people drifting in. Finally I was able to move away to join Lyndi who was near the check-in, chatting with some people I didn't know. After a break in their conversation, I asked Lyndi to introduce me to the couple of people I didn't know.

"This is Carey and Sandra. Do you know this guy?" I looked again to see if I might know him. He had come in late and strode right past after he give me his \$10. He looked like he was her age, a little younger than me, but I didn't recognize anything about him. "No," I bantered, "you have so many friends that I don't know ALL of them". He was wearing a 60's style crewneck-shirt and a sweater over jeans. He wore 60's glasses and his hair was in a DA, the quintessential boy's hair cut of the day. Lyndi smiled.

"Let me introduce you" she grinned, "to Phil Brownell." Oh no. I SHOULD have recognized him. It was my husband. He had found a use for that wig after all! I wondered if I would have been attracted to him when I was 16. I wasn't used to seeing him with a full head of hair.



Beverley McChesney
Cloverdale Street Festival, Three Teens, 2005, Acrylic

What Matters Most in Life: Place, Relationships, Possessions?

By Hank Karow

When I was a child I never liked moving. It always led to a separation from loved ones, from the place I was familiar with and felt safe in, and even from my toys and books I cherished.

Strangers and unfamiliar places were often frightening and I was left with a sense of abandonment. Of course, my parents' real intent was to keep me out of harm's way because the city was bombed quite regularly. But as a child, I only understood that I had to leave my family to live with strangers in a strange countryside. I didn't even have the company of my familiar toys and books. But in the long run that did not matter because the war took all of that away when bombs fell on our house and left very little of value.

There was great joy when my father came just before the end of the war to bring me to our new home to be reunited with my immediate family. The new place, the ancient city of Braunschweig, was very different from where we had lived before. The only common denominator between these two places was the destruction caused by the war.

Before I was in my early teens, I had gone through lengthy periods of separation and changes in place. But the post-war years promised a period of stability and permanence. It was a good time to experience the changes for the better as the economy changed from the defeat of Nazi-Germany to the Wirtschaftswunder, the economic miracle over the next decade when much of the destruction was replaced by new construction.

All was well until my parents died before I was a young adult. After that, the whole cycle of separation and saying good-bye began anew when my sisters drifted off one by one to seek their own fortunes in foreign lands: Canada, England, Scotland and Wales. A few years later, when my training was complete, my employer sent me to New York for two years to perfect my English and to study American manufacturing methods. That was a wonderful opportunity that I made the most of, to the point of deciding to stay in America when my two years were up. New York was the place to be and I spent almost every weekend there. By coming to America, I had to give up cherished possessions again because I could bring in only so much. So when I got off the boat in NY, literally speaking, I had a few suitcases and \$50 cash in my pocket.

But the most important thing was that I had a good and well-paying job on Long Island. After several job changes and entering college, I became a naturalized citizen. This enabled me to get a security clearance to work on critical aerospace contracts. The timing was perfect. Sputnik had been launched less than a year earlier, funding for space and defense programs was readily available and there were excellent opportunities at the leading edge of technology. However, there was a price to pay: mobility was required. I needed to go where the good jobs were. So I became one of the many itinerant aerospace engineers, bringing me from New York to Michigan to Massachusetts and to Connecticut. Other than Long Island, I never really warmed up to any of those places, with the exception of the Boston area perhaps. I was just passing through.

All that changed when I got a call from a former colleague that there was a good opportunity in California. My first reaction was "no way!" I had just begun to enjoy living in New England and besides, California was not only considered the "Land of Fruits and Nuts" by Easterners but it was also so darn far away on the other side of the country. The job sounded good

enough that I agreed to go to a place called Santa Rosa for the interview. I had to look it up on a map and to my pleasant surprise I found that it was not in the L.A. area. It was late fall and the weather was already getting pretty cold back East when I left Boston. The next day, I was taken to an outdoor restaurant on the Plaza for lunch where we were basking in the warm October sun. That got my attention. After the interview, I drove around Sonoma County and found it very beautiful in the late fall sun: vineyard-covered hills, redwood forests, and a dramatic coastline. Before I flew out of San Francisco, I was already sold on Northern California.

The rest is history. A month later, I drove my trusty old VW across the country, weighted down by my meager possessions. This trip was a fascinating study of place: pleasant Mid-West countryside, a totally flat Kansas, the Rocky Mountains, the Big Basin, and the High Sierra. When I went over the summit, I discovered what snow is really like. It was the first storm of the season. When I saw the palm trees in Newcastle during a torrential rain-storm, I knew that I had arrived in the "Promised Land." California, here I come! Despite the fact that I had begun to like New England a lot, I never looked back. I'm still here, forty-two years later, in Santa Rosa in the beautiful wine country of Sonoma County. When I first read what Luther Burbank had said of this area, that it was the chosen spot (for his horticulture) on all of the Earth, he really was not kidding. This is really a very special place and we call it home. Coming here was one of the best things I've done in my life. I finally found stability and a sense of belonging.

In answer to my question of what is important in life, I can definitively say with confidence: family and relationships first and foremost, the place I've chosen a very close second, and material possessions rank far behind health and a happy life.



Beverley McChesney
Life is Good, 2005
Acrylic

Winter Creek Road, Santa Rosa, California

by Gayle Reid

Bob and I purchase twenty-four acres in 1975.
Split three ways, we end up with seven.
Bob designs and builds our home.
It perches in the middle of a hillside.
Rows of lavender greet the eye.
Giant arches begin outside, curve through the house
and come out again; an outside, inside, outside house.

We raise two sons; the first, born on my birthday, has Down Syndrome.
The second son is born 22 months later free of complications.
I feel ecstasy for a brief moment right after each birth.
Room full of toys; I take inventory every day.
Aaron's small animal collection goes in the toy barn.
Alex's legos scattered on the floor fit into the case.
The family piano sits in a corner.
Grown up Alex comes home from a date.
I know if he's happy or sad by the tune he plays.

We spend holidays and special occasions with my parents in Ukiah.
Dad, born the day before Aaron and me, grills steaks for our birthday dinner.
The three of us blow out candles; 29 years of photographs.
Mom bakes the Thanksgiving turkey. They bring the entire meal to us.
All I have to do is steam the vegetables. One year I forgot.
Friends come to visit. Luncheons outside under the passion flower vine.
Children explore the cave with flashlights. Teenagers tell ghost stories there.
We dance inside on the hardwood floor and outside on the slick tiles.
Music from Africa engulfs the house, especially during Thursday night drum class.

Our house is like a dachshund, sunning itself along the land, wrapping around gardens.
I sit in my hammock under the oak trees. Flowers surround me:
Rock garden with lemon buttons, white ladies, violas and gardenias.
Eye travels up a path to the ramp bed: anemones of various colors, blue asters and tall euphorbia.
Facing me: sweet hibiscus, hollyhocks, alstroemeria and hot lips.
Humming birds can't leave them alone.
Arbor of wisteria twists toward honeysuckle; scents mingle with fragrances
from orange and lemon trees.
A lush environment comforts us through life.
This is home.



Terry Behrens
Spring Harvest Family Affair, 2013
Acrylic

I was raised in the sound of the sea,
Path of least resistance, go with the flow, that's me.
Learned to swim the warm, gentle waves of my own Key West beach,
Learned what the underwater silence of the reef could teach.
I knew too the roaring of the rains,
The howl of hurricanes.

At twelve, I rode the long green combers of the Arabian Sea.
It was just those giant waves, the shore, the sky, and me.
Exhilaration of that exquisite elevator ride,
Deposited gently on the shore by the incoming tide.
The ebbing riptides, the dangerous pull, I got to know.
Avoided having to swim against the flow.

Later, in California, I was blessed to ride.
Those holy waves on sacred beaches, strong Pacific tide.
And there I met a mermaid, who knew the water's way
The way I did. Our paths entwined, we were meant to stay together.
But the tides of those wild times unclasped our hands,
Strange currents swept us to stranger lands.

I learned to love the thunderous thousand tongues of water falling.
Roar of Yosemite's cathedral choir calling.
And always the mermaid whispering,
The wind in every tree
Echoing her song to me.

Forty years I swam with the current, never upstream,
Never making a splash, steering the middle, never the extreme.
Slave to the ship-of-fools empire, surviving by being
Invisible, by no one ever seeing
Me swimming with the current, out of sight.
And always doing everything right.

The river ran its course, deposited me on the strange, fossilized, crumbling, ruined shore,
Of a dried-up ocean that is no more.
Oh, I loved the long drought of my stubborn, lonely pain
I didn't need people like flowers don't need rain.
And finally, as I was swirling down the drain,
I found myself listening to the rain,
I heard the mermaid singing, felt the strong pull of the tide,
And let it take me for a ride,
Four hundred miles north, through driving rain,
To get back to my mermaid once again.

Now, together we celebrate our intertwining way
Walk along the beach at Bodega Bay,
Wade in the long Pacific rollers, that great ocean mother of a tide
That pulls us, pulls us, ever closer to each other.

How I Got To Sonoma County

by Jerry O'Rourke



Frances K. Crosse
Blue, 2014
Encaustic on wood

Drawn to Community

by Fran Claggett

I am a poet of place, you say,
and I recognize my own voice.
When are you coming home, they used to ask.
When are you coming back.

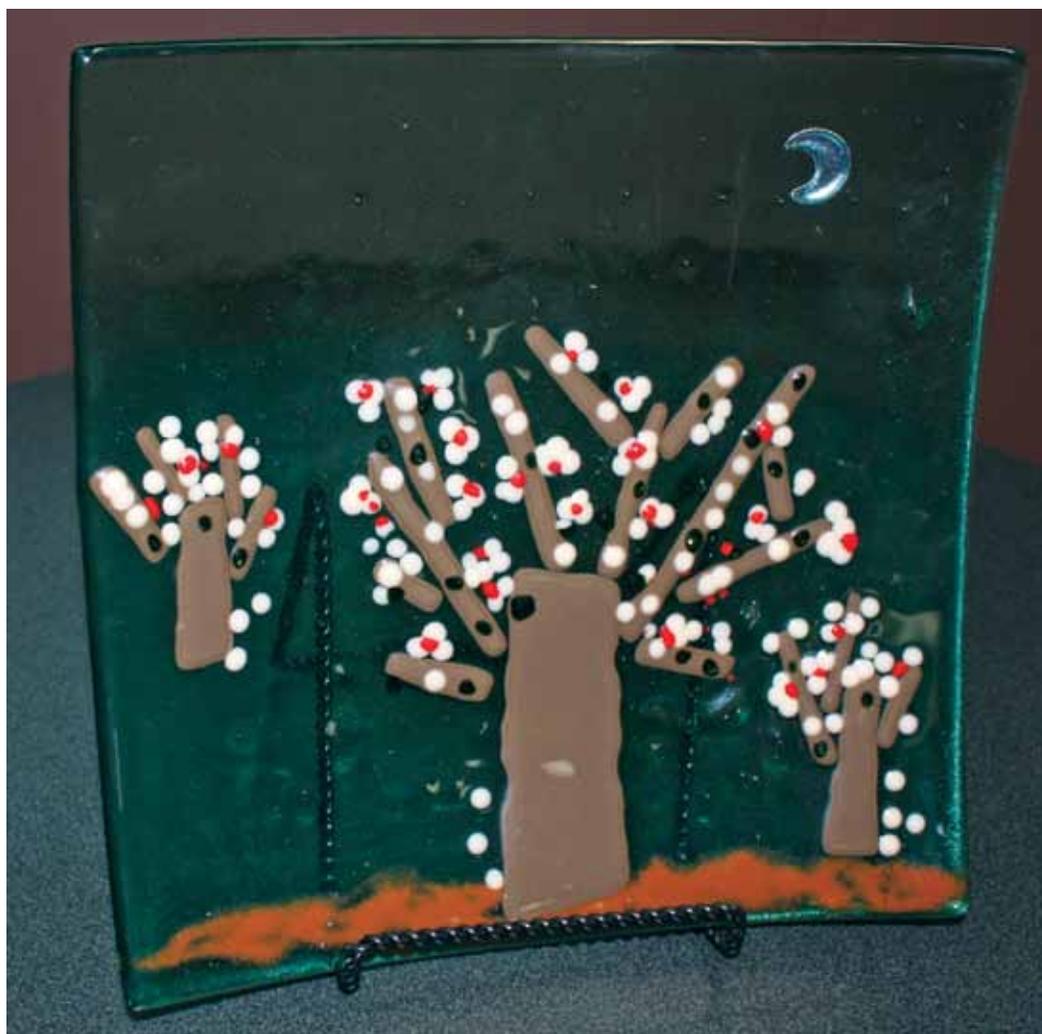
I am home, I told them, I have always been home,
ever since I came here. And yet I acknowledge
that other place, that land where I was born—
know the slight rise of road that opens to the
sudden view of valley stretched below.
I acknowledge the seasons that turned
the trees vibrant colors in the fall.

But there are seasons here, too, I say.
Seasons that thin or thicken my blood here,
here in this constant place. Seasons that turn
February into fields of white apple blossoms.
You just have to pay attention.

I am home, again to myself. This constant
place. Constant in this place. Standing here,
in this place.

Can you be more specific?

The small whirl of dust begins by gathering up,
spiraling, achieving form in the motion. It moves,
touches down again and again, then comes
to a place where it stops. Drops. Becomes place,
is of that place. Here.



Joanne Lapinski
Sebastopol Apple Blossoms, 2014
Fused glass

Making Sonoma Valley Home

By Charlene Lohmeier

Home. Where is home?

I grew up in the Navy. A Navy brat. We moved every year, back and forth between California ports and Pacific island ports. San Pedro. Midway Island. San Diego. Pearl Harbor. San Francisco. Okinawa.

Stateside, we participated in the post-war boom time and optimistic America. We lived in newly constructed stucco tract houses, with television sets and tall antennas on the roof. Overseas, we lived in places built for the war, and since then all but abandoned. Quonset huts surrounded by broken concrete with brilliant tropical flowers pushing through. We didn't stay in any one place long enough for me to finish a grade in school, let alone call it home.

Yet I didn't feel rootless. Stateside summers usually meant a long car trip from California to Salt Lake City, where my parents had grown up. Where my mother was related to everybody. Where the talk was of the grandparents and great grandparents crossing the plains with handcarts to settle in Zion as part of the Mormon migration. These were my people, and they had moved around a lot too. I belonged to a long line of them, stretching back to the founding of the church. Its persecutions, its triumphs, its finding Home in the Salt Lake Valley was my story. Zion was my spiritual home, its red rocks and sagebrush my internal landscape, wherever I happened to be living around the wide Pacific.

Whenever someone asks me why I'm no longer a Mormon, no longer a believer in god, I say it is because I went home to Zion. I went to Brigham Young University. I had often dreamed of living among my people, of belonging, rather than being the odd man out, the new kid in school who refused to drink Coke. They would understand me, accept me. I would be home. I left behind the hot Santa Ana winds of the San Fernando Valley, my wonderful boyfriend, my younger brother and sisters, and went off to Utah to grow into my destiny.

I had high hopes of BYU. A church school, where I already knew the rules. Where my religious notions wouldn't be ridiculed. Where my goals would mesh with everybody else's. Where I would fit in. Oh, the naïveté of the young.

Something about having lived in a third world country, as Okinawa had been in the 50s, gave me a perspective that was foreign to my cousins raised in Utah. Something about having spent the previous two years in Los Angeles among the flower children made me more open-minded than my roommates raised in Idaho. Something about having a father who shared his intense curiosity about the world with me as much as he did with my brother made me unable to copy the passive, submissive, sweet spirit of my dorm mates.

I did not fit in. Tears. Prayers. Endless unanswered prayers. Long, lonely hours of contemplation, staring out over the valley of Utah Lake, or up at the white rocks making a large Y on the side of a Wasatch mountain, or trudging through that unfamiliar white stuff called snow. Counseling sessions with the dorm parents. None of it could turn me into a docile, womanly Molly Mormon. I just couldn't squeeze my toes into that glass slipper. I had outgrown the church.

I gave it the old college try. Two years of misery, trying to compress myself into the Mormon mold. They should have been my people. But I was clearly not one of them. I gave it up.

And lost everything. I lost my people, my history, my community, my music, my home. I was in exile right there in Zion.

I went back to Southern California, confused, lost, my anchor gone, my future a mystery. My boyfriend had been drafted to Vietnam. My CSU Northridge classmates were into sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll, all of which I either feared or hated. Once again, I was the new kid in school, a bit weird, didn't fit in; but this time there was no internal landscape I could call home.

I married a man who had converted to Mormonism. Divorced a year later. Married a Catholic, who immediately took me away from every familiar thing, to Chicago, the Midwest, to a green I'd never seen before. Flat land stretching at least a thousand miles in every direction. A strange fresh water ocean called Lake Michigan. Skyscrapers, concrete. And people who expected you to conform to their stringent norms. An alien landscape; an alien culture. Thirty years in exile.

I'm back in California now, having left behind alienation and husband to return to the land of my birth, though a bit north of any place in it that I had previously known. Back among my true people, the ones who say "Do your own thing, man!" And, miraculously, I'm back with my Vietnam vet, the man I loved before I went to BYU and lost everything.

All has been restored, except an inconvenient faith, and youthful naïveté. Older, wiser, and way, way happier. The love of my life, a rootless Navy brat like myself, and I are creating a home together here in the Sonoma Valley. Defining home together. For now, and for always, home is wherever and whatever we make it.



Marcia Fosberg | *Sonoma Country Barn*, 2012 | Photograph

Where Do We Go?

by Evelyn Connolly

In memory of Frank Connolly 1939-2002

You always broke the ice at cocktail parties
On patios overlooking the rolling green hillsides of
Glen Ellen.

Where do we go after we die?

And I looked up to catch the sparkle in your eyes.

Then playfully-

I mean, is there a door to a great vineyard beyond
With millions of souls floating around?

The strangers all laugh

Then take up the dare.

To our families united for all time, a fifth generation
Winemaker suggests.

Even your cousin fathered by the parish priest

Someone volleys.

Giggles begin. The game has begun.

Into my next life, another says.

Then, a lob from the mini-skirted hostess

Pouring the estate chardonnay.

What if you return as a burro?

Guffaws emerge.

Don't know, don't care, says someone new.

So, you abide like The Dude, you return

Keeping it light like a master of ceremonies.

The air fills with laughter and conversation.

A successful party, you said on the drive home.

But, now with your ashes scattered in the Valley of
the Moon

The parties fade away.

Adrift as in a sea of broken ice, yearning for just
one more glimpse

Of that sparkle in your eyes, I tilt my head and look
up.

When you don't appear I shout my SOS

Where did you go?



Irwin Miller
Light on the Mustard, 2014
Photographic print

Namesake by Junko Rich

Mo was home from London for a short visit being a carrier to bring an envelope to Los Angeles on Friday so she could spend a short weekend at home before flying back to England for work.

Peter and I met Mo at SFO, stopped by the Petaluma Market first to pick up two bunches of flowers before driving out to the Bodega Head.

Mo and I scaled down a wet and steep unofficial path to the rocky beach below while Peter waited on the top.

I tell Mo to toss flowers into the waves with me for it's Haru's memorial anniversary.

As we toss flowers, my arm brushes against her shoulder, strong from years of swimming.

Flowers may reach Japan, I tell her.

"Or, perhaps, Haru's spirit could see the flowers from us, and make an appearance" I continue, fully aware that I am delusional. "Maybe, Mom." Mo kindly goes along with my fantastical wish of seeing my mother's incarnation.

Now, our hands empty of flowers, we sit side by side on rocks gazing into the waves.

My eyes catch a seal raising her head among bobbing flowers. "See, she is here!" Mo follows the direction of my pointing finger.

"How many years since Haru died?" Mo asks. My mind is not into the arithmetic and answered

"I was seven on that July day, and I didn't say good-bye to her then."

The seal cocked her head once and swam away.

"Goodbye." I mouth the word.

Mo didn't see that for she was also gazing out to the sea. She wraps her warm arm around my shoulders.

"I love you" she says.

My daughter is growing up.

Years later, Mo named her first born after Haru, the grandmother she never met.



Donna DeLaBriandais | *Early Morning Moon, 2012* | Watercolor



Linda C. Donahue | *Sonoma County...On the Trail, 2014* | Assemblage

The Magic of Armstrong Woods by Enid Macken

As we drive into Armstrong Woods State Park one March day in 2014, we leave the bright sunshine behind and enter into the shade and majesty of this redwood forest. Our 6-year old granddaughter Elsie exclaims, "Oh! Look! The trees are so wide!"

This is the same child who earlier that morning asked what we were going to do at Armstrong Woods. When I answered we'd walk in the forest and have a picnic, she replied, "Boring!" After just a few seconds in the park, Elsie has changed her attitude. Once again Armstrong Woods has cast its spell on a visitor.

We do not hear the word "boring" again that day. Elsie and her 9-year old brother gaze up at the Colonel Armstrong tree searching for its top. They stand at its wide base. The sign says the tree is about 1400 years old. I'm not sure Elsie can yet comprehend the significance of the tree's age, but she does understand the number is a big one, and the tree is old.

After lunch in the picnic area, we start down a path into the woods. Zern and Elsie dart ahead, just as their father and uncles did at the same ages. The calmness of the forest seems to exhilarate children. They run freely in the midst of the ancient trees. John and I shout out to them, "Wait for us. Don't go too far."

We had said those same words to our sons many times. One time we didn't say them, and our son Tom took off down a dry creek bed. Soon he was out of sight and couldn't hear our shouts. We thought he would jump out from behind a redwood tree as our boys often did when they would dash off ahead of us, but Tom wasn't hiding for us anywhere. After some worried moments, we spotted him still running. "I wanted to run to the end," he explained.

Our sons did stop running long enough to step into the trunks of redwood trees hollowed out by fire. In the 1970s many of these trees lined the paths and invited them inside. Now most of these hollowed out trees are on the other side of a low fence marking the path. Frequent signs request visitors to stay on the trails. Fortunately, one tree with a good deep hollow area to climb down in remains on the path. Zern and Elsie jump inside the charred trunk and peek out at us before continuing down the trail.

Three weeks later I drive into Armstrong Woods once again. This time the pace is slower. My daughter-in-law's mother Dossie and her caregiver are with me. The caregiver maneuvers Dossie's wheelchair through the mud remaining from an earlier rainstorm. We stop at the Colonel Armstrong tree for a few minutes before following the trail deeper into the forest. Soon I hear Dossie say, "I always tell my rabbi I feel closer to God in nature than I do in any temple."

Our religions are different, but I feel the same way. And the peaceful, meditative atmosphere of the redwood forest often inspires spiritual thoughts.

When we moved to Sonoma County from Southern California in 1972, we were amazed that Armstrong Woods with its majestic trees and shady paths was less than an hour's drive from our house. In Southern California we had to settle for dry chaparral-covered hills when we walked in the wilderness areas close to home. It was an unexpected joy to have a picnic dinner at Armstrong Woods after a day of work. We went often during our first weeks in Sonoma County.

Over the years Armstrong Woods has been a frequent destination for us, especially when we have out of town visitors or the weather is very hot. The trees never fail to impress the people we bring. Since the 1980s, my husband has done business with a Japanese company. We often have Japanese business visitors, and we always include a trip to Armstrong Woods during their stay. Japanese people have a great reverence for their ancient temples and proudly take us to see them. We don't have ancient buildings in Sonoma County, but we do have ancient redwoods. One summer a woman from the Japanese company arrived in a fragile mental condition. We weren't given any details, but it appeared she had experienced a nervous breakdown. During our visit to Armstrong Woods with her, we walked to the redwood amphitheater. She sat down on a bench away from the rest of us and appeared deep in thought. She remained there surrounded by the comforting stillness of the forest for many minutes. We didn't rush her. When she returned to us, she announced, "I am well."

The sight of a full moon rising behind the tall redwoods is one I will always remember. It happened one March evening when we were with two Japanese college students. Their father, who had been a frequent business visitor, had died suddenly the year before. We were showing these young men some of the places their father would have visited on his trips to Sonoma County. Our day had been a full one, and we arrived at Armstrong Woods just before closing time. As we were getting back into our car, I noticed the moon. We stopped and stood silently in awe.

When I was teaching 4th grade, I took some field trips to Armstrong Woods with my classes. We spent time walking the paths and observing the plants in the various layers of a redwood forest. Besides the nature study, I wanted my students to feel the restorative power of quiet, reflective moments surrounded by the serenity and beauty of nature. I always scheduled a quiet time before the end of the field trip. The students read, drew, wrote, or just sat during this time. They sensed the value of this time; they remained quiet. I remember some beautiful poems that came out of this activity. One time a car full of older adults drove in while we observing silence. One woman stepped out of the car and said, "Oh, no! There are a lot of kids here."

Then she added in surprise, "They're quiet!" Of course, the quiet ended when the reflective time was over.

A father who accompanied one of my class field trips to Armstrong Woods was truly impressed. He kept saying, "I didn't know this was here," and "This would be a perfect place to come when I have a lot of stress at work." I don't know if he ever returned; I do know I still remember his amazement.

A few years ago, I took an OLLI class at Sonoma State University about nature and spirituality taught by Professor Jim Preston. We took a field trip to Armstrong Woods one Saturday. Preston had us walk silently from the parking lot outside the entrance to the picnic area. From time to time, he stopped to read poetry to us. I don't remember the poems he read; I do remember my serene, meditative mood. As we were walking, a group of motorcycle riders roared in, somewhat disturbing our deep thoughts. When the riders shut off their engines, they were confused by our silent group and asked what we were doing.

Armstrong Woods has brought both peace and joy to my life for 42 years. I am thankful that Colonel James Armstrong, his daughter Lizzie Armstrong Jones, and the LeBaron family worked to preserve this redwood forest for future generations.

ARTISTS

Terry Behrens | *Spring Harvest Family Affair, 2013* | Acrylic

Frances K. Crosse | *Blue, 2014* | Encaustic on wood

Donna DeLaBriandais | *Early Morning Moon, 2012* | Watercolor

Linda C. Donahue | *Sonoma County...On the Trail, 2014* | Assemblage

Marcia Fosberg | *Sonoma Country Barn, 2012* | Photograph

Joanne Lapinski | *Sebastopol Apple Blossoms, 2014* | Fused glass

Beverley McChesney | *Cloverdale Street Festival, Three Teens, 2005* | Acrylic

Beverley McChesney | *Life is Good, 2005* | Acrylic

Irwin Miller | *Light on the Mustard, 2014* | Photographic print

Connie Mygatt | *Lavender Harvest, 2011* | Oil

AUTHORS

Gale Brownell | *"Sweet 16"*

Fran Claggett | *"Drawn to Community"*

Evelyn Connolly | *"Where Do We Go?"*

Hank H. Karow | *"What Matters Most in Life: Place, Relationships, or Possessions?"*

Kathleen Hesse Larsen | *"Vineyard Wedding"*

Charlene Lohmeier | *"Making Sonoma Valley Home"*

Enid Macken | *"The Magic of Armstrong Woods"*

Jerry O'Rourke | *"How I Got to Sonoma County"*

Gayle Reid | *"Winter Creek Road, Santa Rosa, California"*

Junko Rich | *"Namesake"*

