# A LIGHT IN THE MIST

THE JOURNAL OF HOPE

A HEALING ENVIRONMENTS PUBLICATION VOLUME FIVE, NUMBER ONE, 2000



## Between the Branches

by Deborah Cooper

It was always snowing when I visited.
Remembering, I see you again and again opening the door, and then your face as if it mattered that I came, as if it made some kind of difference after all.

You'd offer tea and one day, worrying that I was cold coming out of my boots, you gave your rag wool socks to me to wear, warm from the radiator.

Each time I came
there was less of you waiting,
less hair,
less fullness to your face,
less energy.
Only your elaborate eyes increased,
taking my breath away.

Sometimes we'd meditate.
The animals would join us.
Or you would let me read to you,
Audre Lorde
or Mary Oliver.

I thought that there would be more time, that Spring might come and we might see a bit of it begin before you left us.

Every now and then
I find myself
looking for you.
Just now, between the branches
of the birch, I catch the rich
mosaic colors of your eyes,
but then the clouds close.

My Wife Died Unexpectedly Last March

v wife died unexpectedly last March. We had just arrived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to begin a new life. We had moved the hub of the Zen Peacemaker Order, which we had co-founded, to Santa Fe and bought an old house which needed lots of work. But it had a central courtyard, hacienda-style, and lots of room for our dogs and a big garden. Nestled in the shadows of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, it was a perfect refuge for a couple planning to be on the road for much of the year.

We arrived on Monday and moved into our house on Tuesday. The following Sunday, as we were hanging pictures on the wall, Jishu complained of chest pains. She was hurried to the hospital, where the doctors verified that she had suffered a major heart attack. For the next four days she seemed to get stronger and better. But on Thursday night Jishu suffered a second heart attack, and she left this form of existence on Friday night, March 20th, the first day of spring, four days shy of her fifty-seventh birthday.

People ask me how I'm doing. It takes a while for me to reply, for it's hard to answer them in words. Finally I tell them I'm bearing witness. But how do you feel, they ask me. I'm raw, I tell them. Do you feel sad?

I shake my head. Raw doesn't feel good or bad. Raw is the smell of lilacs by the back door, not six feet away from her relics on the mantel. Raw is listening to Mahler's Fourth Symphony or the the Songs of Sweet Honey in the Rock. Raw is reading the hundreds of letters that come in, watching television alone at night.

Raw is letting whatever happens happen, what arises, arise. Feelings, too: grief, pain, loss, a desire to disappear, even the desire to die. One feeling follows another, one sensation after the next. I just listen deeply, bear witness.

I do some work; it's very little in comparison to former days. I am careful about how much time I spend with students and associates, for I know how easy and comfortable it is to let that raw state slip and let myself be distracted by work and talk with well meaning friends. So I, long accustomed to being on the road, have stayed home. There are only a few people around me. I live in a house chosen by my wife, reflecting her tastes and wishes. My own choice would be a studio in New

York City's Bowery, not a house in a canyon overlooking a river. Those were the things Jishu wanted, and Jishu is gone, so I live in her house—I call it Casa Jishu and do the things she would have loved. I greet the dawn coming over the mountains, watch the hummingbirds, prune the lilac bushes. Each time I think of the smile on her face had she been here to do these things. Instead I do them, bearing witness to her presence and her absence. How am I doing? I'm bearing witness. And the state of bearing witness is the state of love.

by Bernie Glassman

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### The Journey Home

In this issue we would like to honor those who shepherd our loved ones into the unknown—the angels of hospice. When my mother died, hospice care was not yet available in this country. How I would have loved to have had her held in the arms of Katie Pust, who considers herself blessed to have been present for one hundred souls at the hour of their passing. How it would have comforted me, had she been visited by someone as sensitive as Deborah Cooper, in her final months.

ently I lay her head on my breast and feel her slowly relax as the medicine allows the pain to ebb away. Such a tiny brown body wrinkled and crushed by disease—disease so ravaging it takes my own breath away. I hold her tenderly as though to carry her away from this unrelenting power.

The moaning ceases as her heart beats strongly against me. Her body leans into my embrace and her motion is stilled by its comfort.

The terror of pain has so filled this room I shut my eyes against its blackness. In the silence it quietly leaves. In the sacredness of this moment, I am filled with wonder at this awesome gift of peace.

Once again, I stroke her cheek and say, "Sleep, my dear one, sleep...May sleep's holy mantle protect you in your journey home."

by Kathleen Mary Pust

It Doesn't Interest Me

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for—and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

It doesn't interest me how old you are. I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dream, for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon. I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow, have been opened by life's betrayals, or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain.

I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own, without moving to hide it or fade it or fix it.

I want to know
if you can be with joy, mine or your own, if
you dance with wildness and let it fill you to
the tips of your fingers and toes, without
cautioning us to be careful, to be realistic, or

to remember the limitations of being human. It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling is true. I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself, if you can bear the accusation of betrayal—and not betray your own soul.

I want to know if you can see beauty even when it is not pretty everyday, and if you can source your life from its presence.

It want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine, and still stand on the edge of a lake and shout to the moon: YES!

It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you have. I want to know if you can get up after the night of grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done for the children.

It doesn't interest me who you are or how you came to be here. I want to know if you can stand in the center of the fire with me and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me what or where or with whom you have studied. I want to know what sustains you from the inside, when all else falls away.

I want to know if you can be alone with yourself—and if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments.

Oriahe Mountain Dreamer An Indian Elder

very symbol carries some inner meaning, whether simple or complex. In all cases, a symbol is an object whose content is greater than its form, for with just a few lines or gestures it conveys a message that would otherwise require many words. But precisely because of this meager form, because their meaning is not overt, symbols demand that the viewer reconstruct the original message within himself. As such, they are vehicles for inner transformation, and are among the primary tools of the religious life, which seeks to convey truths that are altogether beyond words. Symbols are points of contemplation, for only by dwelling upon them are their contents revealed. And the more one contemplates them, the more meaningful they become. Furthermore, religious symbols, whose subject is the infinite, have the potential to convey an infinity of meaning.'

The Temple of Amount by Eliezer Stone. Quoted from Parabola, Fall 1999

The Symbolism of Ritual

Many cultures symbolize the grieving state in different ways. For example, The Day of the Dead is a ritual that is practiced in Mexico, and similarly in the Philippines and other cultures.

A day is set aside (Nov. 2) of every year to remember those who have passed on and to honor the continuity of life.

The day usually begins with visits by the family members to graves of their close kin. At the cemetery, the families engage in decorating the gravesite with flowers, and setting out a bountiful picnic consisting of meaty dishes, cakes, and cookies.

The *Day of the Dead* is not a morbid occasion but rather a festive time where the cemetery transforms into a warm gathering of many families interacting socially with one another, by telling stories of the departed, while sharing in the feast.

At home, special altars are built and ornately decorated with candles, flowers, and religious and symbolic objects. Often the food and other items the departed individual enjoyed are added



Aztec Calendar Day of the Dead originally celebrated during the Aztec month of the goddess Miccailhuitontli

The *Day of the Dead* is a holiday with a complex ancient history that has been transformed through the years. It is characterized by the traditional Mexican blend of pagan and Christian features.

The original celebration can be traced back to the festivities held during the Aztec month of the goddess of Miccailhuitontli (the lady of death) and was dedicated to children and those who died. In the Aztec calendar, it was celebrated during the Gregorian month of July and the beginning of August, but in the post-conquest era it was moved by Spanish priests so that it coincided with the Christian holiday of All Hallows Eve (in Spanish: Dia de Todos Santos) in an effort to transform this ritual to a Christian celebration.

I like this ritual. It is a happy and healing event. It eases the pain, and despite the somber surroundings, the colorful decorations, rich food, and good company have very pleasant overtones to those who participate and observe.

This festive interaction with the living and the dead is a commemoration of those who have passed on while at the same time recognizing the cycle of life and death that is a part of human existence.

The Healing Symbol

uch of my work revolves around creating identities for companies or organizations that are expressed by symbols—sometimes

called logos or trademarks. These marks are funneled-down simplifications that communicate the attributes and goals of a particular group as a flag might depict the essence of a country.



The Healing Environments logo came to me in a most interesting manner. When I first experienced Healing Environments five years ago in Palo Alto, California, and met Kate and Traci, translucent images of light and round forms presented themselves to me. This happened to me in my waking hours and in my dreams and all the way through the process of applying the logo to all of the materials. Gifts came, like the green line (a symbol of life). The experience was completely effortless.

It wasn't work, it was a joyous pleasure.

Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave.

John Milton

Coming To Terms With Time

Identity always worries me, and memory and eternity.

Gertrude Stein

n an effort to shield myself from the hype that surrounded Y2K, I realize now that I had somewhat desensitized myself to the mystery of the moment. Because everywhere I looked the implications of the drawing millennium were already so fully sketched by the media, I neglected to reflect adequately on the significance of the turning decade—century millennium in personal terms. Thus, as we move by day into the year 2000, and the reassuring curves of nine give way to a crowd of zeros, I am visited by a haunting sense of time; not the intimate ticking that marks the phases of my day

or week, but the epic motion of years that have held Socrates, Stradivarius and Jane Austen. Where, I wonder, does this leave me?

To be sure, this angst is a commonplace, and like Gertrude Stein, many a writer and philosopher have "worried" about time and its inscrutability. Yet, while there is a certain solace in company, I still seek a deeper consolation, a wise counsel that will lend grace to this passage and help me to make sense of what S. Paul Burholt describes as this "powerful but intangible change in our time."

In this pursuit, I am grateful to Kate Strasburg, the co-founder of Healing Environments, who lent me a copy of *The Best Spiritual Writing* 1999. There, among a provocative array of writings, I came across an essay by Thomas Moore—familiar to many of you, perhaps, as the author of *Care of the Soul*. In "On Memory and Numbers," Moore speaks to the question, "so what is in a number?" and offers some guidance on ways to conceive of the new millennium.

Using the analogy of his own experience of turning fifty, he acknowledges the power of numbers to "shake one's foundation" and his own "faith in zeros, the ends of decades and the midpoints of centuries." Although he recognizes the ways our culture has "sucked the soul out of numbers by making them quantities void of inherent meaning," he also reminds us that "besides their...value as symbols, numbers serve memory, and deep remembering is one of the chief activities of the human soul." But beyond the framework he gives us for understanding the profound place of numbers in our psyches, the lesson I found most useful in Moores's short meditation was, ultimately, not about the power in a number, but about the possibility.

Just as the shorthand "Y2K" abbreviated the true numerical stature of the year 2000, the paranoia and apocalyptic thinking that accompanied the occasion of this new year limited our collective expectations. Our sense of promise was shadowed by the task of problem solving, as we worried about water supplies, dismantled power plants, and air traffic control. To have felt vulnerable at this liminal moment was natural, for as Moore suggests, "at the end of a time cycle our sensitivities increase and our remorse bites at us with special severity." However, this threshold, he observes, is also a kairos, "a crucial time of opportunity," where the consideration of our past may lead us to greater wisdom and character.

So as I muse on my resolutions for the new year, I remember, with Moore's encouragement, that to feel so heightened a sense of time is also a gift, a "chance to exist in the moment":
To live in the kairos allows us to simply be, to become less absorbed in problem solving and inventing and more engrossed in life's deeper pleasures. The turning of the millennium is a special gift of time—time as a quality, not a quantity. At such a turning point, life makes itself available with unusual abundance and promise.

"On Memory and Numbers" by Thomas Moore was first published in *Parabola*, Spring 1998. All quotations here are from *The Best Spiritual Writing 1999*, edited by Philip Zaleski. Harper Collins Publisher.

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope,

For hope would be hope for the wrong thing: wait without love

For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith

But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

T.S. Eliot

Poetica\*

he word for the day is SERENITY.
Serenity, like a garden," so began a recent review of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation's advisory committee meeting. The goal is to create a healing environment in their client service and treatment area in the heart of the Tenderloin district. The following is just an excerpt from one of several meetings that was facilitated by Eileen Blumenthal, project manager.

Fabrics: Traci brought samples of fabrics that are available for framing and or hanging. They are very natural colors—somewhat evocative of African design, but not exclusively. Everyone loved the colors, textures and weaves. The point was made that we want to appeal to a broad group of clients and staff. Additionally, we want to create a space that is visual for those who seek something artistic, and calming for those who want more solace.

Flooring: Traci, Heather and Randy met with the flooring vendor and saw amazing samples. There's a carpet tile that is very warm, durable, and easy to clean. It comes in a range of colors and has a very natural feel to it. Traci is going to get pricing, and if it's affordable we will consider using that flooring throughout rather than mixing it with linoleum. Traci will also try to find other venues where it has been used so that Heather and Randy can check on its wear and tear over time.



Door from India

Front Entrance: The goal for the front area is to make it more inspiring to walk through. We want it to be light-filled and more transitional—less of an alley. Traci suggested that we add something statuesque at the front to create a sense of flow. We're also still considering ways to "round" the front corner (you walk almost directly into a wall). It might also be possible to use stained glass somewhere in the front entrance.

Gate: There's consensus that the half door and gate is generally unwelcoming and unattractive. Traci suggested that we try to work in more a garden gate archway feel, and shared pictures of images. People like the idea a lot, and are open to the change. We will discuss options with Keith Hooks, the architect, in hopes of working a change in with the final design of the family waiting room. The final installation will be done mid-spring. We'll share the trials and tribulations and best of all, the inspired results.

\*Poetica is the design branch of Healing Environments.

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting: The soul that rises with us, our life's star, Hath had elsewhere its setting, And cometh from afar.

> > Wordsworth

### In and Out of the Hospital With Music

A world of grief and pain, flowers bloom Even then.

Issa

There are two means of refuge from the miseries of life: music and cats.

Albert Schweitzer

anyone knows who has visited a hospital, nowhere is the warmth, color, and vibrancy of music needed more than in the antiseptic

color, and viorancy of music needed more than in the antiseptic environments where we go to get well or to die. True, a certain amount of sterility is a necessary by-product of Western hygiene and good medicine. But rather than immersing patients in the mediocrity of a setting in which television is playing in every room, we could offer them their choice of good music.

In his engaging book, A Leg to Stand On, neurologist Oliver Sacks recounts his remarkable personal experience with the power of music. Recovering from a broken leg suffered while running from a bull on a mountain path, Sacks had been declared medically ready to walk, but his muscles seemed to have forgotten how to propel him forward until he heard music that reminded him what motion felt like in the body. In his words: Music...was a divine message and messenger of life. It was quintessentially quick—"the quickening art", as Kant called it-quickening my soul and with this my body, so that suddenly, spontaneously, I was quickened into motion, my own perceptual and kinetic melody, quickened into life by the innerlife of music...I was carried ahead by the ongoing musical stream.

Sack's ecstatic response echoes that of others in the healing professions who have observed the quickening power of music. Alzheimer's sufferers are among those with whom music has been used with amazing success, triggering memories of verses to songs in those who may have forgotten everything else. Even people awakened from comas have reported following the music they heard like a lifeline back to consciousness.

Because pleasurable music increases the release of endorphins, the body's natural morphine, we are more tolerant of pain. Many of us have experienced times when we were too preoccupied to recognize an injury. After a painful biking accident, I was once diverted by the rapturous beauty of the Andante from Mendelssohn's *String Symphony No.4*, playing over and over on the car stereo during the long drive to the hospital. Acting like an opiate, the music took me to a place of sweetness and light that helped mask the pain.

Nothing speeds up the healing process more than connecting with preexisting inner resources and good health. To help a patient choose music ask, *What music is most associated in your mind with a happy, vibrant time in life?* Even if the body is not able to romp along with a Mozart allegro or a favorite Cole Porter ballad, the mind can dance. A certain piece may carry the quality of energy that becomes the very image of health and recovery, as it was for Sacks. After all, we are rechargeable batteries!

When a friend of mine who instinctively knows what she needs, and lives as if she knows, was hospitalized, she found she was singing to herself all her favorite hymns—"Abide with Me," "Lead, Kindly Light," "Amazing Grace," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Spirituals and hymns were meant to inspire us, to call upon the deep reserves of strength in the human spirit. The hymns we sing in childhood stay with us, and at trying times I may sit at the piano and play a few verses of "Come, Come ye Saints," the beautiful old English tune about the hardships endured by pioneers who walked or pushed handcarts across the continent, many dying along the trail. The rousing chorus, "All is Well! All is Well!" unites me with those whose faith and courage were sufficient to life's demands.

When visiting a friend or relative in the hospital, we can bring a tape of his or her favorite music, or one of ours. (A portable tape recorder costs no more than a flower arrangement.) A Mozart piano concerto or music written for cello are always appropriate. The cello is not only beautiful but its low register is used to relieve pain. A patient who is able to use art materials (such as postcard-sized watercolor paper) may be amused by painting or drawing whatever the music brings to mind. We can help one another find the music for anything, from the pain of the moment to the hope of future joy. When a family friend had stopped eating and grown listless after being diagnosed with a serious illness, we aroused his freaky side, the inner rebel whose fighting spirit can speed recovery time, by bringing him the music from Zorba the Greek. It worked like a spring tonic; we could almost see his Kundalini rise. Alchemically speaking, this music turned up the heat. As doctors tell us,

docile patients may be easier to handle but they don't leave the hospital as soon as feisty ones.

Expression is both the way of health and the way back to it. Conductor David Blum describes how he drew comfort and strength from music during his battle with cancer when at different stages of his treatment he intuited what music would have healing power for him. Having to face radiation therapy, which brought on nightmares of entering a deep, dark cellar, he found that in listening to Beethoven's Third Leonore Overture and identifying with the hero of the opera, Fidelio, who was confined to a dungeon, he began to feel more brave and fearless. At another time, feeling terribly alone before surgery, he calmed himself with the sublime serenity of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. Turning his attention to the positive spirit of this music was an expression of his love of life and partially inoculated him against his suffering.

In the final hours and days of life, music can dramatically change the quality of life for the dying, as well as for their family and friends. The Chalice of Repose Project in Missula, Montana, has pioneered the use of palliative music from voices and harps, administered by musicians trained as thanatologists to work with dying. Founder-musician, Therese Schroeder-Sheker, was inspired by the practices of the Cluny monks in twelfth-century France, who would hold dying brothers while singing and praying for them. Could the soul have a more harmonious passage from life to death?

Hearing is the first sense to develop in the womb. And Dr. Alfred Tomatis points out in The Conscious Ear, the ear is fully evolved at four and a half months, but hearing may begin prior to that. And often, hearing is the last sense to remain. Anesthetized patients have reported hearing conversation and music going on during their surgery, and those who work with the dying assure us that the kindness of words, music, and touch may be sensed even when ordinary consciousness is lost. When music is not available, or even when it is, simply humming a tone with someone—or for them, if they are too weak-brings comfort and peace. At a time when one feels alone or frightened, a vibrating tone is a connection between one soul and another. Humming can be a bridge of sound between life and death.

> by Maureen McCarthy Draper, from the forthcoming book: The Alchemy of Music: Beauty, Sound, and Healing

The Importance of Support

David Spiegel of Stanford School of Medicine discovered in his groundbreaking study ten years ago, one must not overlook the importance of emotional support. The women in his study with metastatic breast cancer who participated in support groups lived twice as long as those who did not. As Michael Lerner of Commonweal once said, "If the FDA had approved a drug with such results, no oncologist would fail to prescribe it.

It is for that reason as well as for their compassion and heart that we salute the Directors of Patient Support Services at West Clinic Wings in Memphis, Tennessee, Brenda Wiseman and Sandy Patterson. Theirs is the most comprehensive system of support for patients and their families we have seen: offering support groups for patients, their families, their caregivers, their children (as well as groups for women only and a day of free energy work). Most unusual perhaps is the support group for their eighty volunteers, 95% of whom are cancer survivors themselves.

We also applaud their use of both symbol and ritual: the choice of "wings" as a symbol of transcendence and their millennium celebration. Cancer patients and their families selected prayer bells with inspirational quotations. These were tied onto a large "arbor" in the clinic to ring in the new millennium with their prayers.

Our prayers are with the patients of West Clinic Wings and with all of you who are ill as we enter the new millennium.



Self-Nurtur

or those of you who are caretakers, who day after day, give of yourselves so that others may be nourished, we offer the gift of Self-Nurture. Written by Alice Domar,

Ph.D., the Harvard-educated director of the Mind/Body Center for Women's Health at Harvard Medical School, this is a book for all who find it difficult to give to themselves. The author shares with us the evening she first facilitated a group of women patients, searching in her own personal life experience for a discussion topic, she drew on the difficulties women have caretaking themselves. Her patients' responses convinced her that she had stumbled upon an issue central to women's wellbeing. Alice offers us a year's prescriptions for nurturing mind, body, and soul. We believe it is a book to be shared with all regardless of gender.



THE DIVING BELL

or those of you who seek inspiration, there is no greater testimony to transcendence than The Diving Bell and the Butterfly. At the age of forty-three, Jean-Dominique Baury, the French editor of ELLE magazine, experienced a devastating stroke which left him entirely paralyzed except for his left eyelid. Refusing to submit to despair, he used that single link to the outside world to write a heartwarming memoir. Completed two days before his death, it rapidly became a bestseller in Europe. Its celebration of life in the midst of personal tragedy can empower us all.



MEETINGS AT THE EDGE

magine our delight at receiving a gift package from Stephen Levine and his wife Ondrea. From their Healing Rock Tapes, it included A Year to Live (which we reviewed previously), a tape on pain management and a British book by Stephen entitled Meetings at the Edge: Dialogues with the Grieving and the Dying, the Healing and the Healed.

One of the country's leaders in the field of counseling the dying and the bereaved, Stephen Levine concurs with our advice to "enter into the darkness." Counseling a therapist who had lost a client to violence, and who felt her heart had been torn open by her loss, Stephen said:

We spoke some of the "the edge" at which all growth occurs. How growth is really a letting go of those places of holding beyond which we seldom venture. That edge is our cage, our imagined limitations, our attachment to old models of who we think we are or "should" be. It is our edges that define what we consider "safe territory". While it is the willingness to explore the vast unknown and to meet our natural fear of the unexplored with compassion that allows us to take each ministep beyond ourselves into who we really are, into our true healing.



The great tragedy of life is not death, but what dies inside us while we live.

Norman Cousins

Dear Friends,

As those of you who have lived through a long winter know, the most difficult time comes after the beautiful, pristine snows have gone. The long, wet, cold, dark months when life is dormant. When it is very hard to believe in spring.

So it is for those of us who grieve. A dark night of the soul. In this issue we invite you to enter into that darkness fully, as Jung says, "Go into your grief for there your soul will grow." To recognize that the soul work of grieving, just as nature's work of renewal, cannot be rushed. Sometimes, as Bernie Glassman says, it is enough to bear witness. Or, as T.S. Eliot said so eloquently: "The faith and the hope and the love are all in the waiting."

So, let us not shrink from the darkness but rather, gathering strength from nature's example, wait patiently and faithfully for spring.



# Together WE WILL COMFORT THE SUFFERING

# Our Mission

Our mission is to aid the current movement toward holistic medicine—toward treating the whole patient (mind, body, spirit) and encouraging hospitals, hospices and individuals to nourish patients, families and caregivers with healing environments. What is a healing environment? We believe a healing environment is one that offers sustenance to the soul and gives meaning to experience. It is one that enables those who are suffering to transcend their pain by connecting to the universal through the transformative power of beauty and art, and that gives comfort through this connection.

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