



SCENTS OF LAVENDER, MEMORIES, AND DREAMS

Memories are funny things. They bring events of long ago into the here-and-now of the present moment. As I get older I think of them as mystical and perhaps even magical. It's as if some moments, some ordinary little things, were too rich to be fitted into the space in my thoughts at the time — so here they come again!

For the past few weeks I have watched our Lavender change from grubby little bushes into the lovely things that were so admired by our Sister Marti (1939–2016). On days that had presented many challenges, she would put Lavender around my room that I might have a more restful sleep. Probably without knowing



it, she was practicing something that came from the ancient Egyptians. King Tutankhamen's (1332–1323 BCE) tomb was filled with Lavender and when it was opened many centuries after his death, there was still a scent. Marti, who patiently introduced me to the world of computers, put a sprig of Lavender on my desk. It is still here working its calming power when I am frustrated with the digital age.



When we planted the olive trees, I wanted to have Lavender between the rows — making Starcross into another Provence. However, it was pointed out to me that this would make olive harvesting virtually impossible!



We have several types of Lavender, all in much smaller patches than I would like. English Lavender is a compact roundish bush. It is planted right next to the Chapel. It has a soft fragrance and can also be used in cooking. It dries nicely and at times we infuse it with the olive oil for a wonderful balm. We thought it was our idea but later found out it was a healing staple of Medieval herbalists. This is the most widely grown Lavender in North America. Yes, it did come from England but it did not originate there. Like all Lavender, it was first prized and cared for by Arabs around the Mediterranean.

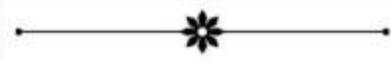
On the other side of our little Chapel is French Lavender. Much taller than its English cousins but very strongly scented, It makes beautiful Lavender wands because of the long stems. These are very popular items but take a long time to make. Some of our young helpers delight in this task. More than once I've come into the barn as a silent group was focusing their attention on weaving ribbon around the stems, a demanding process. I would occasionally ask what they were thinking about and what they shared with me was always very enriching. The Lavender magic was doing its thing! Those wands, like the

sachets that Sister Julie often works on if we are watching television after dinner, carry a lot of special thoughts for a long time. Sometimes I shake a wand given to me years ago and it seems as if wonderful things come out with the still present scent.

In the little rose garden beside our house, we also planted Spanish Lavender which have extremely long stems with small blossoms that last deep into the autumn.



Some friends have urged us to construct a labyrinth bordered with Lavender. It would probably provide a very meditative experience. However, the practical issues of growing the plants and constructing the path have so far held us back. But in a way, I feel that all the Lavender plants growing here form a kind of labyrinth.



Way back in time Lavender was used to attract good fairies who would drive away the evil forces. In Medieval times, and some places even today, Lavender is used to call forth angels and saints as a protection against being overwhelmed by the dark moments that come in life.

I was asked once by a young person, *Why Lavender, why not cabbages?* That's a good question. For one clan among the Hopi it is Squash, with a major feast at the sight of the first blossom. Some Zen Buddhists meditate by raking sand. A dear friend studying Oriental healing has a living leaf which she cares for with as much attention as anyone gives to a Lavender plant. My mother, like yours perhaps, had some very ordinary looking plant on the kitchen windowsill which was very special to her. These can all be guides to opening the doors to the sacredness within each of us.



In Lorraine Hansberry's (1930–1965) beautiful play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, a plant in a pot represents Mama's deferred dreams of moving out of a slum apartment into a house with a little garden. Mama says at one point, *This plant is feeble — but it has spirit*. The plant was as close as Mama got to her dreams. But in the last act the family is finally able to move into a little house. The boxes are moved out of the apartment and the stage is empty. Then Mama rushes in, picks up her plant, and exits! Curtain.



With Lance's help, I gave my young friend a tiny cabbage seedling and when he left to return to college a couple of months later, he took the cabbage with him — perhaps there were a few dreams attached!

Brother Toby
