



We all need a little more **Wabi-Sabi** in our lives. So just what is **Wabi-Sabi** and how can it influence our lives? I'll start with the story that got me interested enough to learn more. I'm not sure just how true it is, but I have no reason to doubt it.

The story begins not long after the end of World War 2 with the unconditional surrender of Japan as the result of dropping two atomic

bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. An American General was part of the occupation forces after the war. He was having lunch with an interpreter and several high ranking Japanese officials when a Japanese woman began screaming at him. She was immediately restrained, but as she continued to scream he asked the interpreter what she was saying. He explained that her whole family had been vaporized by the atomic bomb drop on Hiroshima. She had been in the country that day and was the sole survivor of her entire family. Her mother, father, young brothers, sisters, grandparents and children were all gone without a trace. She was screaming at him, asking why he had done this to her family who had done no harm nor had wished any harm to him.

The General got up, approached the screaming woman and simply said, “**Wabi -Sabi.**” The woman stopped screaming and began crying while repeating the two words **Wabi -Sabi.** The security released the now calmed woman who slowly walked up to the General and hugged him all the while repeating those two words. Now if you are like me, I wondered just what did he say to the woman to cause her to completely change her hate for him to forgiveness for her loss with two words. What did they mean to have such power? My curiosity led me to ask a Japanese friend who told me it was complicated, as the words have no direct translation. It is a very old Japanese philosophy that centers around the fact that there can be beauty in imperfection. When I told him the story of the General he said that the woman understood that the bombings were an imperfect way to end a very long and vicious war that likely had seen many of her other relatives, including her husband, fail to return home. I feel that the General was telling her that it was an imperfect decision to destroy over 80,000 innocent people in a flash in order to save a greater number had a conventional land invasion been carried out. We live in an imperfect world.

The dictionary says that **Wabi-Sabi** is a 1,000 plus year old philosophy that sees beauty in imperfection. It is a lot more than that and has evolved over the centuries.

My father had the **Wabi-Sabi** philosophy in mind without knowing it when he would tell me: “if you want perfection, you’ll have to die and go to heaven, but that doesn’t mean you can’t strive for it.” He was a strict disciplinarian, but very fair as well. He had a leather strap that hung in the bathroom and was used to sharpen his straight razor. If one stepped too far out of line that strap could have other uses. Looking back I don’t recall it ever being used for an “attitude adjustment” as he wisely realized that the fear of it was way more powerful than the actual use would have been. When I rolled the tractor over by not stopping at a creek bed, as I’d been told to do many times to shift to a lower gear, I feared the worst as I lay in a hospital bed. All he said was “I trust that you will never do that again” and believe me I didn’t. **Wabi-Sabi**.

Aviation on the other hand tends to expect perfection from everyone every time.

An accident I investigated where some **Wabi-Sabi** was needed involved a Stinson aircraft that had run out of fuel within a mile of the owner’s private airstrip. The aircraft had just had an engine mod that replaced the 165 hp Franklin engine with a 180 hp Lycoming engine. With the lighter, more powerful engine, he now had no worries getting out of his 1,500 foot airstrip. He and his wife took it on its first cross country with the new engine to visit relatives. The normal two hour trip to visit a



relative was done in about one and three quarter hours. The old engine had about a four and one half hours range. On the return, he stopped at an airport about 15 minutes from his airstrip to get fuel, but the refueler had just closed up and was in the building watching him as he climbed up and looked in his fuel tanks. There was a phone by the pump that could be used to call the refueler after hours who would then charge a \$50 call out fee for after hours refueling. Instead, the pilot made the decision that he had enough fuel to fly the 15 minutes back to his home base where fuel was available in drums. With his airstrip in sight, the engine quit and he crashed into heavy underbrush. His wife smashed the instrument panel with her face and was seriously hurt. The pilot struck the sun shield cowling over the instrument panel with his forehead. This peeled the skin off his skull back to the middle of his head. With blood running into his eyes he had to hold his eyebrows up with his hand in order to see. His left foot was crushed, but with his wife unconscious and groaning, he crawled out

and with a stick as a crutch and one hand holding his forehead up, he crawled/hobbled to the house in order to call for help.

Examination of the wreckage found only the approximate 1.5 gallon of unusable fuel in one tank with the other split open and now empty. The pilot had only liability insurance on the aircraft that was now damaged beyond repair. The pilot freely admitted that he likely had run out of fuel as he was going on the flying time available with the old engine as he didn't know what the endurance was with the new engine.

Transport Canada decided to charge him under the air regulation that states something like "thou shalt not fly without sufficient fuel to keep flying to where you intend to go plus 45 minute reserve."

An accident investigator cannot be subpoenaed to appear in court to testify regarding any case they have investigated. They can be deposed where the opposing lawyers come to you and can ask questions regarding an investigation, but they cannot call you to court.

Perhaps remembering my accident with the tractor, I called the pilot and volunteered to testify. I had to take a day off of work and sit outside a courtroom for ½ a day before trying to lead his clueless about aviation, defense lawyer to ask me about unusable fuel, difficulty in determining remaining fuel in a tail-wheeled aircraft and the endurance differences with different engines. The judge found the man who would never make that mistake again, not guilty of negligence. What a waste of taxpayer's money that was as he likely would have received a suspension of his license that he had no aircraft to fly. A little **Wabi-Sabi** would have gone a long way in this case.

An example where **Wabi-Sabi** could have saved three lives involved a friend of mine who was also a Principal of a school when I was. Max was a great guy and had a son that he was very proud of. The son excelled in school and Max pushed him to always do better. The son went on to university where he found the courses his father had helped him choose a lot harder than high school. He was doing well and passing, but he was not in his usual the top of the class position. His dad encouraged him to try harder. One day he borrowed his Mom's new car, took it to a secluded place, placed his dad's shotgun under his chin and blew his head off. That destroyed his mom and his father took early retirement as he aged before one's eyes. He blamed himself for what happened and so did the mother. I suspect that the rest of his short tormented life was a living hell. **Wabi-Sabi** was needed here as three good people were destroyed in the search for perfection.

I hope that whenever you are confronted by error, be it yours or others, that you can remember these two simple words that can mean so much. **Wabi Sabi**.