



Daily Reflections

LANDSCAPES OF THE HEART

By Julie Mussché

A Quote

“There is light, hidden deep within our cells, lending its brightness and power to the small affair we call our life. So much has risen up to block this light. But the light, the luminous God, disguised and unseen, prevails.”

PAUL D'ARCY, *SEEKING WITH ALL MY HEART*, 73

Reflection

The holidays may stir up memories of those we have loved and lost. In the process of preparing to write reflections this month, a sweet convergence occurred as I recalled the loss of my mother and the journey, both geographic and spiritual, that followed.

A quick synopsis of the context: 1980 I graduated with my Master's degree and by September had several teaching gigs lined up at local colleges and universities. At the same time, I started working part-time as a cartographer

and research analyst. Friends and I were also planning a driving trip through Europe for the following summer.

On Wednesdays, between teaching in the morning at Cal State Long Beach and the cartography job, I would stop to visit my mother for several hours. Around the holidays, I started to notice that my Mom was losing weight and by January she was down two clothing sizes. She commented one day that she had what she thought was a cyst on the back of her neck. When it did not resolve, she finally had it biopsied. The day following my 29th birthday, my mother received a stage four cancer diagnosis and within six weeks, she was gone.

As you might imagine, the shock and sadness of the loss swallowed me. The prospect of leaving the country and traveling through Europe over the summer was both overwhelming and compelling. Following a busy several months, assured that everything regarding my Mom's estate was settled and my step-Dad was going to be okay, I decided to go on the journey.

Desert Amma Matrona tells us "We carry ourselves wherever we go." Sadness followed me yet offered a keen perspective on the gift of life and the beauty of creation. As shared in prior reflections, our touring group started in Paris, went north to the Netherlands and then down the Rhine Valley toward Austria and then Venice, from there into Yugoslavia all the way to Dubrovnik, and back up again through the Lake Region of Italy and through Switzerland, and back to Paris through Bourgogne and the Cote D'Or. A breathtaking journey altogether.

In my reflection of this time, so many images bubbled up in my remembering. Some words that might help to capture the imprint on my spirit:

- *Beauty* - it was awe-striking and wondrous to witness the variety and sheer beauty of creation.
- *Cordiality* - people were welcoming and offered incredible hospitality. This was a gift and comforting.
- *Transformative* - in the circumstance of my grief, there was hope and there were new ways to see life and relationships.
- *Gratitude* - for my mom's presence in my life, for life itself, and the gift of friends, and for God's presence in my life and all things.

Quoting Anthony de Mello, "Mysticism is felt gratitude for everything." I couldn't agree more.



Swans in water
Photo by Julie Mussché

For Pondering

- What are some key moments in your life that have been transformative?
- Where has God been in those moments and how have you felt companioned by Grace?

For Prayer

*Thank you, Gracious One, for all that you are and the sacred gift of life.
Amen.*

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