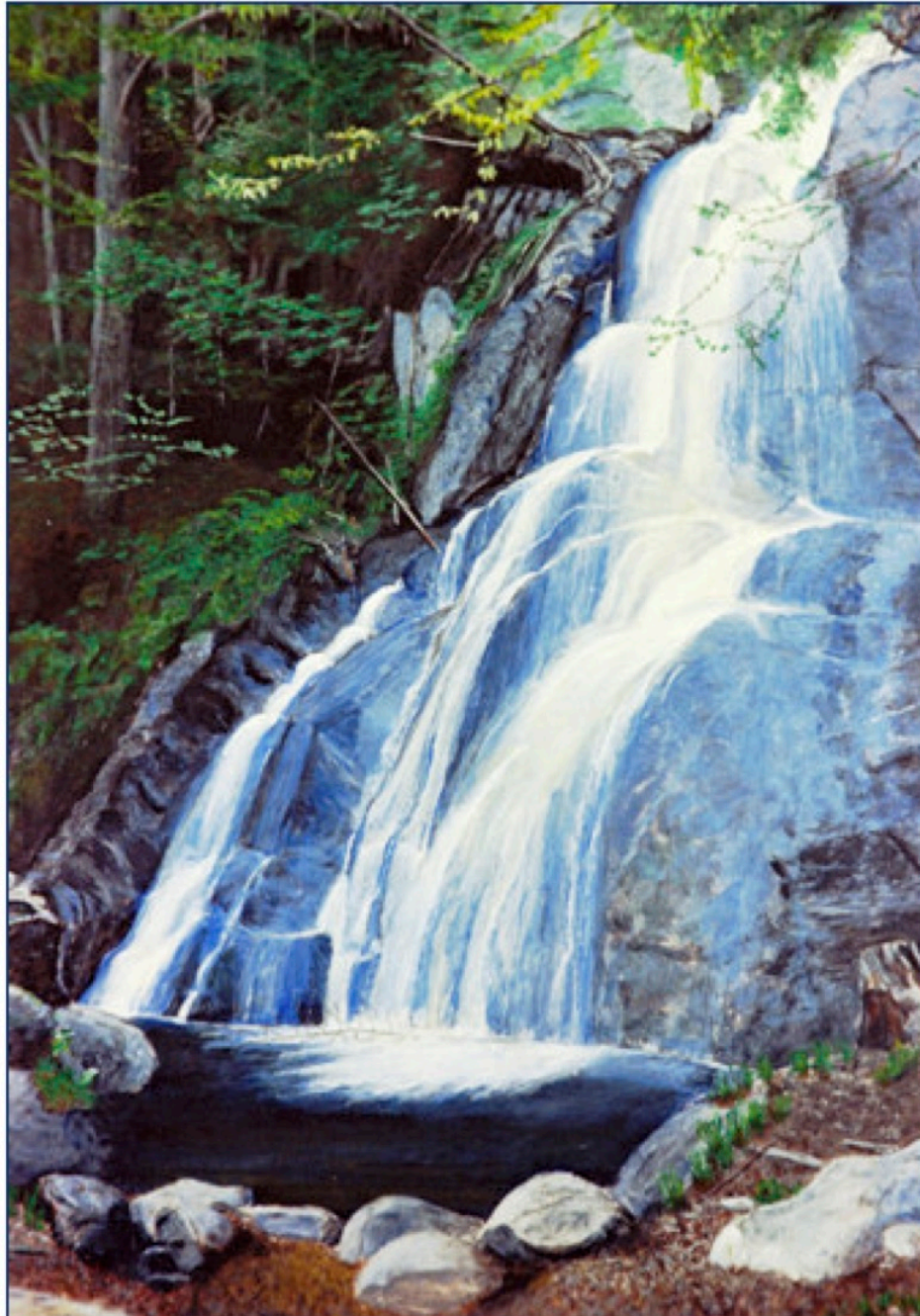


# SPOTLIGHT

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## MY ARTICHOKE

Sunshine de Leon

### **Write about a favorite food from childhood and its significance in your life**

When I was a little girl, eating an artichoke meant eating only its leaves. One by one I would pick each leaf off the middle stem, starting with the small ones, proceeding to the outer most layer and ending with those closest to the heart. I always debated how close to the heart I could go without sacrificing taste because when the leaves were too thin, they became difficult to eat and had a less strong flavor.

I would dip each leaf into a lemon butter sauce or mayonnaise and my first bite would be taken into the perfect “middle” spot, i.e. the exact spot where the leaf starts to become tender. I then let my teeth scrape down the rest of the artichoke leaf until I reached the part with the sauce – this would allow the tastes to blend perfectly. Balancing the flavor of the sauce with the artichoke leaf was vital, as the ratio of leaf to sauce had to be a complimentary one. This taught me an early lesson in how important it was to balance what you loved.

One day I discovered a very special way of eating my last leaf – a way which allowed its delicate flavor to linger. I would drink a sip of water right after I had my last bite and something about the water mixed



with the aftertaste of the artichoke would bring out this deliciously sweet aftertaste in my mouth. I learned that if you swirled the water around in your mouth a little bit before swallowing, the flavor intensified. I was never very good at letting things go quickly. I wanted everything to last.

I would often share an artichoke with my mother because she loved eating their hearts. For some reason I had no interest in this particular part – possibly because it involved peeling and scooping the fuzzy layers between the leaves and the heart. I think the truth was I never felt confident enough regarding how to get to its heart so I just left it alone. The same could be said about the way I dealt with my feelings in my childhood. I preferred to live as far away from my emotional center as possible.

I grew up and a man fell in love with me and wrote me a poem called “The Artichoke.” I guess I was not the only one who knew my attraction for this vegetable ran much deeper than the obvious. “A life lies deep inside you, out of reach from all known men. Many have succumbed in the spiral of your leaves and others not even tried, such is their fear of your prickly ends. Like cowards and fools, they turn around and ignore the greatness of your soul”. Unfortunately, a few months after he discovered my soul, he ran from it and became the man he wrote about.

I spent a week with a French boyfriend in the countryside and when he saw my face light up upon seeing an artichoke at the market, we went home and he made me home-made mayonnaise. I fell in love with him more than I already was, and he ended up being the first man to help me reach my own heart.

I love artichokes now as much as I always have but the difference is I love them completely. I love the leaves because they offer a taste of the pleasure to come and I love the heart for its wholeness. I will now fight to have the hearts - both mine, and the artichoke's.