

I Carry My Landscapes With Me

JENNIFER PAZIENZA



In a 1947 interview American abstract painter Joan Mitchell remarked, “I carry my landscapes around with me.” In a brushstroke her words convey how I navigate the complex geographic and psychic effects of coming from away, which Google tells us is a term used in Canada’s Atlantic provinces for someone who has moved to the area from somewhere else. That certainly applies to me, with one exception – my encounters with the notion began long before my move to Fredericton in 1989.

Mine is a quest story. I tell it through a landscape lens, I always have. Belonging, place and home are key characters. Memory, love and loss too. The plot develops on the assumptions that landscape, the effects of human intervention on the natural world, are settings for life and work. That at its root meaning, in landscape there is a sense of mutual regard, an interrelated shaping of people and place. In this way, my come from away saga opens with me in my mother’s garden witnessing how the landscapes my grandparents carried with them from Sicily took root in our New Jersey backyard, and in her and ultimately in me.



JENNIFER PAZIENZA | IN MY MOTHER'S GARDEN



JENNIFER PAZIENZA | EARLY SPRING | 2020 | PHOTO BY JOY CUMMINGS



“As someone who has continuously come from away... any sense of not belonging or worse, not quite belonging I may have sustained since, pale in comparison and respectfully do not matter. What matters is how I carry my landscapes with me.

Growing up against the ever-encroaching urban landscape, that fragrant, colourful fenced-in patch of ground was home to an enormous white peach tree; flower, herb and vegetable gardens; grape vines and rose-arbor; it was the site of my

earliest formative art making experiences. A place for daydreaming, for poetic dwelling, it was the safe haven I turned to throughout the seasons for refuge and renewal until my first migration after the death of both of my parents by age nine.

With suitcase in hand, it was a five-block trek to the relatives I was made to live with. In that house, bordered by a black top driveway and concrete backyard, save the mint that grew around the trashcans beside the garage, I first experienced coming from away at its most pejorative, as an outsider, an interloper. Taken in, but not taken to heart. As someone who has continuously come from away, any disparaging glances, comments, or behaviours blatant or subtle; any sense of not belonging or worse, not quite belonging

I may have sustained since, pale in comparison and respectfully do not matter. What matters is how I carry my landscapes with me.

I have treasured and relied on that little girl's suitcase my whole life even as I revision its contents. Unlatching the catches, the lid pops open and I cloak myself in the unconditional love and security of that childhood garden to find my way in landscapes as disparate as rolling Pennsylvania farmland; gigantic west Texas skies; urban Wisconsin lakeshore breezes; sun-drenched Sicily, the vagaries of virtual landscapes, in the presence of art, where we all come from away and finally in a life changing plot twist, Keswick Ridge.

Within the sanctuary of my Keswick Ridge studio, as I look onto the Wəłəstəq, the beautiful and bountiful Saint John River valley, memories twig and mingle in present moment awareness. There, the gift of human agency acts in concert with the beauty and mystery of the natural world. My faith in the generative healing power of landscape imagery is reaffirmed and I am home.

In the end then, mine is also a redemption story that relies on the fundamental truth that living well in a place does not depend on being of that place. ↓

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