



OPENING *Doors & Windows*

BY BECKY SHANDER

The idea of making mistakes makes me uneasy. I've been this way since early childhood ... I grew up in a family with parents who praised good grades, the mastering of anything musical, and proper behavior at all times. My parents are Asian, and my father was a missionary — imagine! Basically, I was expected to be perfect (at least this is how my younger self interpreted it). I spent most of my youth trying to reach these mountainously high expectations and hoping to earn my parents' approval.

REMAINING WITHIN THE LINES

Keeping my eyes (and heart) on this intangible prize (acceptance), I became a fast learner. I made sure I understood all the rules and obediently followed them to a T. This stifling way of doing things, which started at home, went out with me into the world ... following me like a mute, twin shadow. For instance, around the age of 4 or 5, I remember wanting to please my teachers at school by always trying to do things the "right" way. I worked hard to carefully color within the lines with my waxy, dull-tipped crayons. And sometimes, I would be so focused on the task that I would hold my breath and forget to exhale. That 5-year-old self could never have imagined working with watercolors where there are no lines whatsoever.

In addition to my deep desire to color within the lines, I was also a rule follower when it came to color selection. I would always use the obvious and expected colors such as green for grass, blue for sky, yellow for sun, etc. Of course these colors would all end up placed neatly within the lines. Yet another reason watercolor should have been impossible for me — make my own colors ... design my own palette ... unheard of!

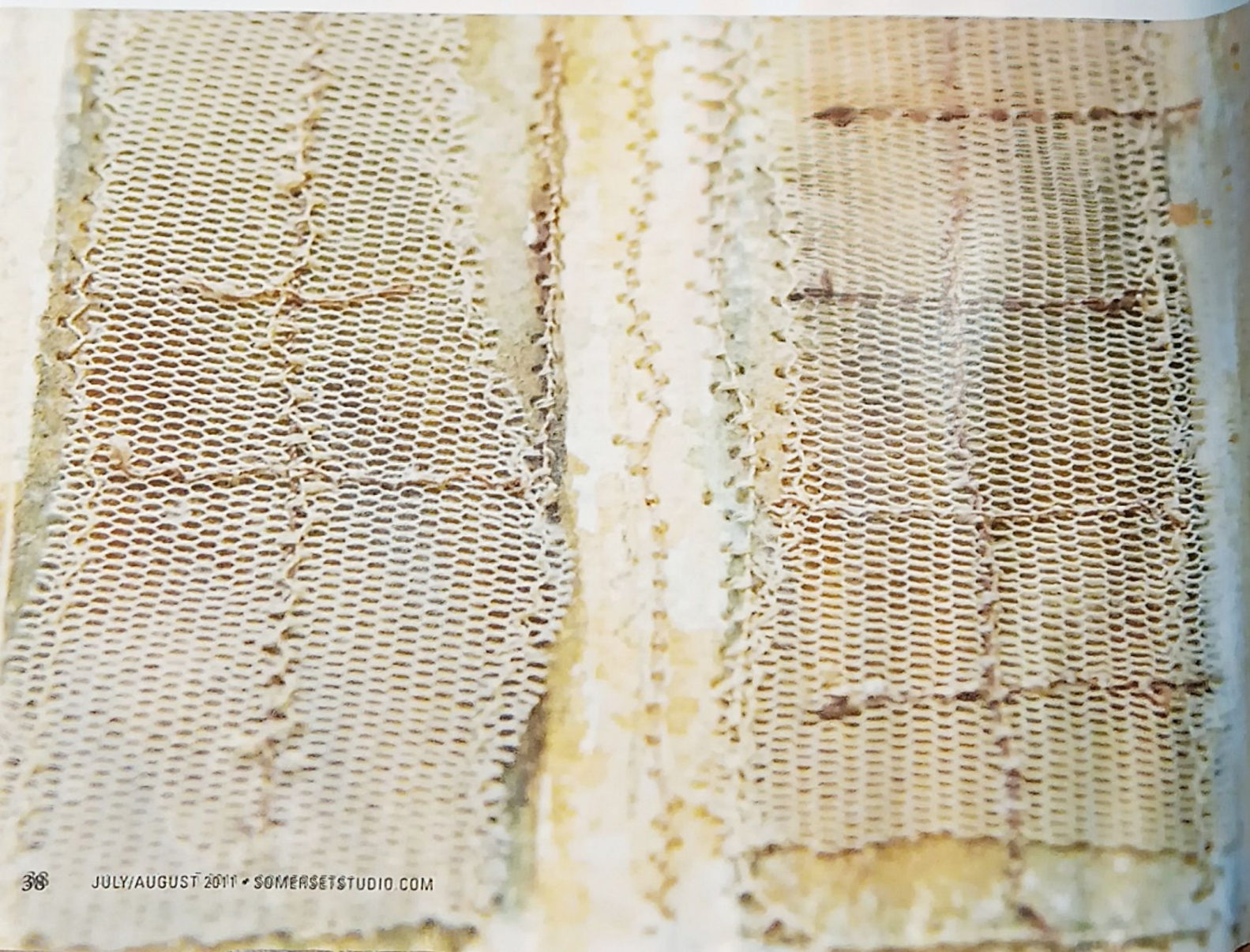
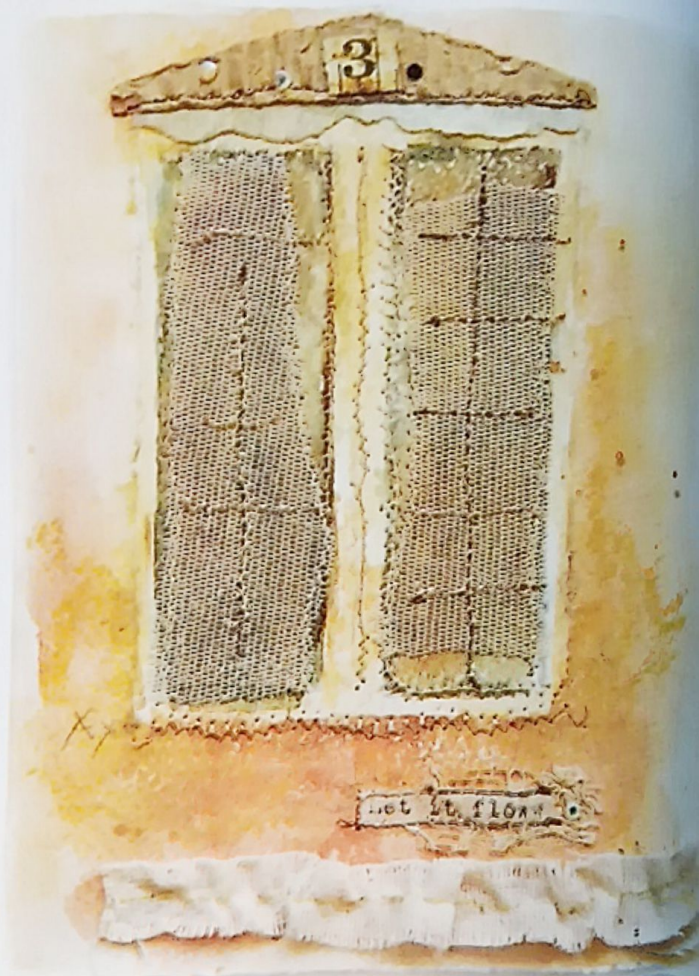
Unfortunately, this tendency continued through most of my school years and well beyond until I reached my twenties (when I was living on my own) and was liberated from this self-imposed box. Once I experienced the luster of imagination I had been missing all those years, I could feel the reassuring embrace of self-acceptance. →



OUT OF THE BOX

I was finally awake to the fact that nothing and no one is perfect, and that I should be more accepting of life and all its flaws ... my own included. I also realized that it's OK to make mistakes, and, in fact, there are very positive lessons to be learned through each failure we experience. Coming to this understanding opened the door to a more carefree life — a world full of wonder and possibilities and light with opportunity peeking through to greet me like the glow around an outside door and the light trying to sneak in despite the obstacle in its way.

I had asked my husband, Bill, to contribute some words of poetry for the arched door piece. He came back to me with: "Sometimes it takes a closed door for opportunity to knock loudly enough to be heard." In his words, this verse means that without an obstacle of some kind, without some struggle, sometimes you can't advance. You need the barrier to allow you to appreciate whatever accomplishment you eventually achieve, and even to be able to see the chance to accomplish something in the first place. This is exactly what watercolor represented to me — a nearly insurmountable barrier that actually opened up the most marvelous and unexpected possibilities for me.



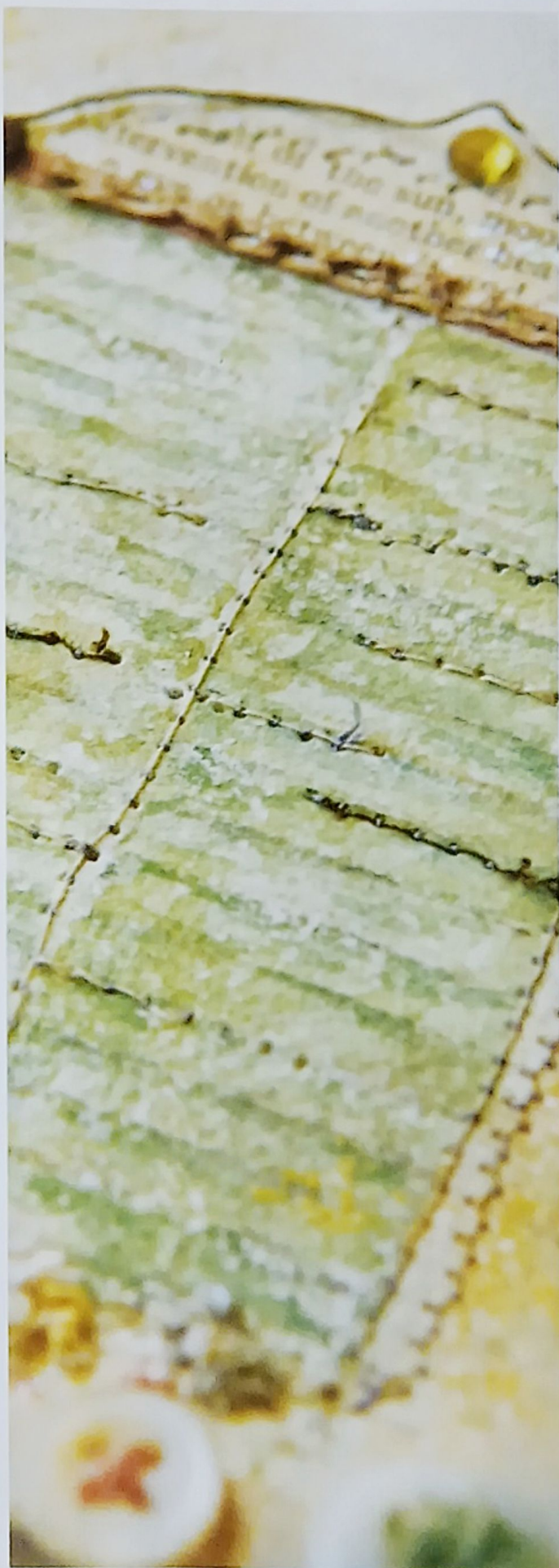


FLIRTING WITH COLOR

I was thinking of openness and opportunity as I painted these colorful door and window images. I mixed color with water, then more color and water, adjusting shades and painting randomly by whim ... back and forth, here and there, dipping and blending with abandon. Between each layer of paint, I would pause and look, my eyes flitting from detail to detail as I decided where to place more color in an almost flirtatious manner. Once this dance of liquid color was completed and the layers looked to be at home in their place, I moved on to adding paper and fabric elements, hand stitches, sewing machine details, and a few 3-D pieces. These embellishments seemed to come together in harmony.

The unpredictable characteristics of watercolor go against my very nature, yet it is exactly what I need. It gives me a chance to go out of my comfort zone, but without the pressure of having to please anyone, including myself. It would be ideal if I could claim that I'm over my "gotta get it perfect" complex, but I'm not completely cured yet. And I'm fine with this; sometimes fine is good enough. And now with every free-flowing brush stroke, I sense more and more of the radiant light of creativity; this energy moves me, in all the right directions. ✦

Becky Shander is a mixed-media artist from Hopkinton, Massachusetts, and serves as a Director's Circle Artist for Stampington & Company Publications. Please visit her blog, beckyshander.com/blog, or website, beckyshander.com, to learn more about her work.



for a certain destiny...

des-ti-ny (des'ti-ni), n.; pl. -nies (-ni-
 (F. *destinée*), < L. *destinata*, fem. of
destinare: see *destine*.) That which is
 determined to happen; the predetermined
 fate; also, that which is to happen to a
 thing; one's lot or fortune; what will become
 of a person or thing; also, the power of
 termines the course of events; overruling
 this power personified or represented as a
 Fate.



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