

## Visual Analysis and Life Writing Activity

Photographs often provide windows into our past through powerful images that conjure up memories of events, experiences, and feelings that may be buried beneath the minute details of our current lives. Both the film Shining Night and the accompanying booklet Morten Lauridsen's Waldron Island Reflections contain many meaningful images of Waldron Island and other places that matter to the composer. Throughout the film and booklet, specific feelings and associations with each specific place are mentioned or implied. These visual and textual references help us get to know Morten Lauridsen as a real person, particularly to understand how his professional life is interconnected with his personal life. Morten Lauridsen is thus an example of an important goal of our education at Cal Lutheran: the **education of the whole person**, in which academic studies, chapel services, co-curricular activities, athletics, and our personal lives are all involved in **the act of creating and living out our journeys as human beings**.

Each of us has **specific associations and feelings with places where we have been**, and we or our parents and friends often capture significant images on our smart phones or digital cameras and post them to social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, or we save them in some other online or print photo album. The following activity asks you **to participate in the visual journey recorded in Morten Lauridsen's Waldron Island Reflections, by both discussing a favorite photo from the booklet and comparing that photo to a specific photo from your past.**

### **Stage I: Choosing a Favorite Image from the Booklet or Film**

My favorite image from both the film and the booklet appears about halfway through the booklet. It is a soft-focus closeup of the exterior of the octagonal/circular creative studio that Lauridsen built on Waldron Island. In the film we are taken inside this special place, and Lauridsen describes the work he does there. He does not do his actual composing in the studio, but instead he uses it as a place to read poetry and other books for his future compositions; he contemplates the art that he has in this studio; he reflects on his life and his future compositions; and he uses the octagon as the "home base" for quiet, reflective walks in the surrounding woods.

For me, **the octagon represents how Lauridsen approaches life and how he approaches his professional work**. His life is much more about circles than straight lines. He works in a circular, process-oriented fashion. Lauridsen's creative studio is the place where his ideas are initially nurtured, before he actually sits down to attempt to place musical notes on staff paper at the piano in Crum's Castle, his main home on Waldron Island. Sometimes Lauridsen begins a composition at his home in the Hollywood Hills, and then finishes it later during a summer sojourn on Waldron. He did this kind of multi-stage process in composing the Lux Aeterna, for example, as he explains in the film. For Lauridsen, **some of his best ideas come to him when he is NOT composing**, but instead when he is reading poetry, relaxing on the beach, writing in a journal, reading a book, repairing Crum's Castle, or reflecting quietly during a woodland walk. He doesn't attempt to separate his composing from the other part of his life, but instead he pays attention to **the overlapping nature of life and work as he creates**.

==> Using our class discussion of this photo as a model, **choose another photo from the booklet**

that you find meaningful. Compare the photograph to the description in the book or to anything relevant that you remember from the film. Use the internet to search for historical details about the place depicted in the photo. Think about what this place might be said to represent about Morten Lauridsen and his calling or vocation in his life journey. **Thumb back through the text, looking for other passages or photos that directly or indirectly illuminate the experiences and feelings evoked by this place. Write a substantial interpretive paragraph or two that explains what you see in the photograph, elsewhere in the booklet, and/or what you remember from the film.** Be sure to use whatever evidence from the text that you can find, but also experiment with drawing your own conclusions based on what you observe in the photograph and what you have noticed more generally from watching the film. *Note: If you wish to see it again, there are a few copies of the film on reserve in Pearson Library.*

## **Stage II**

Using your initial work with the booklet as a model, **please choose one meaningful photograph from your past.** The photo that you choose may be of you, a member of your immediate family, a significant relative, or a close friend. –Or the photo might be of a significant place where you lived or visited; there might not be any human figures in the photo. To more directly “try on” how photographs and text can create meaning, try to select an image from your childhood that represents **a pivotal moment or struggle or transition from your past.** Instead of choosing an upbeat “glamour” shot, **try to find an image that shows a moment that you recall being difficult or challenging or meaningful in some way—perhaps one that later led to necessary change and growth.** Photos from your early- or middle-childhood tend to work best. You may wish to ask family members to select some representative images to send to you electronically, so that you can choose from those, or you may be able to find photos on a family member’s social media page or online album.

Once you have chosen your image, examine it carefully, noting facial expressions, body language, shading, and/or the placement of figures and/or objects within the frame. **Discuss the photo** with family and/or friends who were present during the event or who were familiar with the context of your life during the time when it was taken. **Then write a substantial interpretive paragraph that explains what both you and others see in it, particularly in terms of what it means to you now.** If you see any comparisons between the challenge or shift that you faced and the ones described by Morten Lauridsen, you may wish to include that, too.

## **Requirements:**

1. Please word-process your paragraphs into one essay; try your best to connect the two parts of your project so that the two photographs speak to one another in a meaningful way.
2. Length: 3-4 double-spaced, word-processed pages.
3. Edit and proofread carefully (do more than one draft to help you improve your writing).
4. If possible, please attach a copy of the photo you have chosen; if that is not possible, you may forward a .jpg file of the photo to me by e-mail.
5. Be prepared to informally present your selected photographs to the class.
6. For any sources that you use, please include a “Works Cited” list (MLA format).
7. **Due: Tuesday, October 7 at the beginning of class.**