

Jennifer K Nichols

Process Art

*Where the process of learning, loving, and living, **is** the goal*

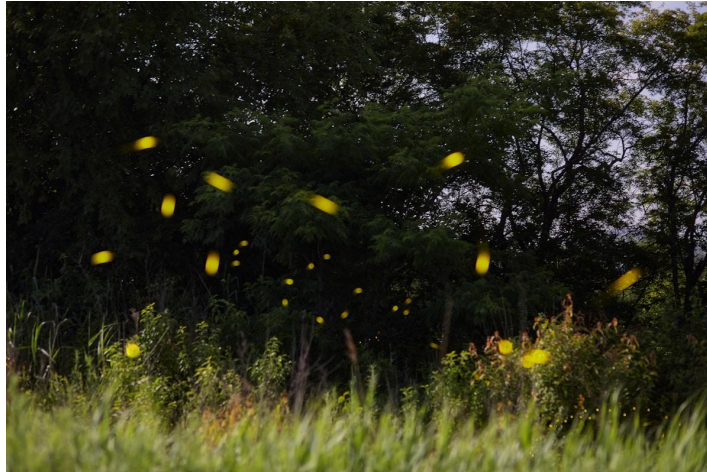


WELCOME!



Hello Friends! Welcome to the middle of June!

Peaches, magnolias, lilies and hydrangeas! Summer textures delight me! In Alabama, warm humid mornings greet us. By mid-day the air is thick and steamy, fogging up my glasses and pressing against my skin. We walk in the early morning and late evenings now. This week we saw our first firefly blinking after dark in the hedges.



**"Beauty gives us pleasure.
It awakens sensations that may have lain dormant.
It arrives through the windows our souls, our five senses."
Luci Shaw in *Breath for the Bones***

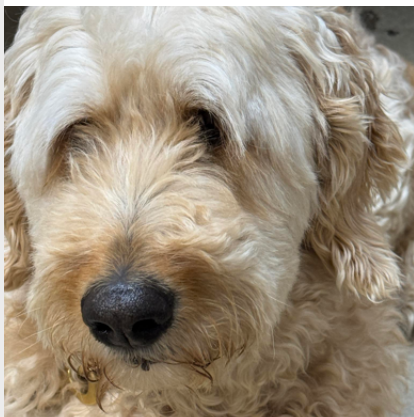
Embracing All the Textures of Summer

I love Luci Shaw's idea that our senses are windows for our soul. Using our senses to absorb beauty around us, we simultaneously develop a vocabulary that helps us express what is happening inside of us. Textures, colors, and sounds communicate what is hard to convey.

Slow and lazy feels like a hot, humid summer afternoon in Alabama. Relief feels like a plunge into cool water. I know when I feel prickly inside because I have (very carefully) handled cactus. I understand what having enough grit to finish something feels like because I've weeded my garden; not finishing until I was a muddy mess. Texture takes us from a two-dimensional plastic life into a vibrant multi-dimensional life that has depth, variety, and feeling.



Early this month we took a quick trip to see our son and daughter-in-law in Florida. We celebrated the end of a hard year of medical school and shared the excitement of beginning hospital rotations with our son. We cheered on our daughter-in-law as she begins her own master's program. Not caring much about dignity, I splashed down a water slide with them over and over. The bright sunshine, silky blue pool water, and rugged Floridian palm trees delighted me. I was particularly taken with the textured detail of the landscape. Looking closely, I was astonished at the beauty and detail. Taking it all in, I wondered how all of the fragile pieces of the wetland forest we were in fit together seamlessly.



At home, one week later, our beloved golden doodle woke up terribly sick. We knew she had a slow growing cancer because we have removed a few external tumors. We didn't know the cancer was growing internally until x-rays revealed her internal organs out of place. Crying into her soft fur, we said goodbye. Neighbors softened the rough edges of our sudden grief with flowers and bread, notes, and kind eyes.

It was unexpected to move from celebration to sorrow so quickly. I realize this sounds like emotional whiplash. I don't see it that way, though. Taking a middle-space point of view, I view this as living moment-by-moment and noticing where on the arc (beginning, middle, or ending) each moment falls. I have thousands of sweet moments with Lucy tucked inside me that tell the story of the arc of her life. I savored them when she was with me and they are still a part of me even at the end. Nothing in love is ever lost. Love infuses every moment with a glimpse of heaven. Beauty helps us name it.

"There is another calling for the artist, and that is one of linking earth to heaven,
pointing the human to the divine, finding connections."

Luci Shaw in *Breath for the Bones*



Rich texture, emotional and sensory, makes life beautiful and poignant. This is what it feels like to be alive--whooshing waterslides and big splashes; warm sunshine and blessed shade; soft fur and hot tears; delicate flower petals and warm cinnamon bread; fuzzy peaches and cold ice cream. It feels like awe knowing that an animal can be compassionate. *How did our little dog know exactly when to lean in and offer comfort?* It feels like playing in a pool when you are a grown-up with grown-up kids.

Jennifer (and Kona)

A practice of **prayer** for the middle of June



Not every prayer needs words. Silence is a beautiful prayer. In silence, we learn how to *be* with God. Genesis opens with silence. Then God speaks, calling forth light. In Revelation 8:1, a great multitude has gathered around the throne. The Lamb steps forward to open the seventh seal. There is silence in heaven for “about half an hour,” John tells us. The silence around the throne is a palpable, expectant silence.

Meeting God in silence, simply showing up in love, is a way to honor God, and it's a way of practicing surrender. We simply bring ourselves to be with the Lord.

Accustomed to our noisy world, it takes time to get used to silence. It helps to ease in by choosing short times of silence first. Notice as you practice that silence is both internal and external. Reading, ruminating over something that happened, and planning ahead all disrupt internal silence. External noise comes at us from all directions. First, learn to be comfortable in exterior silence. Next, practice quieting your thoughts. Over time, silence stills our fretful natures. We start to bring quiet back into the clamor.

Silent prayer might look like taking a walk without your phone or AirPods. It might look like driving home from work in silence, or setting a timer and sitting in silence for five, ten, or twenty minutes. It might look like sitting on a blanket under a tree or in a rocking chair on your back porch. It doesn't matter how or where you meet God in silence. I hope you give a try.

What do you notice when you choose to be silent with God?

A question I am **asking** myself in the middle of June

What am I glad that I did this month?

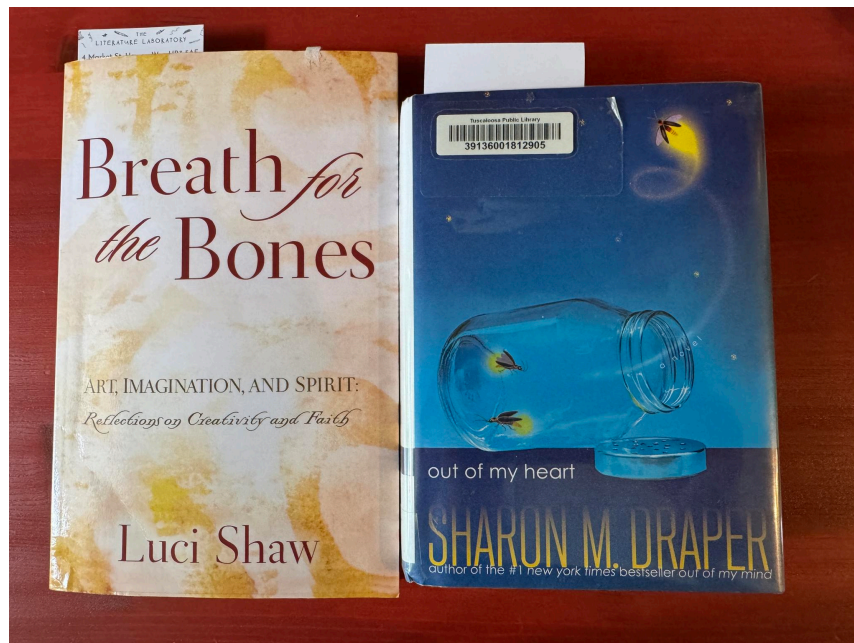
Consider keeping a list of what comes to mind in a journal.

Last month I kept a list of where I noticed love flowing through me.

Here are a few of the things I wrote down:

- Around the dinner table with good friends and family
- On the phone with my kids
- Visiting Restoration Anglican in Minneapolis
- Caring for my baby plants
- Taking a prayer walk with my dogs through my neighborhood

A book (or 2) that I am in the middle of **reading** currently.



Luci Shaw is one of my favorite authors. She's also prolific and that is good news for me. *Breath for the Bones* is a collection of essays in which she explores the intersection of beauty, the work of an artist, and theology. Answering the question, "What good is poetry?" Luci helps us see why we need art. She shows how creativity, imagination, and beauty reveal what we often miss and are a fundamental piece of our life with God. I am loving every minute!

I just started *out of my heart* by Sharon M. Draper. I finished rereading her first book, *out of my mind*, last week with my reading group. I like the way this second book opens! It's a good time for this series. Draper helps us confront our assumptions and she gently shows us how our assumptions cause harm and how the stories we tell ourselves are often incorrect. If you haven't read this book, it is not just for children and I highly recommend it. It's a great read-aloud with kids too.

What I notice that is beautiful right now.



June

- Zinnias in the front garden.
- Shade trees!
- Tables full of peaches at the farmer's market.
- Our shockingly green forest that vibrates each evening with cicada songs.
- All the neighborhood dogs sniffing their way along our sidewalks and the friendly owners they brought with them.

In the South, it's as tempting to stay inside where it is cool as it is to hibernate indoors during the cold winter months up north. I don't want to though. I would miss out on so much! I don't want to live numb. Plunging into the middle of where I am, taking it all in with my senses, is where beauty emerges each moment.

Let's live like this.



“For God alone my **soul waits in silence**;
from him comes my salvation.”

Psalm 62:1

SEE YOU IN THE **MIDDLE OF JULY**

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1655 McFarland Blvd N, # 565
Tuscaloosa , AL 35406, USA

