



# Joy's Garden

BOOK 1

EMBRACE THE MOUNTAIN

Dorothy Jean Fagan

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*Embrace the Mountain*

DOROTHY FAGAN

THE PAINTING LESSON BOOKS

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## DEDICATION



Along my path I have been blessed with many dear friends and family. If not for every single one of you, I might have lost my way. It seems a miracle that I am still here with enough wit to paint and to tell this story.

Two, who have passed over were here to hold my hand from the start. Pauline Fagan, my mother, lost her battle with cancer in 1989. That didn't stop her from visiting me in dreams. Steadfast and committed, she counseled and encouraged me to accept my gifts.

Throughout his life my father, John Fagan, walked with me. He inspired my paintings and showed me that creativity and healing are one and the same process.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My dear friend and author, Sarah Collins Honenberger, coaxed this book from me. So reluctant to talk about it, I tried my best to tell the story in as few words as possible.

I thank Sally for taking me seriously as a writer. Shocked that a professional writer would take the time and effort to read my draft, I was thrilled to try every suggestion she made. When she asked for more details about paint, colors, and brushes ~ I got going and put them in.

My draft doubled in size and so did my confidence. Thank you, Sally.

DOROTHY FAGAN

## CONTENTS

	Acknowledgments	v
1	Alone in the Woods	8
2	Winter Solstice	10
3	Sparkly in the Woods	14
4	Embrace the Mountain	17
5	Cascading Dreams	30
6	Lavande Magic	66





ALONE IN THE WOODS ~ 1983

## 1 ALONE IN THE WOODS

Reaching for the soft Ultramarine pastel, my head smashes into the floorboards. Bound and gagged, I scream. No sound comes out.

As if in a dream, groping I reach again. A screaming Chartreuse pastel rakes across my gritty page. Tearing colors from my fury, if only someone could hear.

The knife slices dangerously close. Am I bleeding? I don't know.

Flashing Cadmium Orange, Vermilion, angle betwixt muddy purple bruises. Ivory Black and Prussian Blue surface.

Stillness. Alone in the woods, is he gone?

Quick lock the door.

What happened?

Where is the delicate pastel landscape I was painting?

Where is the artist I was, only a moment ago?

Lost in the woods, what would . . .

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WINTER SOLSTICE, 1979

## 2 WINTER SOLSTICE

Flat patterned strokes laid side by side on soft white etching paper in muted, earthy colors. I painted mountains in winter with their bones exposed, bare trees cross-hatched against rocks and sky.

Endless valleys, distant vistas dotted with solitary rooftops, tiny rivers, ponds and dreams without a home.

The day of the assault it all stopped. When I returned to my studio I could no longer paint. Screaming colors flew in angular, awkward shapes pretending to be trees in the woods.

The artist I knew was gone.

Determined not to be a victim, I went in search of her.

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July 21, 2015

Dream: Today is the day my journey began in 1983. I wake slowly, trying to count the years. Was this really the day? I wonder and count again.

Downstairs, I pour a cup of coffee, cream and sugar. On the edge of the sofa by the window, the drawing pops to mind ~ the very first sketch on my journey ~ tears.

I wrap myself in the white fuzzy blanket pulling it around me, shuddering as if cold. The patio door is steamed with hot muggy July air. I am safe. In my pj's I sit frozen remembering.

The detective had asked if I could remember my assailant. No, I replied. Can you make a sketch? He wanted to know. I told him I'd try.

Wire-bound sketchbook and soft Ebony sketching pencil in hand, I had no clue how to draw someone. I painted landscapes, not people. I drew an oval shape on the page. How a face that gave me chills got there, I still don't know.

I gave it to the detective and never saw it again.

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Six months later at the trial, the defense attorney attacked me on the stand. Attempting to discredit me as an artist ~ and as a woman ~ he assaulted me with probing questions. I complied, again trying just to survive the moment.

Thinking about it I can hardly hold my coffee, shaking wildly it spills on my hand-painted coffee table. I take another sip, holding the mug with two hands now.

When the trial was over, the detective told me my sketch was shown beside the arrest photo in the courtroom. "It was one more nail in his coffin."

The detective's job was done. My assailant was convicted of rape and attempted murder and sentenced to life plus thirty years.

My door slammed shut.

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SPARKLY IN THE WOODS ~ 2016

### 3 SPARKLY IN THE WOODS

Ice. Hovering above the studio, branches sparkle in the morning light. A fairy land out of Doctor Zhivago surrounds me.

Searching for paper, I select a dark blue sheet of handmade Lakota. The opportunity to paint plein air ice from the comfort of my studio is rare. It will melt quickly. I grab a big chunk of Cobalt Violet, handmade by Diane Townsend. Violet blends readily with blue fibers on the page. I dig in.

Facing the end, my wall of windows opens to a view of the icy landscape outside. I paint colors flowing inside me, no longer frozen.

Scanning trays of pastels laid out across the table, one speaks loudly above the others. Grabbing her, I put her in place on the painting. One by one, earthy colors fall into place. Ultramarine Blue, Cobalt Violet, Gold Ochre, Shadow Green, the foundation for my painting is complete. I feel it in my bones.





Trays of pastels laid out on my drawing table, face the east windows.

Sun moves higher, radiant colors present themselves. Catching my eye, Brilliant Turquoise grabs my hand, dancing wildly across the sky. Breaking into the tree line, 'would's' shattered. Heart rising, I feel peaceful. Serene moment passes quickly. I scan the palette for more colors.

My Color Sensing method brings peace. I feel sparkly. Lucky to be here, alive and painting. Grateful the Creator heard my scream.

## 4 EMBRACE THE MOUNTAIN

The end of my journey began with an acceptance letter in French. Musee de La Grande Vigne in Dinan, France offered me a one month residency in return for a painting for their permanent collection. In a Medieval town in Brittany, my studio would be in the oldest part where the Port of Dinan was first established in the twelfth century. I was to follow twenty years of artists from all over the world in the museum's stone studio cottage on the River Rance.

Friends and collectors were excited for me and purchased the paintings I would create in advance, gifting me the means and inspiration for my trip. I began writing a blog so they could watch as I painted in France. In the five years since, our relationships have grown deeper and propelled me to embrace my mountain.

When the mountain blocked my vision in 1995, life became so dark that I gave all my canvases away and stopped painting. During those years I was invisible. At a party no one noticed me come and go. At work no one heard me speak.

Yet the flame would not be extinguished. I would feel it as a yearning, an inexplicable urge to touch color, to pick up my paint brush again, to sing out loud. Yet in 2001 when I held the brush in my hand, I could no longer paint. My strokes were awkward, colors muddy. No longer at my fingertips were the paintings which had brought me acceptance into juried exhibitions at The Pastel Society of America, American Artist's Professional League, Salmagundi Club, the Pastel Society of Canada and all the others.

I would have to start again. Musee de La Grande Vigne was my window. This time I knew what it felt like to have a burning urge to create under the weight of the mountain. Mountains are not meant to be moved. Walk with me and I will share the paintings and stories that helped me embrace it.



CASCADING DREAMS I, mixed media, oil wash and willow charcoal

On a whim I packed a watercolor palette and watercolor postcards. I hadn't used a transparent medium since college.

With pastel and oil an artist starts with the dark shapes, then paints light shapes over them with opaque paint ~ letting the shadow colors show through. With transparent watercolors, the process is reversed. White paper creates the lights from the start. Then the artist slowly blocks in the light colors and works toward the dark last.

The thirty watercolor postcards I painted in France inverted far more than my painting. Creating them enabled me to see and paint the Light ~ and to see the life purpose of my artistic gift.

A pocket palette and two packs of watercolor postcards fit conveniently into my big watermelon-striped satchel. I carried them easily up the steep, cobbledstone Rue du Jerzeul. It looked like a fairy tale with half-timber, stone houses, shops, a church steeple and a castle turret built in the 1100s, aligned along the narrow street.



People still live upstairs, keep shop downstairs. Scrumptious chocolate croissants and baguettes are freshly made at the sunny yellow pâtisserie on the corner. The Vermilion awning with the verdigris door serves glacé in home made cones. A dress shop sells linen woven in Brittany since the Middle Ages.