

Perfumer's Autobiography, a work in progress.

Before I knew the names of perfume materials, I knew the smell of ****summer on a Minnesota lake****.

I knew what happened when morning sun warmed the knotty-pine walls of our cabin on ****Big Detroit Lake****, releasing that unmistakable resinous scent into rooms overlooking water that seemed to stretch for miles.

****Warm pine behind me. Open water before me.**** A screen door opened, and the two worlds became one.

Lake air moved through the cabin, carrying damp shoreline, sun-warmed sand, and green things growing beneath the surface. There were aquatic plants tangled into the lake bottom, algae drifting through the shallows, shells and clams hidden below, and sunfish and bullheads we watched beneath the dock.

Then there was the smell of fish—truly fresh fish, pulled directly from the water.

Nothing about it smelled like the imaginary blue “water” of a perfume bottle.

****The lake smelled alive.****

- It changed with the hour.
- It changed with the wind.
- It changed when rain was coming.
- It changed after the storm had passed, and everything—pine, wood, earth, plants, and water—seemed to release its scent at once.
- And somehow the warm knotty pine of that cabin held everything together.

To this day, I can remember the feeling of standing inside, surrounded by pine while looking through the windows at miles of Big Detroit Lake.

I didn't know I was learning fragrance.

****I thought I was simply having a childhood.****

There were other lakes and other cabins.

Gramma Ann loved her year-round cabin on ****Lake Sallie****, where children who spent enough time exploring the water eventually became acquainted with one of its least charming inhabitants: bloodsuckers.

Gramma Ann had a solution for almost everything. ****Vinegar.****

And she wasn't wrong.

After a day in the lake, a warm shower doused with what seemed like a gallon of vinegar could turn into a rather spectacular slimy, bloody mess on the shower floor. But the bloodsuckers released quickly and painlessly, and within moments the whole unpleasant collection disappeared down the drain.

Even vinegar became part of the perfume of childhood. So did painting. My dad is a highly skilled auto and airline painter and restoration specialist. I remember helping in his shop after school and watching him mask off the car, make stripes with different colors, and mix the pigments and fine metallic thinners and additives, so a fresh new car or newly restored vehicle, especially that hint of metallic, fresh leather, and new electronics, just always warms my

heart and makes me think of fast cars and flying first class in his 6-passenger airplane or his completely remodeled and revamped amphibious plane, which keeps my heart soft at times when I miss him.

There were blueberries picked on our family farm in Huntersville and up further north in the Bemidji area for the past 20-some years, and strawberries picked at strawberry farms along the way to Grandma's—the smell of ripe fruit mixed with leaves, stems, soil, and summer heat.

There was alfalfa. I would bale hay with Grandpa, help him milk the cows, or call them in at night, careful to hop across the cow-pie-filled meadow on tall grass stumps that the cows generously left us. My best friends in junior and senior high were farmers, and I loved feeding the calves the shapely-scented silage, or tilling a field, and even throwing hay bales to the top of the barn in a hot summer heat.

There were woods and storms. There were friends and family who brought me there. Some aunties gave me department stores' perfume samples for Christmas that they collected for me during the year! I consider myself very lucky.

And there was ****sweetgrass****, although sweetgrass belongs somewhere different in this story. Its meaning reaches beyond an attractive aroma. It is connected with purification, remembrance, and sending up prayers, giving thanks to the Creator for all things—the land, water, plants, animals, family, memory, and life itself for its blessings and lessons.

Perhaps that is why I have never experienced scent simply as something that smells good. ****Scent means something.****

My mother understood another side of it.

She loved beautiful perfume and wanted the best fragrances she could identify. She collected perfumes that, had we saved even portions of the fragrances together with their original bottles and packaging, could be worth thousands today.

Her memorable philosophy was "Beauty is pain." My childhood bestie, Mindy, reminded me of that phrase.

But fragrance in our family reaches back farther still. My great-grandmother Mary, my grandfather's mother, whose parents trained him for medical school, became a medic during the war and returned home, deciding he was truly a farmer, logger, and carpenter. Mary passed down the safety rules of soapmaking, bringing her traditions and formulas as a necessity because she was a Lutheran missionary from Sweden who wanted to live in and work the land and raise her family with my great-grandfather from Norway in a place where my brother and mother now call home, which everyone called "The Farm."

Great Grandma Mary mastered high-temperature hot-process soap making outside in a big, fire-heated kettle with great care and respect for safety and a natural gift for creating with local or train-hauled fruits and locally harvested botanicals. I remember the Watkins salesman from the stories my grandparents shared, and I always love spending time at the farm. Great Grandma Mary's success and passion in soap making saved me about 7 years ago, when I transitioned some of my MFA in fine arts studies during COVID lockdown to master soap making. That quickly led to lotion crafting and ultimately my passion, perfumery.

Long before I studied the history of perfumery and legendary masters in craftsmanship and iconic perfumes, and which aroma chemicals, accords, and evaporation curves, I also developed a rapid prototyping-to-packaging standard operating procedure, which was very helpful from my BS in Business coursework and degree. The women in my family were strong, smart, funny, and knowledgeable about worldly practices, traditional Ojibwe practices, and world, national, and local events, and such. They were already making soap, scenting our body products and home

with their combined creations from oils evaporated from steam distillation, sometimes combined with store-bought Watkins things, and our family members, their friends, and our neighbors decided what smelled beautiful.

- Great-grandmother Mary had soap and scent.
- My mother had perfume.
- I inherited both worlds.
- Later, I had a lake place of my own on **Cass Lake**.
- For a time, perhaps owning the place seemed important.
- It doesn't anymore.
- I don't need more than one home.
- What I need is **access to experience**.

I want to stand beside water and smell what the wind is carrying. I want to notice berries ripening, pine after rain, vegetation along a shoreline, the first change in the air before a storm, especially when visiting the Iron Range and smelling the fresh cooling of hot iron ore rock when the cold rain suddenly falls, and the fresh yet metallic scent left behind when it passes.

I want to keep encountering the smells that become our best memories. Because eventually I understood something that childhood had been teaching me all along:

I cannot keep the cabin.

**I did not keep the '65 red Mustang with pony interior, but I still have that car key. **

I cannot keep the summer. And I live to see another; every winter I pray.

I cannot keep everyone I love beside me forever, but I can give my love when we are together today.

And I know oh so well how scent can do something extraordinary.

A fragrance encountered decades later can suddenly open a door that no longer exists.

For an instant, the pine walls are warm again.

The screen door opens.

The lake is outside.

Someone you love is in the next room.

And you are there. It's almost the opposite of PTSD, and I believe I have heard others refer to these moments as "Glimmers."

That realization has become part of my purpose as a perfumer and artist. I don't want merely to manufacture pleasant smells.

I want to understand what makes a scent become attached to a human life—and then learn the difficult art and science of creating fragrances worthy of becoming part of someone else's memories.

Because I believe a scent will always bring back a memory. So make great scents for special memories to last a lifetime.