

PREVIEW CLASS: Your Everyday Places

This is a preview lesson for "Scrapbooking Everyday Life." For details on the complete class and registration, [click here](#)

- *prompts & approaches for:* everyday places
- *focus on journaling:* meaning without schmaltz
- *sketches for* scrapbooking everyday life

"I want to go home to the dull old town, with the shaded street, and the open square, and the hill, and the flats, and the house I love, and the paths I know -- I want to go home." -- Paul Kester

The places we come from, the places we've traveled through, and the places we long to visit all inform who we are. How many of you have had the very longing described in the opening quote here? When you experience this kind of longing for a place, the place itself takes on associations and triggers feelings.

Writers and filmmakers understand this connection



[click here for journaling](#)

between place and character, often creating a story setting with such power it becomes a character itself. Think of 1920s Long Island in *The Great Gatsby*. Its geography and society inform the characters' actions--both those who've lived there all their lives and the newcomer Gatsby.

When I want to plumb my own thoughts on the places in my life, past and present, I often turn to the poem "First Year" by Irish poet Eavan Boland that begins: *It was in our first home--/our damp, upstairs, one-year eyrie--/above a tree-lined area/nearer the city.* That first stanza can carry me immediately to a "garden" apartment in Silver Springs, MD, and from there I'm recalling the furniture, the deck, the view of the parking lot below it, and even the stories.



[click here for journaling](#)

Many of my favorite scrapbook pages are those I've created as my own nod to the places in my life. "Been There" (on page 1) and "It's Charm" are both about my childhood home--a topic I scrapbook again and again.

prompts & approaches: YOUR EVERYDAY PLACES

To figure out and decide which places of your life to scrapbook:

- Pull out a piece of paper and begin making lists that answer the following:
 1. What are the "MACRO" places in which you live your everyday life? (These would be places like: home, town, work, school, errand destinations, fun destinations, etc.)
 2. Within each of these "MACRO" spots, what are the "MICRO SPOTS?" (i.e., for the macro spot "home" the micro spots might include: kitchen, porch, desk, garage, garden, driveway, foyer . . .)
- Now go through your lists and check off the spots that compel you. To decide just how you'll approach documenting a particular place, ask yourself these questions --and make notes as you do. The answers will help you get at the place's significance in your life, the tone you want to take in your journaling, and even details to include in the journaling:
 - ◇ is this spot a part of your daily routine?
 - ◇ is it a place you like to go to? what feelings do you have about it?
 - ◇ does it have a strong influence on your character (or on that of those living with you)?
 - ◇ will you remember it in 10 years? do you want to remember it in 10 years?
 - ◇ what makes it interesting or compelling?
 - ◇ what do you usually do at this spot?
 - ◇ who else is with you at this spot?
 - ◇ what is/are the lighting, the temperature, the smells at this spot?
 - ◇ what are the most important concrete details about this spot?

With your lists and answers in front of you, pick a place and decide upon an approach for making your page. In other words, decide upon the scope and angle you'll take. Will it be thoughtful, documentary, snapshot, or contextual?

- thoughtful

Create a thoughtful (perhaps even reverent) celebration of an important place that helps the viewer understand your feelings about the place and the role it plays (or has played) in your life. "Been There" on page 1 is this kind of page for me. I firmly believe that the place I was raised has left an indelible (and good) mark on my character, and this is one of the many pages I've made in homage to it. "Trestle" on page 9 records how the train tracks and trestle near our home have fit into our life over the years.

- documentary

Make a document or record of your personal world. "Your Room" on page 5 includes several photos of my son's room last year. I wanted a record (for him and for me) of the things that he surrounded himself with and the style in which he did this.

"Sweet Dreams" on page 7 is another bedroom page. The bedroom documented here is the one my sons share when they're at their grandparents' home.

excerpt from "First Year"

Where is the soul of a marriage?

Because I am writing this
not to recall our lives,
but to imagine them,
I will say it is
in the first gifts of place:

the steep inclines
and country silences
of your boyhood,
the orange-faced narcissi
and the whole length of the
Blackwater

strengthening our embrace.

Against Love Poetry
by Eavan Boland

- snapshot

Take a (perhaps fun) peek at a very localized spot in your life captured at one moment in time. "Like a River to the Sea" is this kind of a page for me-- I took a photo of the odd items that accumulated on my dresser top recently and then journaling a list and some of the reasons these things are there.



[click here for journaling](#)

- context

Scrap a page that's not specifically about a place, but that uses photos of place to provide context. In "See Why" on page 6, the farmland in the photos sets the context for my Dad's story and allows me to make a record of what his land looked like at this time.



focus on journaling: MEANING WITHOUT SCHMALTZ

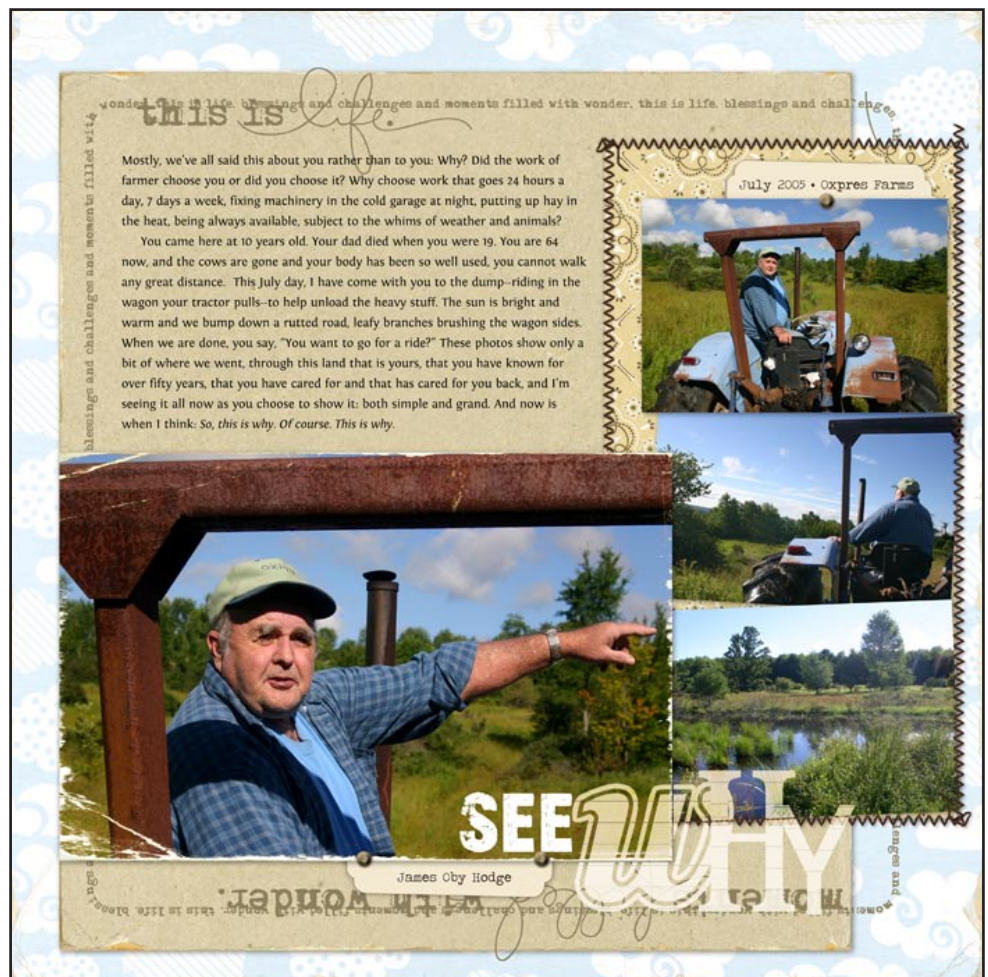
Purple prose, sentimentality, schmaltz: all of these are ways of describing writing that uses exaggerated or affected emotion. Sentimental writing relies on clichés (“heaven on earth,” “a feast for the eyes”) and abstracts (peace, despair, joy) to grab at a reader’s heartstrings rather than taking the time to render a subject with complexities and specifics. The result is writing that we don’t quite believe and definitely don’t feel.

Try these techniques for pages that have meaning without being “schmaltzy.”

- **Pay attention to concrete details.**

In both your writing and your photos, focus on conveying how you experienced something concretely (as opposed to naming your feelings) including any of the five senses for which you have relevant information. Relevant is key -- detail for detail’s sake can weigh things down and make it hard for the reader to figure out what’s important.

Photos can show lighting, colors, and specific sights. In your writing, you can include smell, sound, touch, and taste.



[click here for journaling](#)

The best way to do this writing is to allow yourself to initially free write and then revise with a checklist:

- Use no more than 20% abstract concepts and 80% concrete description. (See sidebar here.)
- Avoid “pretty prose” by eliminating streams of adjectives, adverbs, and metaphors.
- Avoid clichés, simplistic expressions, and “Hallmark”-isms.
- Be clear. Revise language that’s “fuzzy,” i.e., sweet and abstract, and replace it with concrete details.

The journaling in “See Why” on page 6 opens with a listing of the constants of a farmer’s life and a brief history of how my father got there, then moves on to recount a specific outing. This outing provides a few concrete details that supplement the photos -- and that build up to provide the basis for my new understanding of where he’s coming from. The photos work with the journaling to establish the concrete details. Views of land with lots of green grass, blue sky, bits of water and trees all give a sense of the natural world in which my father has moved about his entire life.

Concrete details are those of images that can be sensed (seen, heard, touched, smelled, even tasted). Including details gives your image specificity. “Creature” is a vague word. “Animal” is more specific but still leaves a lot to the imagination. “ But tell us about your “long-haired Persian cat with a wide face” and you’re getting specific.

Significant details are those that matter to the story. You don’t need filler. A significant detail suggests an abstraction or feeling like beauty or stress or joy **without** using that abstract word. When you write the detail rather than the abstraction you’ve got a more compelling piece.

- ***Evoke an emotional response with color, image, motif, and design choices.***

On a scrapbook page, you have more than your journaling available for conveying a feeling. It's possible to use a combination of images, color, and motif to convey the joy or disappointment of a moment, place, or subject. In writing about art (specifically about Hamlet), T.S. Eliot talked about the "objective correlative," a set of objects, or a situation, or a chain of events that evoke an emotion in the audience. Rather than writing "He felt sad," in a story, the author can use weather, gestures, and even the things the character observes to the same purpose. On many of the pages you scrapbook, you will absolutely have a feeling or attitude about the subject you're scrapping. Consciously think about every choice you make to create a whole that's evocative of a mood or emotion.

Specifically, you can work with:

- color associations;
- pattern (oversized, stylized florals convey a different tone than bright dots on white background);
- photo cropping and editing;
and
- image and motif

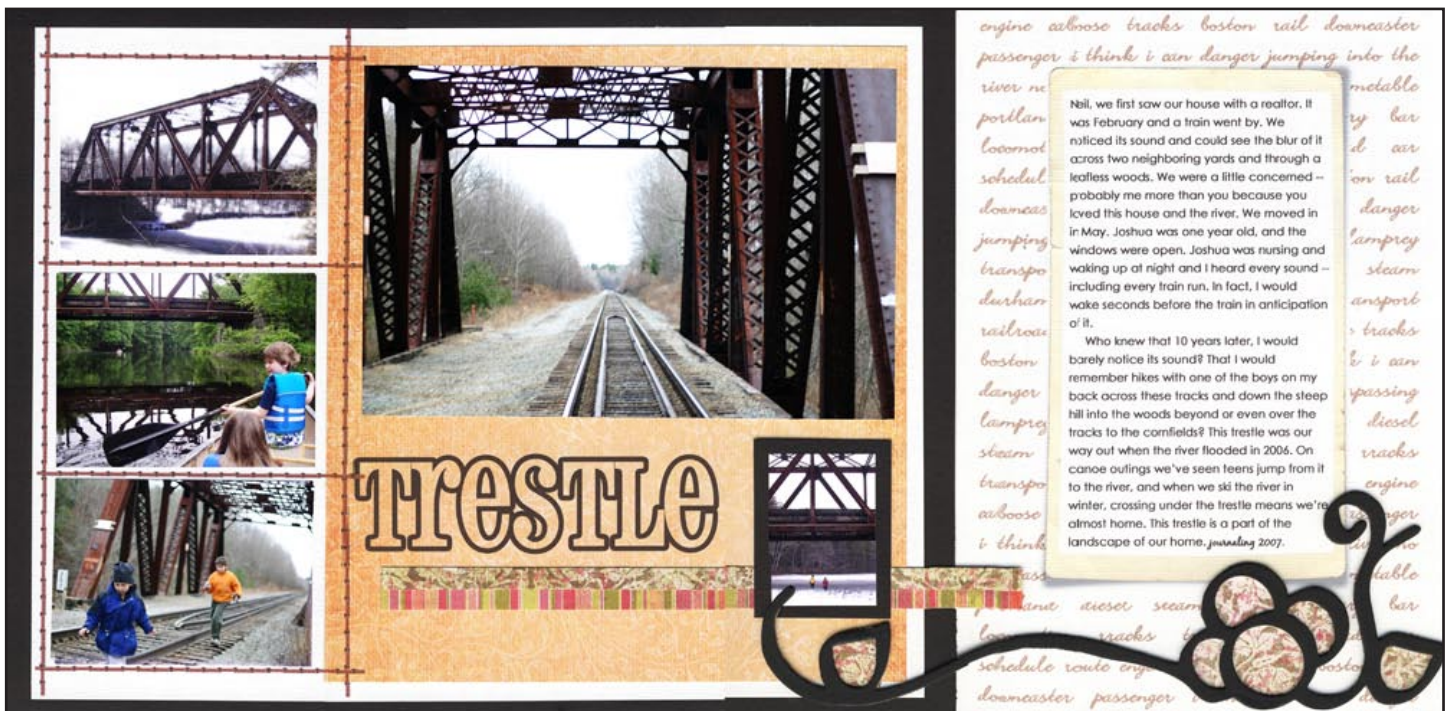
The layered papers along with curled and worn edges and warm colors in "Sweet Dreams" convey a cozy tone that goes with how I feel about this room. A bedtime motif of the cow jumping over the moon and a gingham bow complete this feeling and support the subject.



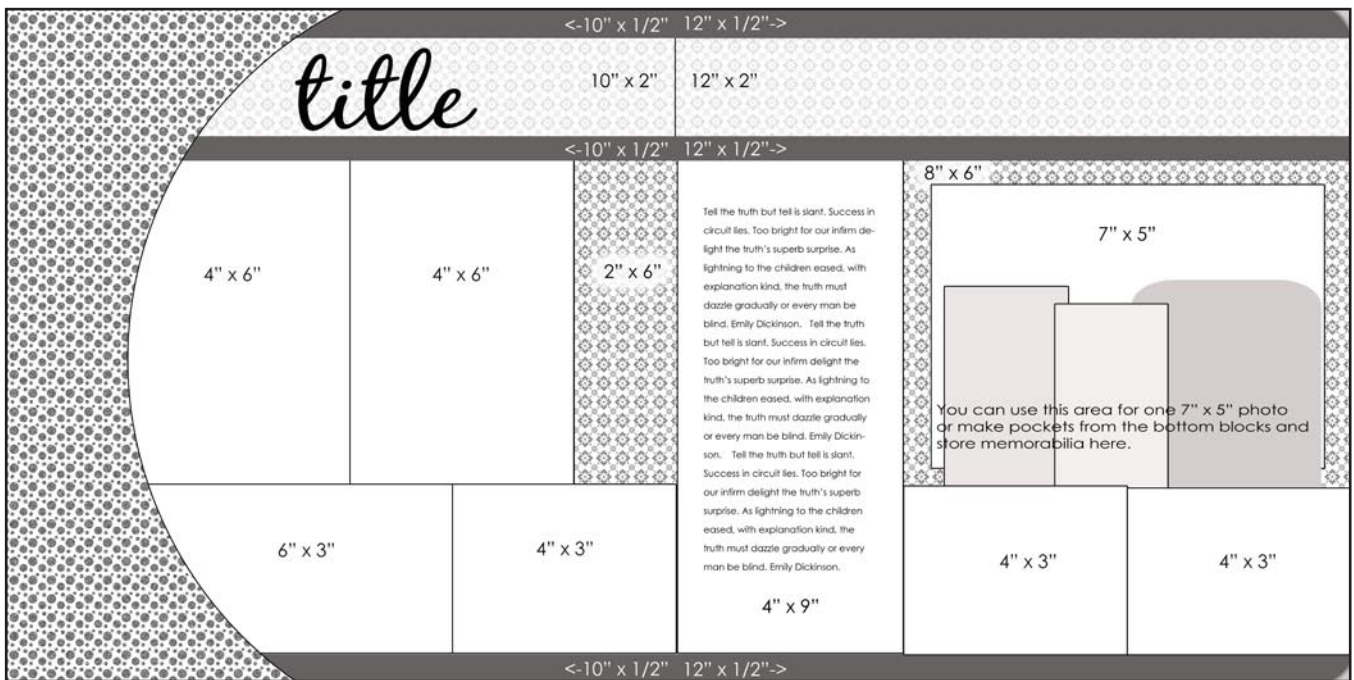
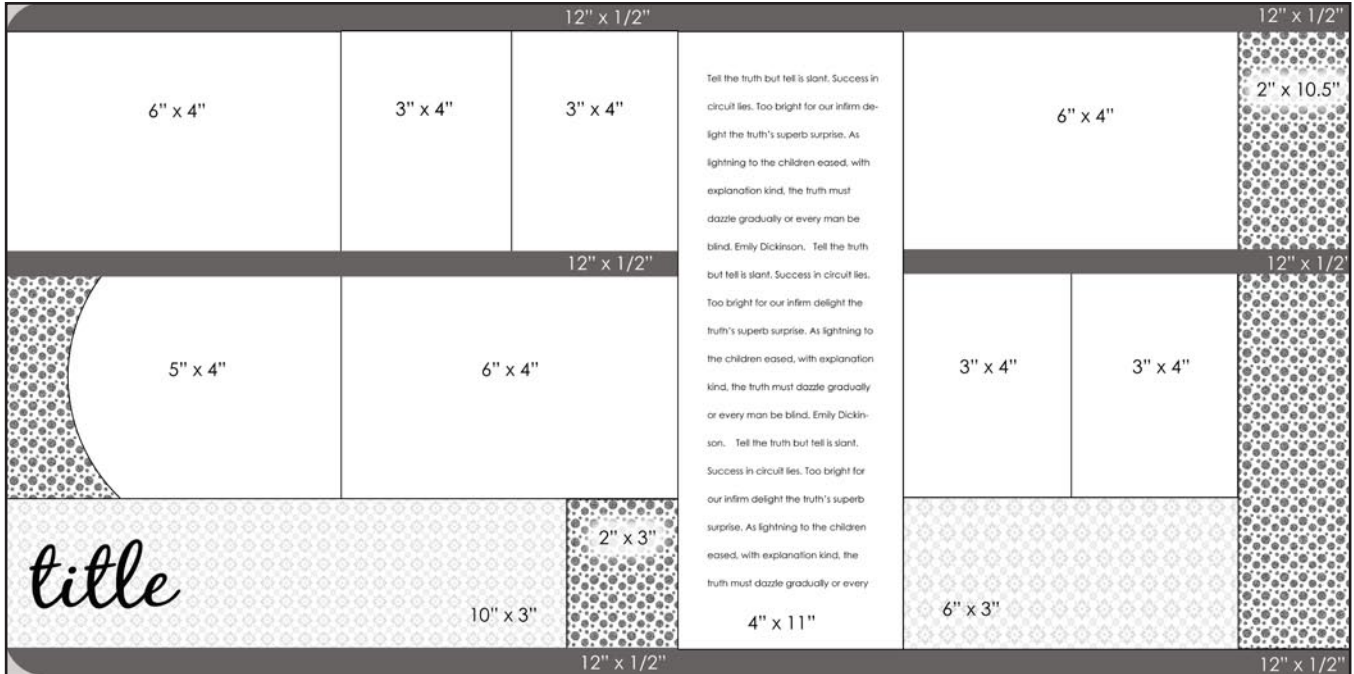
● **Show don't tell**

Hold back from telling the reader what they should think about your subject (or at least save it for the end). Trust that if you report an experience as truly and accurately as possible that it will speak for itself. Do not try to shape a response, but, rather, seek to present the kind of clear picture that lets readers come to their own understanding of meaning. The journaling on "Its Charm" on page 2 accumulates details that work to earn the abstract "charm" in the page's title, listing the many aspects of life at my parents' home that are both different than those at my home and that my family loves.

The journaling and photos in "Trestle" also accumulate details. The photos were taken in different seasons and from different angles. The details accumulated in the journaling are of incidents relating to this place. Together they sum to show just how this spot fits into our lives now and in the past.



[click here for journaling](#)



JOURNALING

Journaling: “Been There”

The sight of you three takes me straight back to my days of sunning next to hayfields on this farm in upstate NY. Oh, the indulgence of sunning oneself as others labored nearby -- the bravura involved in attempting a suntan in a place that has as many overcast days a year as it does sunny. I'm quite sure my brothers (one of them your dad) and my own dad thought I was a little addled and that I certainly didn't "get" their lives. And I didn't. I planned to go to college for international business and get a job making lots of money so that I could hire someone to watch my children and do my housework. Oh--and I would be living in a city.

Yep. I'm pretty sure I had (and voiced) those plans. And I did go to college. And I did go off to Washington DC. And I had some international relationships and I worked a lot and commuted and ate at nice restaurants and traveled on business so much I was doing my laundry at hotels. And it was good for a while.

But you guys know where I ended up. In fact, the life I live now is the life you've always known me living. I live in the country in a small college town in New Hampshire and I'm a stay-at-home mom to your cousins and I do all the dishes and I don't make a lot of money.

AND . . . I love to come visit you and I love to see my boys playing with you and I love seeing all of you BE on this land as I once WAS on this land. return to “Been There”

Journaling: “Its charm”

So much at Mom and Dad's is different from our home. There's a barn—several buildings, actually—and all of them filled with treasures to explore. They use a clothesline and grow a garden and have lush flower beds around the house and numerous bird feeders. There's a wellhouse and even a trampoline! It's not just in the way they do things but it's also in the charm of the place -- all the touches outside and in. This pump and goose that Ethan's standing next to are new this year, and the front porch is always my favorite place to be—so many flowers and sweet touches. Summer 2008. Oxford, NY. return to “Its Charm

Journaling: “Like a River to the Sea”

Whenever we can't find something around here, Joshua or Isaac or will eventually say, “Look on Mom's dresser.” And I often lament, “Why's *THIS* (pvc pipe, lone sock, wrapper to string cheese, YuGiOh card deck) on my dresser?”

Today's contents: card shuffler & holders from Gin Rummy with Isaac; lone sock; spoon from under a pillow (snow day superstition); Aztec mask; “My Fair Lady” DVD; trombone slide cream that was in my suitcase when we went to Disney; puzzle book from Tami; orange & blue “camo” paint for Isaac's tank; string Donald; pencil case with game pieces for Sunshine Math; small wire cutters; baseball (?); stationary; memory card; paper chain napkin holder from the “sustainable” Commencement Dinner last month; Halo figure & Littlest Pet Shop figure; lint brush; lizard, ruler; bag of toothpicks (for crafting); pvc from Joshua's nerf gun modifications; ruler ... return to “Like a River to the Sea”

Journaling: “See Why”

Mostly, we've all said this about you rather than to you: Why? Did the work of farmer choose you or did you choose it? Why choose work that goes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, fixing machinery in the cold garage at night, putting up hay in the heat, being always available, subject to the whims of weather and animals?

You came here at 10 years old. Your dad died when you were 19. You are 64 now, and the cows are gone and your body has been so well used, you cannot walk any great distance. This July day, I have come with you to the dump--riding in the wagon your tractor pulls--to help unload the heavy stuff. The sun is bright and warm and we bump down a rutted road, leafy branches brushing the wagon sides. When we are done, you say, “You want to go for a ride?” These photos show only a bit of where we went, through this land that is yours, that you have known for over fifty years, that you have cared for and that has cared for you back, and I'm seeing it all now as you choose to show it: both simple and grand. And now is when I think: So, this is why. Of course. This is why. return to “See Why”

Journaling: “Trestle”

Neil, we first saw our house with a realtor. It was February and a train went by. We noticed its sound and could see the blur of it across two neighboring yards and through a leafless woods. We were a little concerned -- probably me more than you because you loved this house and the river. We moved in in May. Joshua was one year old, and the windows were open. Joshua was nursing and waking up at night and I heard every sound -- including every train run. In fact, I would wake seconds before the train in anticipation of it. Who knew that 10 years later, I would barely notice its sound? That I would remember hikes with one of the boys on my back across these tracks and down the steep hill into the woods beyond or even over the tracks to the cornfields? This trestle was our way out when the river flooded in 2006. On canoe outings we've seen teens jump from it to the river, and when we ski the river in winter, crossing under the trestle means we're almost home. This trestle is a part of the landscape of our home. journaling 2007. return to “Trestle”