

# A LIGHT IN THE MIST

THE JOURNAL OF HOPE

A HEALING ENVIRONMENTS PUBLICATION  
VOLUME SEVEN, NUMBER ONE, 2002

L I F E  
L I F E I S A  
J J O U R N E Y



PHOTOGRAPH BY BARBARA WARD-VAGO



The Peace of Wild Things  
The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night from the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lay down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars.  
Waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

*Wendell Berry*

Life is a journey. A journey filled with challenge. A journey filled with growth. For some of us, the journey leads us, or a loved one, to a life-threatening illness.

When faced with such a challenge, it may comfort us to remember that the Chinese character for crisis is composed of both danger and opportunity, or as the ancient *I Ching* instructs us, chaos paves the way for creation.

Given sufficient courage and grace, we may use this opportunity to discover a new way of being—a deeper or higher level of consciousness—one that invites us to see things more clearly, to hold our loved ones more closely, to use our gifts more wisely.

We may in time come to see this challenge as a mysterious gift. As Carlos Castenada once said, “Death is an advisor looking over our shoulder showing us how to live.”

For some of us this illness will serve as a wake-up call to honor those parts of ourselves which have been silenced, a turning point to discover and pursue the dream which we have forgotten or never known, or an invitation to explore who we are and why we are here. For others, illness calls us to the greatest challenge and the greatest gift of all—transcendence—and to a realization that there is an inner reality which transcends exterior circumstances. In the midst of pain and loss there may be joy and gifts of incalculable beauty, for the power of the human spirit is greater than death itself and love transcends both time and space.

To all of us—life offers the gift of transformation.

## LIFE IS A JOURNEY

There is a Far Side cartoon with which I resonate all too frequently. In it, a burning, brick building labeled Crisis Clinic is floating downstream in a rushing river, poised at the point of tumbling over a huge waterfall. The caption reads: “Everything’s about the same here. How are things with you?”

I once asked my therapist if I had an unusual number of stresses in my life. “Yes,” she said, “I’d say what happens to you in a week may happen to my

average patient in a month or more.”

A psychic I once consulted suggested that the high degree of chaos in my life was designed to force me onto a higher spiritual plane. After all, unless forced by circumstances, most of us like to maintain the illusion that we are in control of our lives.

Dr. Eric Cassell has said that suffering is caused not so much by pain as by the meaning, or lack of meaning, which we attach to it. And so the framework within which we view the “bad” things that happen to us becomes all important.

Over the years, what has worked for me, is to see life as a school, a rather difficult school at times, in which the goal is not happiness, but spiritual and psychological growth.

Sometimes I look toward the heavens and berate my advisor with a clenched fist: “Hey, I only signed up for fifteen credits and you’ve given me twenty this quarter!” Or, “Hey, I already learned that lesson, why did you sign me up for a refresher course!?”

The concept of happiness as being life’s goal is a peculiarly Western concept. As is the dualistic notion that events are either good or bad. In Buddhism everything is seen as grist for the mill, as material to ponder on the path to enlightenment. Equanimity or inner peace is the goal.

Years ago *Psychology Today* printed a fascinating study of life satisfaction based on geographical location. One would readily assume that Californians had the greatest life satisfaction. But it turns out that Californians tend to expect life to have happy-ever-after perfection, and therefore their disillusionment engenders more unhappiness than the stoicism of New England.

In the late 1930s, a prospective, longitudinal study was begun at Harvard University that would eventually become the longest study of adult development in the world. In the first of three cohorts, 268 Harvard undergraduates were selected for a series of interviews and questionnaires which would span their entire lives. In 1977, Dr. George Vaillant published the preliminary findings in his book *Adaptation to Life* (reprinted in 1995).

Vaillant concluded that it is not what happens to us in life which determines our life satisfaction, but rather the success of our coping mechanisms. Interestingly, art and altruism (as in Healing Environments) turned out to be two of the most effective tools for transforming what life hands us.

This is the philosophy of *A Light in the Mist*. I was heartened recently to read an article in *The Journal of Holistic Nursing*, entitled “Strengthening Transcendent Meaning.” For that is what patients (and all of us) need. And that is what we attempt to do with our work.

In this issue we review some of the tools for transcendence we have encountered in our search for inner peace. We offer them as a gift and pray they may give you strength for the journey.



One of my coping mechanisms is, when tempted to feel sorry for myself, to find someone whose suffering far exceeds my own. Recently

I heard of such a story, a story of mythic proportions. A story of life as a harrowing journey.

My friend Phil founded a nonprofit to furnish homes for the formerly homeless. It was he who told me of the Lost Boys of Africa. It seems 140 of the “lost boys” were to be relocated in the Bay Area. Phil was called upon to furnish a three bedroom home for nine of them. Here is their story.

Some twenty years ago, as conflict and famine swept across Africa, a small group of young orphaned boys banded together for survival. Year after year their numbers grew until they became a hoard of twenty thousand. Driven from country to country, their only security became one another.

After nine of them were relocated in the San Francisco area and housed in Phil’s project, the touching scars of their strange lives were still visible. The morning after their first night in their new home, their sponsor arrived to find all nine boys huddled asleep on the floor in one of the three bedrooms. In this land of plenty, their security remained one another.

If you would like more information about Phil’s organization please call 650.322.9716

## Sea Change

A change wrought by  
the sea, as in the forming of a  
pearl; hence, marked transformation,  
as to something richer or finer.

Webster’s Dictionary,  
Second Addition

Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea change  
Into something rich and strange.  
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell.

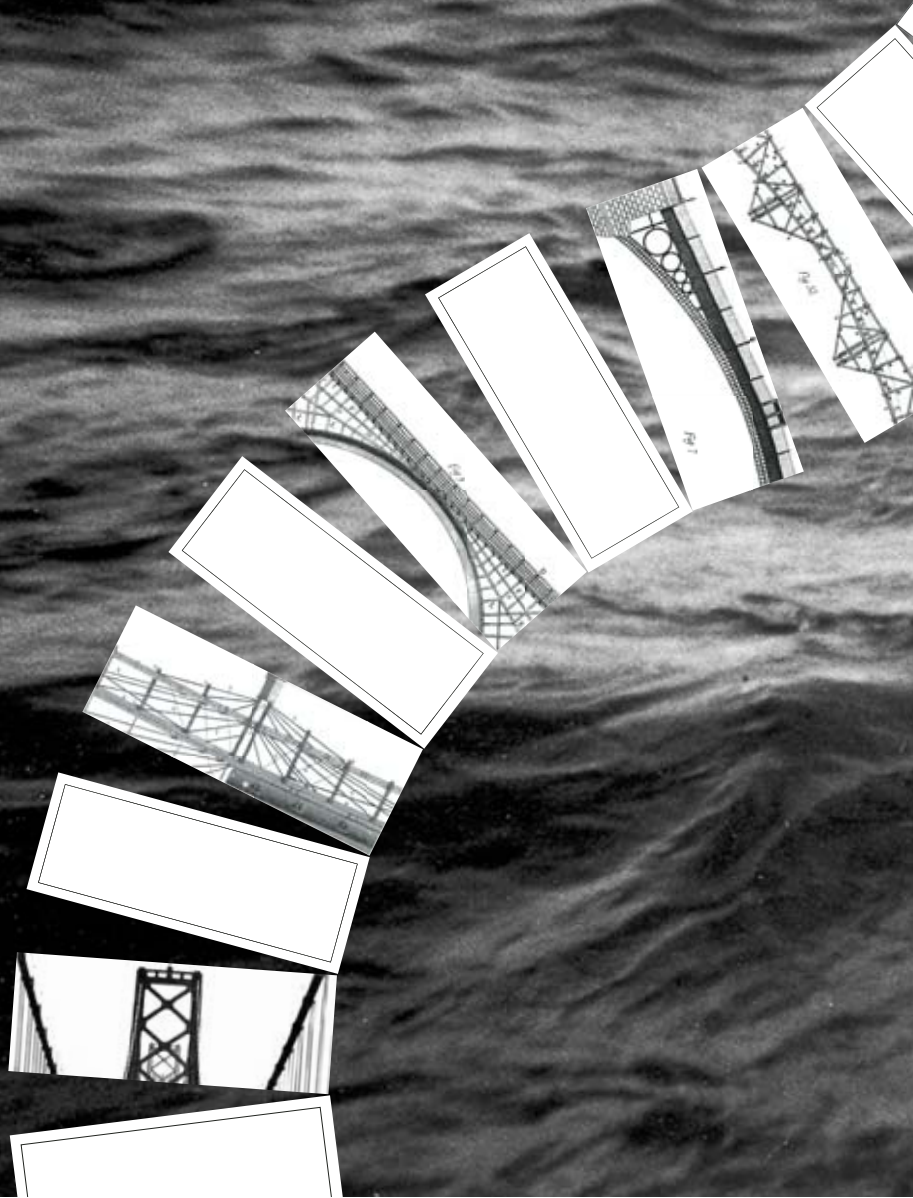
Shakespeare  
The Tempest I. ii. 400.

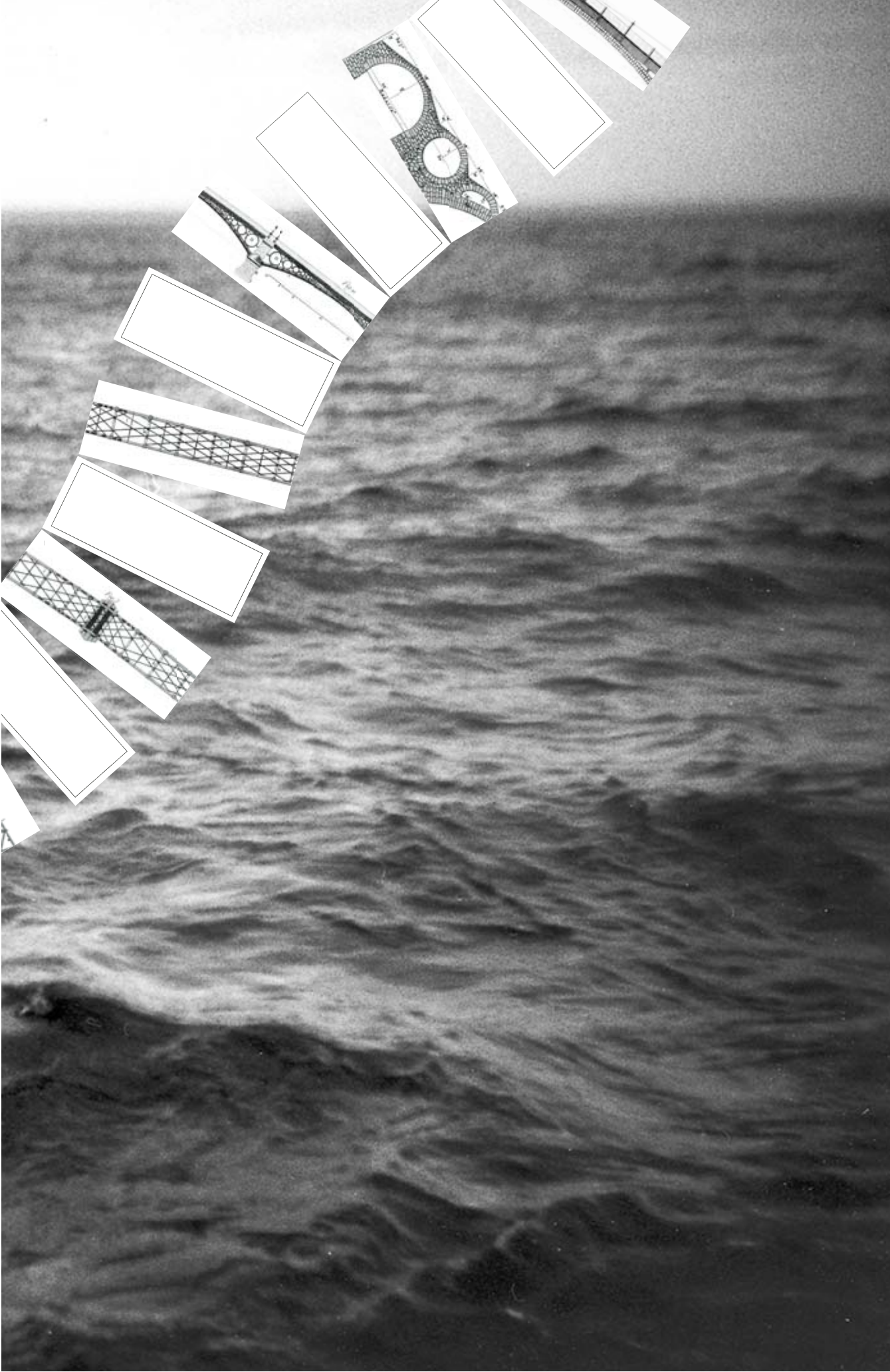
1.  
Carefully tear out the cards.

2.  
Shuffle them and draw nine  
without looking.

3.  
Place them in the blanks.

These are tools that  
you might try to help you  
bridge troubled waters.





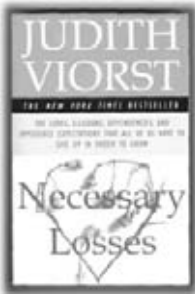
## Necessary Losses:

*The loves, illusions, dependencies, and impossible expectations that all of us have to give up in order to grow.*

Judith Viorst

First of all, I am no expert in the ways of dealing with loss. Secondly, I am no expert in the ways of dealing with love. That said, let me tell you a story.

A good friend recently went on a long-awaited vacation. During her time working in hospice care, she had worked through hundreds of lives and deaths. She navigated her way through so much and yet, it was when her father passed away and her personal relationship crumbled that she felt the heaviest loss. Still, she looked forward, acknowledging her heavy heart, attending bereavement sessions and managing her ever-changing life. So, her vacation time finally arrived—September 11, 2001.



Two weeks later I checked in with her—her simple reply was this: “I thought I would get a vacation from death, loss and grief.”

*Necessary Losses* came to me recently and I must say, I love it. I curled up with it on several evenings and I found comfort and understanding in Viorst’s approach to how we deal with loss—oh, inevitable loss! Loss is in the same vein as Death, we want to move on—pass it. It is painful. Why dwell any further?

In this book, she travels over the attachments that construct our life and the way memory holds on to some experiences more than others. The way we might have experienced love, separation and loss as a child may still affect us in our everyday life. The positive memories often save us—they form a cocoon around us and make us feel like we are invincible or at least safe. The negative memories can haunt or even scar us internally. The other temptress out there is expectation. This is difficult for me as I believe in manifestation and seeing yourself into the future—yet it must be countered with letting go of some or even all of those

dreams. So often in our determination to persist we cling to dreams and realities that have already changed. We are left holding an empty dream—tying our precious energy and resources onto something that doesn’t really exist for us anymore.

I believe it is important to understand the dynamic of how we love and, consequently, how we grapple with loss of love or changes in our way of loving. What I find difficult is overcoming how I have dealt with loss in the past and shaping the way I will deal with change in the future. My mental blocks make me feel like I have succumbed to old familiar pathways instead of moving on to what might be the right path or a better way. In living this life of ours—can we acknowledge our pain and suffering and grieve? Can we learn how to deal with such sadness and move on?

The answer is yes! There is room for serendipity and creativity on the other side of pain. There is reconciliation and hope and manifestation. There are so many ways to love in this world—I recommend this book to everyone who has loved and felt loss. I hope it can serve as a gentle guide for an often difficult time.

\*\*\*

André Gide

*On ne découvre pas de terre nouvelle sans consentir à perdre de vue, d’abord et longtemps, tout rivage.*

One doesn’t discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore at first and for a long time.

## TRANSITIONS



come across my path as we prepare each new journal.

As I was wading through previous issues to find the most pertinent quotes for the back of the cards in this issue, I came across a beautiful little book I had bought several years ago and never read: *Transitions* by Julia Cameron. As I skimmed through it I was amazed at both the power and the relevance of the quotes as “tools to help bridge troubled waters.”

Filled with “prayers and declarations for a changing life,” this little gem of meditations and affirmations is an eloquent reminder that we are not alone on our perilous journey. Wisdom and love surround us and are ours for the taking. We need only open our hearts to “spiritual sunlight.”

May the following excerpt serve as an enticing introduction to this comforting guidebook for life’s arduous path:

“Transition creates vulnerability. The safety of the old life has been set aside. The safety of the new life is not yet in place. The passage between the two feels perilous and threatening. Our feet move unsteadily on the rope bridge slung across the jungle chasm and yet, these feelings are an illusion. I am safe and secure at all times, in all situations, however unsettling. I claim spiritual safety as the bedrock of my security. My faith is the mountain. Events are the clouds that hide its face. While it may feel at times that events have overwhelmed me, I remind myself that these are just passing shadows. My faith endures. My heart, though vulnerable, is protected. The universe intends me good. Choosing to believe that, I find good in adversity. Elected optimism, while difficult to maintain, is spiritually pragmatic. In opening the possibility of good within difficulty, we seize the key of curiosity that allows us to open new doors.

Today, I comfort my threatened heart. I affirm my safety in times of change. I accept the comfort of spiritual sunlight. I am warmed by the truth that I am loved and protected even in the midst of chaotic change. Despite my shock, I survey my new spiritual surroundings with a spirit of possibility.”

Excerpted from *Transitions: Prayers and Declarations for a Changing Life* by Julia Cameron. Tarcher/Putnam, New York, 1999

*The first faint noise of gently moving water broke the silence, low and faint and whispering, faint as the bells of sleep; hither and thither, hither and thither, and the faint flame trembled on her cheek.*

James Joyce:

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

## B O O K S

## LIFE AS A JOURNEY

*A Woman’s Journey to God: Finding the Feminine Path*

Joan Borysenko

*Transitions: Prayers and Declarations for a Changing Life*

Julia Cameron

*The Illustrated Alchemist: A Fable About Following Your Dream*

Paulo Coelho

*The Secret of the Shadow: The Power of Owning Your Own Story*

Debbie Ford

*How, Then, Shall We Live?: Four Simple Questions That Reveal the Beauty and Meaning of Our Lives*

Wayne Muller

*Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life*

George E. Vaillant, M.D.

*Pilgrim Heart: The Inner Journey Home*

Sarah York

## ILLNESS AS JOURNEY

*Lightning at the Gate: A Visionary Journey of Healing*

Jeanne Achterberg

*Healing Beyond the Body: Medicine and the Infinite Reach of the Mind*

Larry Dossey, M.D.

*Bone: A Journal of Wisdom, Strength, and Healing*  
 Marion Woodman  
*Learning To Fall: The Blessings of an Imperfect Life*  
 Philip Simmons

I N D E X

JOURNAL

*Writing from Life: Telling Your Soul's Story*  
 Susan Wittig Albert, Ph.D.  
*Visual Journaling: Going Deeper than Words*  
 Barbara Ganim and Susan Fox  
*Leaving a Trace: On Keeping A Journal*  
 Alexandra Johnson  
*At a Journal Workshop: Writing to Access the Power of the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability*  
 Ira Progoff, Ph.D.  
 Circle Journey Books: Correspondence Kit  
 Paul Westrick

POETRY

*Finding What You Didn't Lose: Expressing Your Truth and Creativity Through Poem-Making*  
 John Fox  
*The Discovery of Poetry: A Field Guide to Reading and Writing Poems*  
 Frances Mayes  
*The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry*  
 Stephen Mitchell  
*Centering: In Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*  
 M.C. Richards

CREATIVITY

*The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*  
 Julia Cameron  
*Expect the Unexpected (Or You Won't Find It): A Creativity Tool Based on the Ancient Wisdom of Heraclitus*  
 Roger Von Oech

MUSIC

*The Nature of Music: Beauty, Sound, and Healing*  
 Maureen McCarthy Draper

HAVEN

*House as a Mirror of Self*  
 Claire Cooper-Lewis  
*The Sensual Home: Liberate Your Senses and Change Your Life*  
 Ilse Crawford  
*House of Belief: Creating Your Personal Style*  
 Kelee Katillac  
 —Getaways: Carefree Retreats for All Seasons  
 —A Room of Her Own: Women's Personal Spaces  
 —Bedrooms: Creating the Stylish, Comfortable Room of Your Dreams  
 Chris Casson Madden  
*Little Retreats: More Than Thirty Cozy Getaway Spaces for the Seaside, Mountains and Country*  
 Jane Tidbury

MANIFESTATION

*Visioning: Ten Steps to Designing the Life of Your Dreams*  
 Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D.  
*Your Heart's Desire: Instructions for Creating the Life You Really Want*  
 Sonia Choquette, Ph.D.

SPIRITUALITY

*How To Know God: The Soul's Journey Into The Mystery Of Mysteries*  
 Deepak Chopra  
*The Meditation Year: A Seasonal Guide to Contemplation, Relaxation, and Visualization*  
 Jane Hope  
*Sacred Contracts: Awakening Your Divine Potential*  
 Caroline Myss



Volume 1, Number 1 1996  
 First Issue



Volume 1, Number 2 1996  
 Tea Ceremony



Volume 1, Number 3 1996  
 Ritual



Volume 1, Number 4 1997  
 Oneness



Volume 2, Number 1 1997  
 Maitri



Volume 2, Number 2 1997  
 Hope



Volume 3, Number 1 1998  
 The Healing Home



Volume 3, Number 2 1998  
 Mission



Volume 3, Number 3 1998  
 Creativity



Volume 4, Number 1 1999  
 Intention



Volume 4, Number 2 1999  
 Grace, Gratitude, Forgiveness



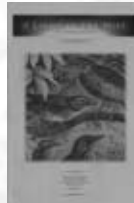
Volume 4, Number 3 1999  
 Work



Volume 4, Number 4 1999  
 Millennium



Volume 5, Number 1 2000  
 Grief



Volume 5, Number 2 2000  
 Animals



Volume 5, Number 3 2000  
 Art and Healing



Volume 6, Number 1 2001  
 Love



Volume 6, Number 2 2001  
 Design



Volume 6, Number 3 2001  
 Prayer



Volume 6, Number 4 2001  
 Sandtray



Volume 7, Number 1 2002  
 Life is a Journey

Note: If you have requested our newsletter and have not received it, please mail in the enclosed card. We have experienced some difficulty with both our e-mail and our phone messages.

## TRANSFORMATION

Six years ago, within ten minutes of meeting Sam, our graphic designer, he said: "I get it. You're all about transformation." That was a match made in heaven.

Over the years we have presented story after story of people successfully transcending the tragedy of loss. Last week Traci and I were given the gift of meeting one of them in person.

Brittany is the young woman we wrote about who lost her mother sometime before her high school graduation and who had the courage to hold her and sing to her throughout her last night.

Now a junior at Princeton, Brittany is a stellar example of the power of grief to mobilize meaning.

Last Thursday we learned that while still a high school student, Brittany had designed the introductory programs for children with cancer at St. Jude's in Memphis.

She admitted that for a year after her mother's death she wanted nothing to do with cancer, but not long after arriving at Princeton she formed a dynamic group promoting awareness of cancer and funding for cancer research.

She is currently trying to get a well-known star (whose mother died of cancer when she was

very young) to speak on campus, as well as pursuing Katie Couric. Brittany's "can-do" attitude is truly inspiring. Like us, she believes that if your mission is worthy, anything is possible.

Her dream for the future is to go to medical school and become a pediatric oncologist. She hopes to establish a healing community for children with cancer which will combine the best of Western medicine and Eastern philosophy.

Traci and I have no doubt that she will accomplish that or something equally amazing. We look forward to the day when we can say "We knew Brittany when..."



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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