

Landscapes and Prayers

Why do I make landscapes? The answer is twofold. In part, I make landscapes because the outside world always seemed less dangerous than the inside world of my childhood. If I ever felt safe, it was outside. And partially, it's because my grandmother created "landscapes" of a sort – beautiful flower arrangements - that captured my young imagination.

In an interview with author Krista Tippett, the poet, Mary Oliver, describes her childhood by saying, "It was a very bad childhood for everybody, every member of the household, not just myself I think. And I escaped it, barely.... I got saved by the beauty of the natural world." Oliver goes on to describe skipping school to spend her days in the forest near her home, reading books and writing poems.

I, too, had a "bad childhood," to quote Oliver, although I grew up in an elegant house, in a fancy suburb. Being outside offered me an escape from family difficulties. In the local woods, I found solace, something I rarely found at home.

The story of these landscapes can also be attributed to my maternal grandmother, Ellen Gordon Allen, who lived in Japan at the end of World War II. While in Japan, she became a skilled practitioner of Ikebana flower arranging, and upon returning to the US, founded *Ikebana International*, an organization that promotes Japanese flower arranging and Japanese culture. As a child, I was completely captivated by the Asian art in my grandmother's home, and by her flower arrangements. The combination of flowers, branches, leaves, and rocks that she used to create her "landscapes" somehow made sense to me. And her use of line, shape, pattern, texture, color, symmetry and asymmetry mesmerized me.

So I, too, make landscapes of a sort. These images begin as silver prints that I bleach with potassium ferricyanide, utilizing various tools such as brushes and funnels. The bleach allows me to create a unique world. Within these landscapes, I find peace, and great comfort.