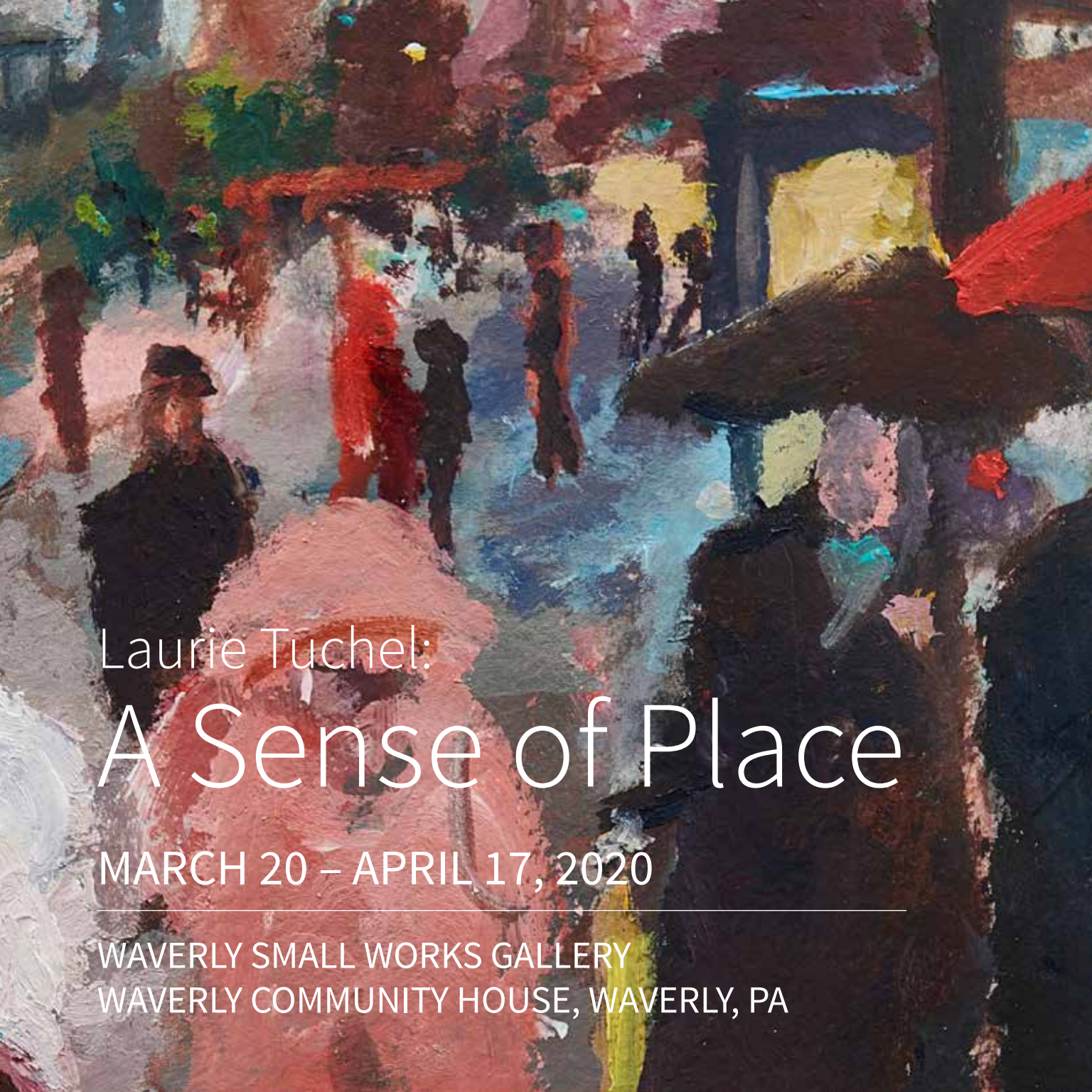


Laurie Tuchel:

A Sense of Place

MARCH 20 – APRIL 17, 2020

WAVERLY SMALL WORKS GALLERY
WAVERLY COMMUNITY HOUSE, WAVERLY, PA

From my first meeting with Laurie Tuchel, it was obvious to me that she is a storyteller as much as she is a gifted artist.

"A Sense of Place" is a collection of stories that frame her experiences for the viewer, told brilliantly through the use of paper, pigment, and heart. Laurie's work not only embodies the resplendent heritage and history of the places she calls home, but also invites the viewer to wonder at the darker aspect of nature and the human condition.

Laurie Tuchel was invited to be the solo exhibitor at Waverly Small Works Gallery's Annual National Women's History Month Show, as she truly embraces what it means to be a woman of the world, bringing something new to it through her extraordinary paintings everyday. Laurie's work evokes both harmony and discord, struggle and triumph, compassion and celebration.

The viewer is left with their own Sense of Place after a brief glimpse into the world our storyteller has collected for us.

Merissa Garrison
DIRECTOR
WAVERLY SMALL WORKS GALLERY

A Sense of Place

I am so pleased to be holding my first solo exhibition here in Waverly, my hometown, my first sense of place. A village that holds memories of a happy childhood and continues to be called home by my mother and sister. The gallery's invitation to exhibit provided an opportunity to reflect upon this special area. I thought about its historical role during the Underground Railroad, which hung mysteriously over the head of my childhood, always vaguely present through oral references but never taught nor mentioned in school. I decided to look more closely at this piece of history and to explore its story through painting. In essence, to better understand how the years between the 1840's and 1860's contributed to Waverly's sense of place.

Grand Bahama Island has been an adopted home for the last 18 years. Living on an island is fragile. Water plays a big role, beautiful and destructive. Last year Category 5 hurricane Dorian hit its shores and proceeded to wipe out half of the island, taking with it life, history and culture. The island now is in part, a microcosm of the effect of climate change and a populations' struggle to understand, or in some cases, to even acknowledge it. The human toll has been significant. Partially destroyed and mentally exhausted, the island's sense of place is under great strain. Will it physically survive to rebuild or literally sink into oblivion? Will the islanders' stories remain to be passed down to future generations or will they be lost to eternity?

Will Bahamians be forced to migrate to other shores because living here is untenable? Grand Bahama's vulnerable situation offers an opportunity to reflect upon the strength of the human condition and its resilience. The island is fighting to survive and to maintain its historical and physical sense of place. The question needing asked is whether this is a preview of what we all might expect?

The country of Scotland is my summer home. The birthplace of my husband, its sense of place has been a solid presence throughout our married life. A land of charm, filled with beautiful scenery, lively people and colourful history. Edinburgh, its capital, looks out over the North Sea, is crowned with an ancient hilltop castle, cobblestoned streets and echoes with the centuries of its past.

The country's culture is evoked through its music, its visual and performing art, its people, its sports and its architecture. The society's collective love of nature and animals is always evident and is often framed within a stunning visual beauty, even, and often because of, the frequent rain. Summer days are long in

Scotland. Day moves into night slowly and returns quickly in the wee hours of morning. Life is on parade to enjoy, to celebrate and to witness ***its sense of place.***

Laurie N Tuchel

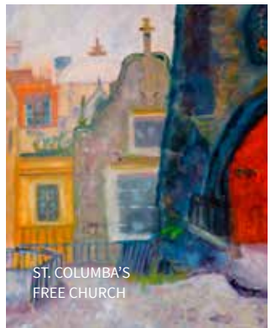
Shared moments of grief, joy, community and stillness.

I first met Laurie in 2014 when she attended my Summer School at Leith School of Art in Edinburgh. Over a fast paced and intensive week students were introduced to colour theory and the use of oil paint. Laurie was enthusiastic and keen to learn and by the end of the week had produced a carefully considered and sensitive painting of **St. Columba's Free Church** near the top of Edinburgh's historic Royal Mile. More importantly Laurie discovered a passion for painting and since that Summer School has steadfastly dedicated herself to attending courses, going on field trips and learning as much as she can. Every day is another opportunity to develop her art practice.

Six years on, and reflecting on that early work, it is apparent that much of Laurie's current interests and approaches were there from the start. In this early painting we see her love of colour, mark making and of course her desire to capture a sense of wherever was home for her at the time. In addition, her choice of a closely cropped composition has since become a hallmark of her work.

It is fitting that this exhibition is titled ***'A Sense of Place'***. No matter where Laurie is in the world, she makes time to paint and draw. Using any art materials that are available to her, working on scraps of paper and with odd bits of collage, she tirelessly strives to capture moments, be that past or present, which resonate with her.

This exhibition portrays the light and shade of Laurie's nomadic lifestyle. Working between her hometown of Waverly in Pennsylvania, the Bahamas and Scotland her work captures the unique cultural, historical and geographical diversity of each place. Drawing on her own sketches, the media, and historic documents Laurie records and retells stories through her characteristic soft brush work and sensitive colour palette creating a poignant and sensitive aesthetic.



ST. COLUMBA'S FREE CHURCH

REST IN PEACE DEAR CHILD

Laurie's interest is not in accuracy or proportions but in catching a fleeting sense of the multiplicity of lived experiences she finds around her. Her paintings of figures, both alone and in groups, are close cropped and intimate drawing us into their shared moments of joy, grief, community and stillness. While at first glance the various collection of images seem unrelated it becomes apparent that they are inextricably linked through Laurie, her life, travels and most of all interest and curiosity in the lives and struggles of the people who populate the distinct and often disparate worlds she collectively calls home.

Val Mclean
ARTIST AND TUTOR
LEITH SCHOOL OF ART, EDINBURGH

Three places, giving shape to her own life....

Laurie Tuchel undertook courses at Leith School of Art, Edinburgh, over a three year period and it was a privilege to work with her. Laurie was an ideal student who always gave a resolute commitment to her work which showed consistent development. Initially her focus was on the mechanics of painting, then colour and composition and finally finding her own voice and giving life to her own ideas.

Laurie Tuchel's progress has been steady and strong, rapidly becoming the fully rounded individual artist we see today. In this exhibition, ***A Sense of Place***, we find an artist engaged in studying her own life and recording her experiences visually. The paintings are all made in three places, which are the places that have been the most significant and meaningful, giving shape to her own life.

Laurie digs deeply into the life and history of her hometown of Waverly and finds that fleeing slaves, heading north, had been accepted by her home community. We see a painting of a ***Union Freed Slave Soldier*** and find human understanding and empathy towards this man. There is a depth of character in the man's face, wrought from great adversity and the uniformed figure: does it provide a new identity for this man or is there an awkwardness, a discomfort, an artificiality?

We move to Scotland and find very different aspects of life encapsulated in a form of painting that requires very considered visual editing, cropping compositions to reach the heart of a subject, distilling information in order to maintain what is most significant. In ***The Bagpipers***, the cropping of the subject helps create colour relationships and pattern, beautifully designed across the flat picture plane, creating a visual rhythm, in keeping with the marching pipe band.

THE BAGPIPERS

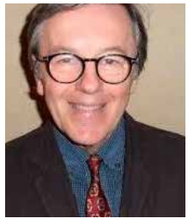
The third place of great importance is Grand Bahama, where Laurie has lived for 18 years. The impact of Hurricane Dorian which 'has taken away life, history and culture' has drawn a very deep and emotional response to this disaster. ***Braving the Storm*** shows the aftermath of the hurricane with a wasteland of damaged trees and broken cables cutting off communication. We are drawn across the picture plane to a small, fragile cluster of people, rescuing and attempting to protect a few possessions, fragments of their former lives. There is a sense of being present in this scene, it is raw, rough, real, but also humane.

A Generational Disaster shows a portrait head of a woman reflecting on the loss of a loved one. The woman is inconsolable, reflective, dignified and gracious, while suffering intense pain. Such a range of emotions are given full expression empathetically and reach far beyond mere depiction.

INDESCRIBABLE RELIEF

Indescribable Relief draws us in to the personal space of two women, a grandmother and mother, cherishing and protecting their child. It is a wonderful painting, full of emotional intensity befitting this subject. We see here echoes of the work of the French painter Georges Rouault and his deep engagement with the human condition. We also find a resonance with the German artist Emil Nolde who conveys profound depth of human emotion by strengthening colour and simplifying form.

I am delighted to see that Laurie Tuchel has found her voice and it is one that rings clear and true, without sentiment or affectation. Laurie's work captures a sense of light, the time of day and even the weather in order to keep us in the moment. Her work is constructed by attaching paper together, piece by piece, finding her compositions gradually in this, her own innovative method. Laurie is not distracted by details but reaches the heart of the matter. 'Get to the life about you' was a demand made by the artist and teacher Robert Henri to his students and Laurie Tuchel has certainly taken note of that!



Philip Archer
PAST PRINCIPAL
LEITH SCHOOL OF ART, EDINBURGH

Sense of Place – A Nomadic Exploration of the Paintings of Laurie Tuchel

Layers of vibrant colour blending into instinctual guttural loose brush strokes. Canvas surfaces covered in touchable unpredictable textures. Figures that become their background and landscapes that blend into figures. Emotions that emerge from the canvas in clear bursts and then blur back into the composition like memories and dreams. Identities that are obscured to draw you into a narrative. A narrative that is unclear at first, but then deeply knowable across generations. A sunny day, a delightful landscape, a face showing loss, an embrace communicating pain, a tragedy that becomes personal, and an image that brings history back from erasure. Concepts that seep into the viewer's sense of knowing, that speak to a universal human condition and then come into focus with a sense of place and time, with an understanding of where we are and who we are.

Artists are purveyors of our time; they reflect back to us what is happening and interpret the world how they see it. Laurie Tuchel's landscapes and her subjects have the feeling of someone who looks from afar and wants to tell us what she sees, and ultimately, what she feels about what she sees.

Tuchel, as she writes in her artist statement, is decidedly nomadic. An obsessive observational artist living part time in the Bahamas, and part time in Scotland, while frequently visiting her home in the United States.

As she traverses these three locations she does so as a keen personified "watcher." She captures moments in her mind's eye and then on her canvas, feeding them back to us through her experience and her unique lens. When one considers this whole collection, you have the understanding that she is acutely and painstakingly analyzing what she sees around her. That lens is highly influenced by her background in studying cultural anthropology. She looks, and then she asks what is missing? Whose story is being told? How can I document it? How do I tell this story through paint? In ***Braving the Storm*** she uses both the surface and the paint to document the story of Hurricane Dorian and its effect on the people and the land.

The haphazard scraps of paper she paints on look like they were gathered and sewn together from wreckage and debris during the aftermath and the chaos. Those collaged pieces are poignant and deliberate. They speak to the language of disaster, and the resourcefulness of the people who will use what they have to build up their community and their livelihoods again. She is in distress while painting, meditating on the difficult questions of our time. "Will the islanders' stories remain to be passed down to future generations or will they be lost to eternity? Will Bahamians be forced to migrate to other shores because living here is untenable?"(Tuchel)

On top of this make-shift canvas we see an image that is very familiar. We saw it on the news, we saw it on our phones, on our social media accounts. We saw it with the hash tag #BahamasStrong. However, we also saw it many other times, in many other climate crisis images over the past decade. We have seen this before. It is an icon of human suffering and resilience. It is humans braving many storms, gathering together, leaving their homes, helping where they can, straining and pushing against the rising waters and unprecedented storms. Using what they can find to get to the next place, enveloped in nature, pushing through disaster to the next point. Tuchel is there with them, in her frantic and chaotic brush strokes. She doesn't erase her hand. She exemplifies her watching presence and place in documenting an ongoing narrative of climate crisis, through a frantic sharp gray brush stroke in the left corner. She scrapes into the paint leaving scratch marks above the figures that speak to frustration and anger at the situation we find ourselves in. She drags her brush ever so lightly across the canvas with burnt umber to emphasize the power lines – a broken, flimsy and barely legible line. A light flimsy mark emphasizing our crumbling infrastructure in the face of an earth pushing back in response by causing a generational human disaster.

In ***Young Survivor of the Underground Railroad***, Tuchel looks to a record of cultural history that suffered erasure.

EVACUATION OF SWEETINGS CAY

As she writes in her artist statement "I thought about its (Waverly) historical role during the Underground Railroad, which hung mysteriously over the head of my childhood, always vaguely present through oral references but never taught nor mentioned in school" (Tuchel).

In a home bound nomadic moment, in Tuchel's artistic journey, she goes back to where she came from and wonders about this **Sense of Place**. She asks if she even knew it at all? Her sense of place was missing a story, a history, a deep narrative of people that is etched on the land. Again, through her choice of subject she brings us into a common human condition. A story of colonialism, of erased histories, of forgotten people, of a place that experienced deep trauma, pain and loss but wants us to forget. The artist moves us in close to the subject who is the survivor of this exploitation. She positions us so that we feel we are standing right in front of her. The young girl seems to throw her head back in a gesture of freedom, braids waving behind her into a dream-like place with no reference. However, in the face, the hollow eyes, and the uneasy brush strokes across the cheeks, we can feel all is not well. There is pain, struggle, and immense loss. Tuchel leaves the edges out of focus. Through her compositional choices she brings us along this journey; her subject coming into focus when she can't quite see it. Again, quick brush strokes communicate urgency, importance, and a desperation to know, recording, in this case, what we cannot see in our media, in our textbooks, and on our news.

When Tuchel writes about Scotland her tone changes and clearly so does her palette and her brush stroke. It seems, as an artist, that the feelings and viewpoint are so direct that the viewer can immediately feel what she sees and how she experiences it. "Summer days are long in Scotland. Day moves into night slowly and returns quickly in the wee hours of morning. Life is on parade to enjoy, to celebrate and to witness its sense of place " (Tuchel).

Examining ***Circus Lane Edinburgh*** as an example, value, colour and brush stroke suddenly solidify. The visual icons she paints are recognizable but uniquely hers through the mark of her hand, the unexpected choice of colour, and the surprising compositional choices. We can feel the ground on her feet, the historic old buildings

GIRL WITH THE PIGTAILS

coming out of the landscapes like century old forests. The people, the culture and the city have been here for hundreds of years. They are grounded. They are part of the landscape; not intruding in on it.

Communicating through the generational line of the French Impressionists here, Tuchel's brush strokes explode all over the canvas. She emotionally expands on the controlled deliberate dashes of a Monet or Pissaro. Here we can feel an artist who works on pure instinct, capturing things in the moment without cause for technical interruption or self consciousness in her studio process. She brings us along her observational journey of that light as moves over the brush, over the walls across the building and into a lilac sky with gorgeous pale blue brush strokes pushing into it with delight. In **Sense of Place** we get a uniquely twentieth first century view of the world we live in.

As an artist, Laurie Tuchel traverses across continents many times in a year. Her eyes roving and constantly observing what is around her. We see the Scottish landscape through the eyes of contemporary approaches to painting, we experience the climate crisis and its effect in the Carribean through painful images, and we experience a reckoning as we unearth untold stories erased by the machinations of colonization. She obsessively documents her experiences with a spontaneity of approach that results in an honest and pure visual vocabulary. One in which, colour, brush stroke and texture and their emotional power reign above any desire to imitate the photograph. She is there in the painting with us. We feel her brush moving across the canvas, documenting, telling us a story, looking for hidden history and motivating us to sense and emotionally respond to what she sees and what she feels in all the places she traverses.

Ilene Sova
BFA, MFA
CHAIR OF CONTEMPORARY DRAWING AND PAINTING
OCAD UNIVERSITY

A sense of place:
Waverly

WAVERLY COMMUNITY HOUSE

FREE METHODIST CHURCH 1874

WAVERLY GENERAL STORE OF BEDFORD & BATCHELOR

LITTLE SCHOOL HOUSE 1830

THE LITTLE HOUSE, BUILT BY LOTT NORRIS, 1850

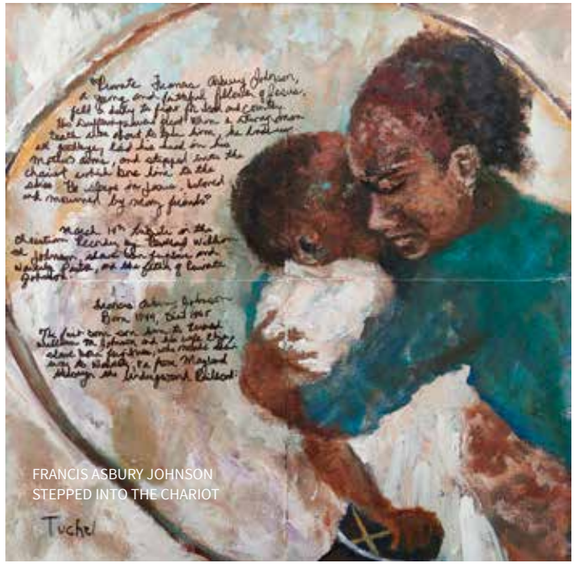
YOUNG SURVIVOR OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

ALBERT REA HOUSE, 1847

ONCE YOU LEARN TO READ,
YOU'LL BE FOREVER FREE

AT LAST RECOGNIZED
IN THE RIGHTS OF
MANHOOD

SONGPLAY



FRANCIS ASBURY JOHNSON
STEPPED INTO THE CHARIOT

RATHER DIE FREEMEN,
THAN TO BE SLAVES

A sense of place: The Bahamas

EVACUATION OF SWEETINGS CAY

REST IN PEACE DEAR CHILD

FACE OF AN INDOMITABLE
SPIRIT IN ARTICULATE SPACE

INDESCRIBABLE RELIEF

BRAVING THE STORM

A GENERATIONAL DISASTER

GIRL WITH THE PIGTAILS

A sense of place: Scotland

A DAY FOR CRICKET

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

CIRCUS LANE

FREDERICK STREET

THE FISHMONGER OF OBAN


THE BAGPIPPERS

A Sense of Place is dedicated to my two sons, Andrew and James and to Chas, my spouse of 34 years, who through his insatiable love of travel and can-do attitude, has shown me that no matter where we live in the world, life is truly what we make of it, as long as we follow our passions, we work hard and we remind ourselves every day how fortunate we are to share *A Sense of Place*.

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