

A LIGHT IN THE MIST

THE JOURNAL OF HOPE

A HEALING ENVIRONMENTS PUBLICATION
VOLUME THREE, NUMBER ONE, 1998



NOTHING
IS MORE INTIMATE
THAN HOME
AND THEREFORE
NOTHING
MORE PROPER
TO THE SOUL.

Thomas Moore

A HEALING STATE OF MIND:
“COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS”
BRING A SENSE OF HOME TO
HEALTH CARE SETTINGS
BY JEROME GAGNON

H

OME HAS MANY definitions, primary among them the idea of shelter as sanctuary. But home can also be seen as a metaphor for the body, mind and emo-

tions, and finding sanctuary within, as well as without, can be a painful journey for many of us, according to Kate Strasburg of Healing Environments.

“Our philosophy is that the purpose of life is to grow, psychologically and spiritually. A healing environment has to give people emotional support on the deepest level so they can find courage and grace. It’s not enough to slap some pretty pastels on the wall. We need to convey that you are valuable, your life is treasured and honored,” she said.

“Sometimes I like to think of an environment as a labyrinth,” added co-founder Traci Teraoka. “There are certain pivotal points on the journey – at the entrances and exits, and in hallways and transitional spaces, for instance – and in my work, I try to create something that feels safe, making sure that people who are going through the worst times feel met and supported along the way,” she said.

Here are several suggestions from Strasburg on creating a haven in your home, from *A Light in the Mist, A Journal of Hope*:

- ☞ Start with intention. What are you seeking to accomplish? Do you hope to express your innermost self, honor a significant relationship, accommodate children, comfort one who is suffering?

- ☞ Eliminate clutter. To create a sense of tranquility, limit the sensory input to a comfortable level.
- ☞ Surround yourself with things you love, including things with age, cultural artifacts, objects crafted by hand and heart, and symbols of significance.
- ☞ Honor your past. Sift through old letters and photographs to document your life. Frame a love letter. Surround a missing loved one's photo with flowers.
- ☞ Revere your dreams. Consider creating an "altar" on which to place a symbolic representation of what you wish in your life.
- ☞ Create a ritual. Frame your day. Monks in monasteries bless each time of day with prayer. Ritual can be used to transcend both time and distance.
- ☞ Strive for transcendence. With whatever means possible, try to imbue your home with a physical representation of a higher or deeper level of reality.
- ☞ Include music. Find the music that best speaks to you and make it the background of your life.
- ☞ Incorporate nature. Whether it's the serenity of a beautiful orchid, the joy of a canary's song, the lush growth of a fern or the purring of a cat, nature — plant or animal — soothes us by placing us in the larger context of the natural world.
- ☞ Make your art healing art. Select art that speaks to you and affirms your deepest longings.
- ☞ Bless your home. Bless yourself. Your life is sacred and deserves to be framed lovingly and with intention. You deserve a healing environment, a healing home, a haven. Give thanks.



THE HOUSE IS MORE THAN A BOX WITHIN WHICH TO LIVE;
IT IS A SOUL ACTIVITY TO BE RETRIEVED FROM THE NUMBNESS
OF THE WORLD OF MODERN OBJECTS.
— ROBERT SARDELLO



WE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WESTERNERS MUST IMBUE
THE ARTIFACTS OF OUR EVERYDAY LIVES WITH MEANING.



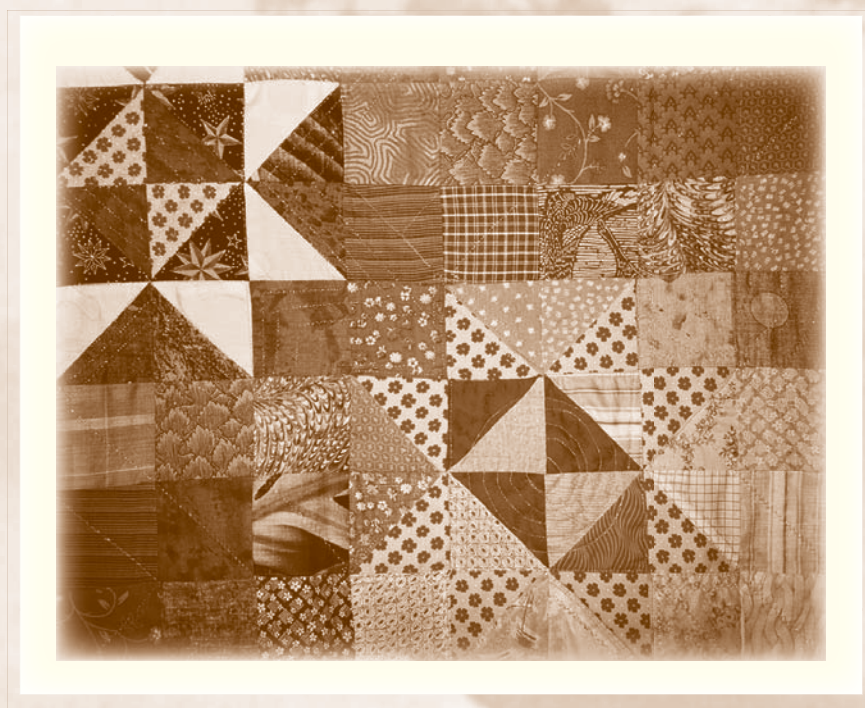
SURROUND YOURSELF WITH THINGS YOU LOVE.
CELEBRATE YOUR LIFE AND YOUR OWN SENSE OF IDENTITY.



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TO CREATE A SENSE OF TRANQUILITY.
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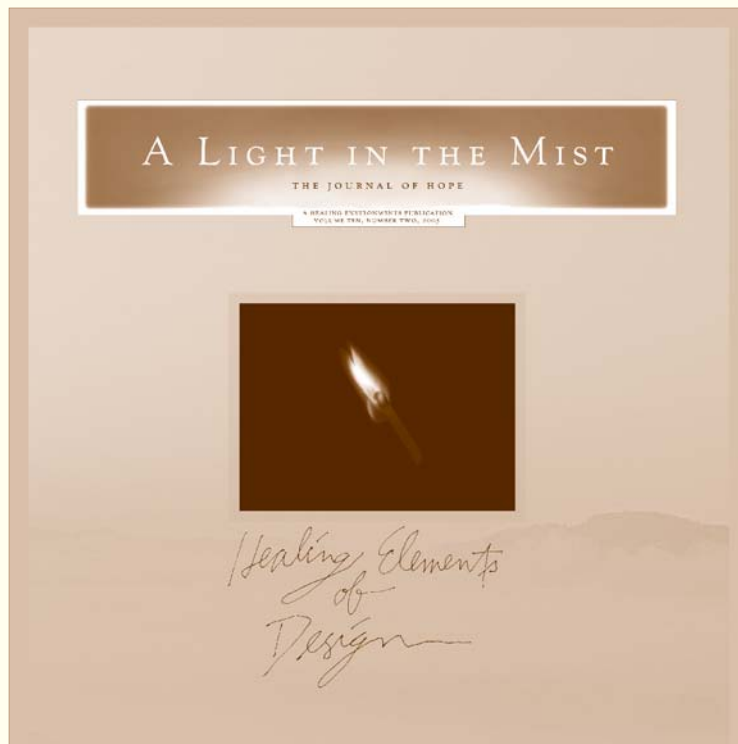
CREATE A RITUAL. FRAME YOUR DAY.
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HEALING ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

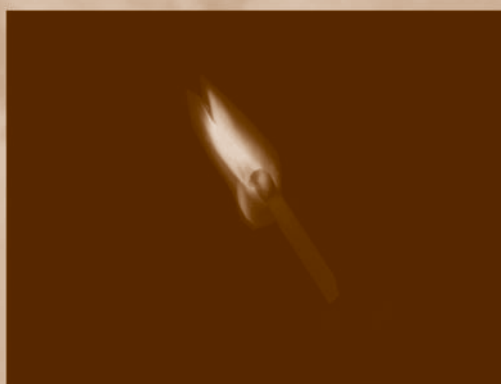
Whether consulting with the Canadian government on the creation of twenty-seven new healthcare facilities or speaking to an international audience at a conference in Amsterdam, Traci was constantly asked, “What are the healing elements of design?” In response, we decided to create this dual issue, which contains a workbook for creating a healing environment in any setting, as well as an anthology of the healing elements of design.



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THE JOURNAL OF HOPE

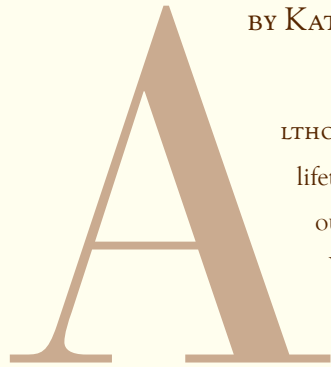
A HEALING ENVIRONMENTS PUBLICATION
VOLUME TEN, NUMBER TWO, 2005



*Healing Elements
of
Design*

A NEW INCARNATION

BY KATE STRASBURG



ALTHOUGH THE average American moves five times in a lifetime, many of us cling as fondly to the status quo as our European counterparts. There is nothing in the Western tradition which instructs, as Buddhism does, that change is constant and, therefore, excessive attachment a certain cause of unhappiness. However if we view crises from an Asian perspective, they each provide a unique opportunity for transformation. As the ancient Chinese I Ching proclaims: chaos paves the way for creation.

The process of reconfiguring a dream does not come easily. I am reminded of something I read about transformation in *O Magazine*. When a caterpillar creates a chrysalis, it does not simply affix wings to its body. It must first lose all semblance of caterpillar before reemerging as butterfly. The process of transformation takes a great deal of faith. One must let go of all that has been before reinventing oneself. As André Gide wrote: "One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore at first and for a long time."

And so when Traci and I realized that Healing Environments would have to find a new home, as rents were rising and the troubled economy depleting non-profits' funding, we entered a passage of unknowing. For ten years our non-profit's identity had been fused with our twelve-room showcase in Palo Alto. How could it possibly be preserved in a much smaller space in San Francisco? The journey was not an easy one, but what we emerged with is far more magical than that which we left behind. The caterpillar has indeed become a butterfly.

Our new space on Sacramento Street in San Francisco is a fraction of the size space we had previously. Yet the impact we have has expanded geometrically. Located in a former antique store in one of San Francisco's loveliest neighborhoods, we find ourselves encircled by healthcare facilities.

When Traci arrived she began leaving newsletters out in front of our storefront in a wooden rack. They disappeared at a heartening rate. We even began to feel that our presence in a commercial area offered a spiritual antidote to those

seeking relief in excessive consumption. One gentleman brought a friend to simply experience the space. “I’m hoping if he can just be present, he will realize what is missing from his life,” he said.

Let me describe the space in more detail and the process of transforming it. When Traci takes on a design job she steadfastly refuses to do design boards. The reason being that we believe in the creative process as an organic one. I am reminded of Christopher Alexander, the eccentric and innovative architect who allows the land to “speak” to him when designing a building. So Traci and I moved into Sacramento Street with only a rough idea of what would go where and how it would all work out.

Let me share with you an example of how leaving space for inspiration can result in magic. The centerpiece of our Palo Alto space had been a magnificent antique hand-carved African door. A symbol of transformation, it never failed to inspire our visitors. Traci and I had placed most of our furniture in the new front room when we realized we had failed to find a spot for our most prized possession. I wandered into one of the two back rooms. A small alcove in one would have to replace our meditation room in Palo Alto. We had placed a small Asian trunk in it, with a beautiful Mexican reproduction of an antique cross and a lovely cast of a cherub’s head and wings. Clearly the door completed the vignette. Just after we had placed it there, one of the movers entered the room. Unaware of our mission and engaged in a far from spiritual profession, he provided all the validation we needed for our choice. Glancing at the trio of transcendent objects he gasped audibly.

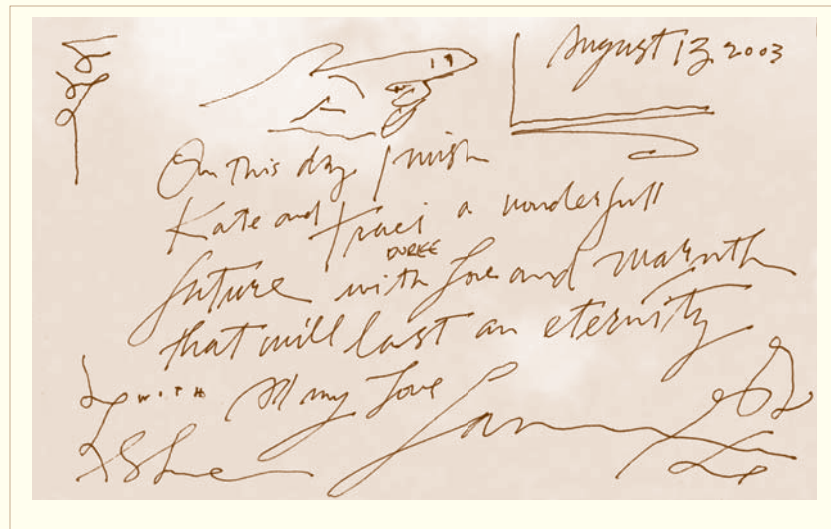
Later we would add the manzanita branches from our first fundraiser, still graced with the Tibetan prayer bells, hand calligraphed poems and diaphanous ribbons left there in memory of loved ones. The resulting meditation alcove is far more powerful than our previous one.

Similarly, a small open closet became a second memorial space, a place for visitors to light candles in memory of loved ones. Once again, serendipity played a major role in its creation. Two other of our favorite objects were difficult to place. They are both extremely colorful, yet we prefer an earthy, more neutral palette. Both hold special meaning for us. One is a traditional Mexican tree of life, created by a patient with no prior art experience. The other a small yet vibrant lap quilt sewn by my cousin Eleanor, a quilt designer, for a dear friend she lost to AIDS.

The final piece of the memorial alcove came together when a mover placed a small round table with a copper top in the closet to get it out of the way. The perfect fireproof surface for votive candles. A nondescript closet became a colorful, meaning-filled memorial.

A third installment of design by inspiration occurred after Traci and I did a table for Dining by Design, the AIDS fundraiser co-sponsored by Elle Decor and Taittinger Champagne. Wanting to create a table that would authentically portray our mission, we chose the theme "Dark Night of the Soul." On a black silk tablecloth we placed an exquisite ancient gilded wooden Kuan Yin (the Buddhist Bodhisattva of compassion) flanked with large black vases filled with flame-red spider orchids.

Wanting to represent our ecumenical stance accurately as well, we placed an Ethiopian Coptic cross and a beautiful menorah by the sculptor Erté on the other side of the table. After the event we brought all three religious icons back to the office, not sure of where they would find a home. In a matter of minutes they transformed the front room into a powerfully spiritual presence on Sacramento Street.



August 13th, 2003—

May this space bring comfort
to all who enter—

May its intention and energy
ripple out into the surrounding
community—

into the health care centers,
into the city, into the country,
into the world— Amen

August 13, 2003

May the generosity of spirit
and compassionate inquiry
that brought Kate and Traci to
this enchanted place continue to
light their path and warm
this hearth.

With love and gratitude;
with joy and blessings.

August 13th 2003

I wish that Healing Environments becomes
a beacon of hope for those facing life-
sustaining issues. That our community physically
& emotionally accepts us & cherishes us.

I hope that this is the blossoming of
my happiness, Kate's happiness, Susan's happiness
and Doree's happiness. May all those
who need hope find it here and take
it with them.



BUDDHA IN HEALING ENVIRONMENTS, SAN FRANCISCO.

TEAM DESIGNS HOMELIKE SPACES FOR HEALING
BY JERRY GAGNON

San Francisco Chronicle

September 22, 2004

STEP INTO Healing Environments on outer Sacramento Street, and enter a place where comforting the seriously ill is the main priority. Not an antiseptic office, it has sunny yellow walls that serve as a backdrop for a collection of art, accessories and symbols representing a wide range of traditions.

Designer Traci Teraoka, founder of the 15-year-old nonprofit organization along with friend Kate Strasburg, greets visitors as she would in her own home, inviting them to relax in overstuffed sofas and chairs, or to explore the peaceful tableaus installed throughout the cozy storefront.

"I think there's something essential to having elements of meaning and beauty around us. If you take away everything and just put someone in a white room, do they thrive in a space like that?" asked Teraoka, a self-described "Army brat" who was born in Japan and graduated from UC Santa Cruz with a degree in art history.

Teraoka and Strasburg, a native Midwesterner who holds a degree in European languages from Stanford, met in 1992 when both were living in Palo Alto, and the two quickly discovered a shared passion for antiques, design and the visual arts.

More than that, they shared a belief that interior design could be used to help others in need. As an antidote to the depersonalization of the medical industry, they believed that a more humanistic approach in designing health care settings could restore a measure of dignity to patients and contribute to the growing movement toward holistic care.

Strasburg's parents both died of cancer. "I was struck by the contrast: my mother's agonizing death in the hospital and my father's healing death at home. Then, in my late 40s, three of my closest friends fell prey to cancer. It was a wake-up call," she said.

The two women opened their office in 1994 in downtown Palo Alto. Designing each room or niche around theme words such as “create,” “rest,” “play” and “meditate,” they said they wanted to expand on the typical hospital or hospice. In the vestibule labeled “create,” they placed emotionally significant handmade items, including a papier-mâché “Tree of Life” — created by an artist who was coping with serious illnesses in his family — and a bright, patchwork “honor” quilt, lovingly pieced together by another artist from her late friend’s shirts.

In “rest,” they simulated a hospital room, layering accessories to illustrate a fictional resident’s life-story, and outfitted a comfortable spot for video watching. More than 1,000 visitors have toured the center, which relocated to smaller quarters in San Francisco last year.

They also started a newsletter, “A Light in the Mist, A Journal of Hope” to spread the message of how health care settings — as well as homes — can be designed to “offer sustenance to the soul and give meaning to experience.”

While Strasburg concentrated on outreach with the newsletter, Teraoka provided pro-bono design services for several local organizations, including Maitri, a residential care facility for people living with AIDS (which opened in its current location on Duboce Street in 1997) and Brandy Moore House (opened in 1996), a project of the Rafiki Housing Program sponsored by the Black Coalition on AIDS.

Honoring the philosophy of Maitri, which derives its name from the Buddhist ideal of compassionate friendship, she acquired a mix of Asian art and antiques, arranging select pieces among donated items. A meditation room features an altar table, Tibetan thangka (painting), flowers, candles and Buddhist symbols. “What’s wonderful about the age we’re living in is, whether we’re working with a health care space or a personal space, we can infuse it with elements of different cultures — of that which speaks to people directly and isn’t necessarily contained in one ideology or one look,” said Teraoka, who serves on Maitri’s board of directors.

Kwan Henmi architects transformed the former garage and one-time plumbing supply business into a light-filled, 15-bed facility centered around a courtyard. A bold pergola with red patina defines the entrance, while the vestibule, consisting of an elevator and stairway, is graced with a mural by artist Susie Wynn that depicts a sheltering tree.

“I’m constantly taking people on tours,” said executive director Tim Patriarca. “I’m the one who asks for money, and I almost don’t have to say a word because people get such a rush of feeling when they come through here. Maitri is such a polar opposite of what people have in their minds, and it can be like this.”

“It’s a very homelike environment, like a family. The rooms all have armoires, pictures, dressers and TVs,” said former resident Tom Fairwell, who lived there for two years. “With the combination of medicines and good care I got, I started feeling better and was able to move on with my life. I couldn’t have done that without my stay at Maitri.”

The Brandy Moore House, architect Michael Harris’ rehab of a three-unit apartment building in the Western Addition, takes advantage of bonus square footage and light with abundant bay windows. Teraoka integrated folk art and strong color throughout the interiors to reflect the African American heritage of many residents in the 11-bed transitional facility. A combination living/dining area is highlighted with hand-carved masks on the walls, while a living/counseling room is enveloped in terracotta tones accented with a red patterned rug, basketry and oak finishes on furniture. In both projects, bedrooms offer personalized retreats “as unique as those who inhabit them,” she said.

In one of their latest jobs, Teraoka transformed an 11-by-12-foot room for the Visiting Nurses and Hospice of the California Pacific Medical Center on South Van Ness Avenue. Designated as a bereavement/therapy room, it consisted of four white walls, fluorescent lighting, industrial blue wall-to-wall carpeting and miscellaneous cast-offs.

Staff members painted one of the walls a textured terracotta color to warm up the space, which Teraoka complemented with a red and blue Turkish Kilim (area rug). A white cotton duck loveseat is supplemented by slip-covered and upholstered armchairs, while a red-lacquered Japanese tansu provides for storage and display. Earth-tone abstract prints and black and white landscape photographs on the walls create virtual views in the windowless space, and incandescent table lamps soften the glare.

“To all of us, life offers the gift of transformation... In the midst of pain and loss there may be joy and gifts of incalculable beauty,” Strasburg has written. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the work of these two compassionate friends, who saw a need and realized their hearts’ mission.



RITUAL RIBBONS IN MEMORY OF LOST LOVED ONES.

WELCOME TO HEALING ENVIRONMENTS

THE MERCHANT's Association wanted to host an Open House event for the stores and galleries. The evening started off slowly – then small groups of people two to four in size began to walk in. It was wonderful to have so many people who were curious about our work in the space. I talked about our mission and shared our materials with everyone.

Two more people walked in. I began to tell them about the work. After I stated our mission the woman said, “Do you write? I think we have one of your publications, called, A Light in the Mist.” I continued with my description of Healing Environments and she said, “YES! It is you... I know your work and I GET IT. Thank you for all that you do. I was sent your materials after a recent loss – I don't even know who sent it. I poured over the materials. Love them.” At that point they settled in and observed how others encountered the space – eager to share with them what a difference our approach makes to those who are grieving.



RITUAL RIBBONS IN MEMORY OF LOST LOVED ONES.

ABOUT KATE STRASBURG

K

ATE STRASBURG was a late bloomer. She found her mission in life after fifty, when she and her good friend Traci co-founded Healing Environments. In it, Kate found the perfect expression for her love of writing and design.

Kate had lost a large number of loved ones to cancer (including her parents and three of her best friends). She wanted to do something to ease the profound emotional suffering which accompanies life-threatening illness. She and Traci wanted to use their love of design for a higher purpose. And so, over coffee one morning, Healing Environments was born. A year later Kate and Traci met Sam, who gave form to their vision with the creation of A Light in the Mist.

Next to her beloved children and adored grandchildren, it has been the passion and great consolation of her life. When her personal life proves rocky, sending free publications out across the country and overseas brings solace. When things beyond her control create anguish, creating beautiful spaces which comfort others who are facing the end of life or the loss of a loved one helps put things in perspective. Kate feels truly blessed to have found her life's work.



ABOUT TRACI TERAOKA

I

AM CO-FOUNDER AND co-director of Healing Environments.

The past 14 years have been largely based around the central question of “What is a Healing Environment?” for those facing life threatening illness and creatively finding ways to answer that question. The question, the process and the opportunities have led to an education of my mind and heart.

We have contributed to this question over and over again by pouring our intention into our design projects and in finding the content for *A Light in the Mist – The Journal of Hope*. For 10 years I served on the board of directors of Maitri – a San Francisco based hospice and 24 hour care home for people living with AIDS. When I first became involved in all of this work it seemed as if there was a large lake before me and I had yet to stick my toe in the water. Now – looking back and looking at where I stand today I can see clearly where participation – literally diving into projects and learning the art of presence has made me a strong swimmer. I am not afraid of the distance. The experiences – the stories – have become part of who I am and how I see the world around me.

When I feel challenged and overwhelmed by my personal life, I stop and look around me and realize that while I can know pain and suffering, we are all faced with reconciling the discrepancies in our trust, faith, values and goals. I feel very fortunate to have this body of work around me as I continue to learn from it every day. When I was going through my divorce in early 2002 I remember the emotional leveling of my dreams and feeling the sadness with every step that I took.

During that time I figured my process needed those moments and I could also pay attention to my work and volunteer work. I called it my hope hook. And indeed it was. It reminded me of my strength and who I was as a person – that I could give and receive openly without being hurt. I am a student of life. The people to whom we dedicate our mission are my teachers.

I continue to be fascinated with this question, “What is a Healing Environment?” I realize that just as with life – the question is not so much about the answer as it is about acknowledging the “aliveness” that

so much about the answer as it is about acknowledging the “aliveness” that goes into our lives and the importance of recognizing that we matter.



MY LEGACY TO LEAVE BEHIND
BY TRACI TERAOKA

I HOPE TO LEAVE a trail of hope and inspiration. Because I realize that many of the people that I have encountered are dealing with great challenges. It is affecting everything that they see, feel and touch. Perhaps that is what is so challenging about change. We can not envision what is before us – and that reaction in turn makes us question and doubt – a negative spiral. I want to restore hope and belief.

For me faith is believing that we can handle situations – that we have an infinite amount of possibilities and that in time we will live the question into the answer.

The nature of life and our experiences have taught us that the perimeters of our lives have great limitations. How many of these limitations exist only in our minds? Step out – step beyond. Do something meaningful. Come from your heart and Be Love. No matter what you run into. With conviction. I believe the best results come from this place.

Use your talents and inherent wisdom to help others.

Did we solve the world's problems? No. However I strongly believe that we created a model. And we helped those care facilities that are actively making a difference. It is important to talk about the issue – even if we disagree on design, architecture, and program. We may not have all the answers tonight. Keep talking. Communicating. Be willing to listen. Participate in the discussion and outcome. Avoid being a negative force against change.

We have heard from the poorest of the poor and the head of institutes and universities and hospitals. Mail has continuously arrived – requesting the comfort that we provide – regardless of class, education and religion. We love that.

I aspire to be of service to help make more good things happen. I will continue to make a difference in the lives of others – to work in collaboration with those who seek and believe in change, growth, and transformation.

I know I will never meet another Kate and Sam. This has been such a time — abundant and creative — always focused around the patient and caregiver. I have learned so much from you. Thank you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.



ABOUT SAM SMIDT

S

am is a leading West Coast artist and designer, and is art director of Healing Environments' *A Light in the Mist* publications. He has worked with Kate and Traci for the last fifteen years.

A number of Sam's works are in the permanent design collection at SFMOMA, and were recently featured in *Graphis* magazine. His work also has been included in the Smithsonian and the Library of Congress. Sam is a professor emeritus at San Jose State University. Sam's studio is located in Palo Alto, California. His son Nathan and daughter Becca, who is also a graphic designer, are helping each other through their present transition.

To see more of Sam's work please visit: www.samsmidt.com



TO THOSE WHO HAVE DIED ALONE
TO THOSE WHO HAVE DIED WELL LOVED
TO THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN PAIN
TO THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN PEACE
TO THOSE WHO HAVE DIED WITH LIVES FULFILLED
TO THOSE WHO HAVE DIED WITH DREAMS UNLIVED
HEALING ENVIRONMENTS IS DEDICATED
TO THE RELIEF OF ALL SUFFERING

FOR WE ARE ONE

Healing Environments has sent publications to the following countries:

	Armenia		Germany		Norway
	Australia		Greece		Pakistan
	Austria		Haiti		Philippines
	Bangladesh		Hungary		Poland
	Belgium		Iceland		Puerto Rico
	Brazil		India		Russia
	Canada		Indonesia		Saudi Arabia
	Canary Islands		Israel		Scotland
	China		Italy		Singapore
	Columbia		Jamaica		Slovenia
	Costa Rica		Japan		South Africa
	Croatia		Kazakhstan		Spain
	Cyprus		Kenya		Swaziland
	Denmark		Kuwait		Sweden
	Dominica		Malaysia		Switzerland
	Ecuador		Mexico		Tanzania
	Egypt		N. Ireland		Thailand
	England		Nepal		Turkey
	Ethiopia		Netherlands		Venezuela
	Finland		New Zealand		Yugoslavia
	France		Nigeria		Zambia



H E A L I N G E N V I R O N M E N T S

Together we will comfort the suffering

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