Love Sonnet LXXXIX

When I die, I want your hands on my eyes:
I want the light and the wheat of your beloved hands
to pass their freshness over me once more:
I want to feel the softness that changed my destiny.

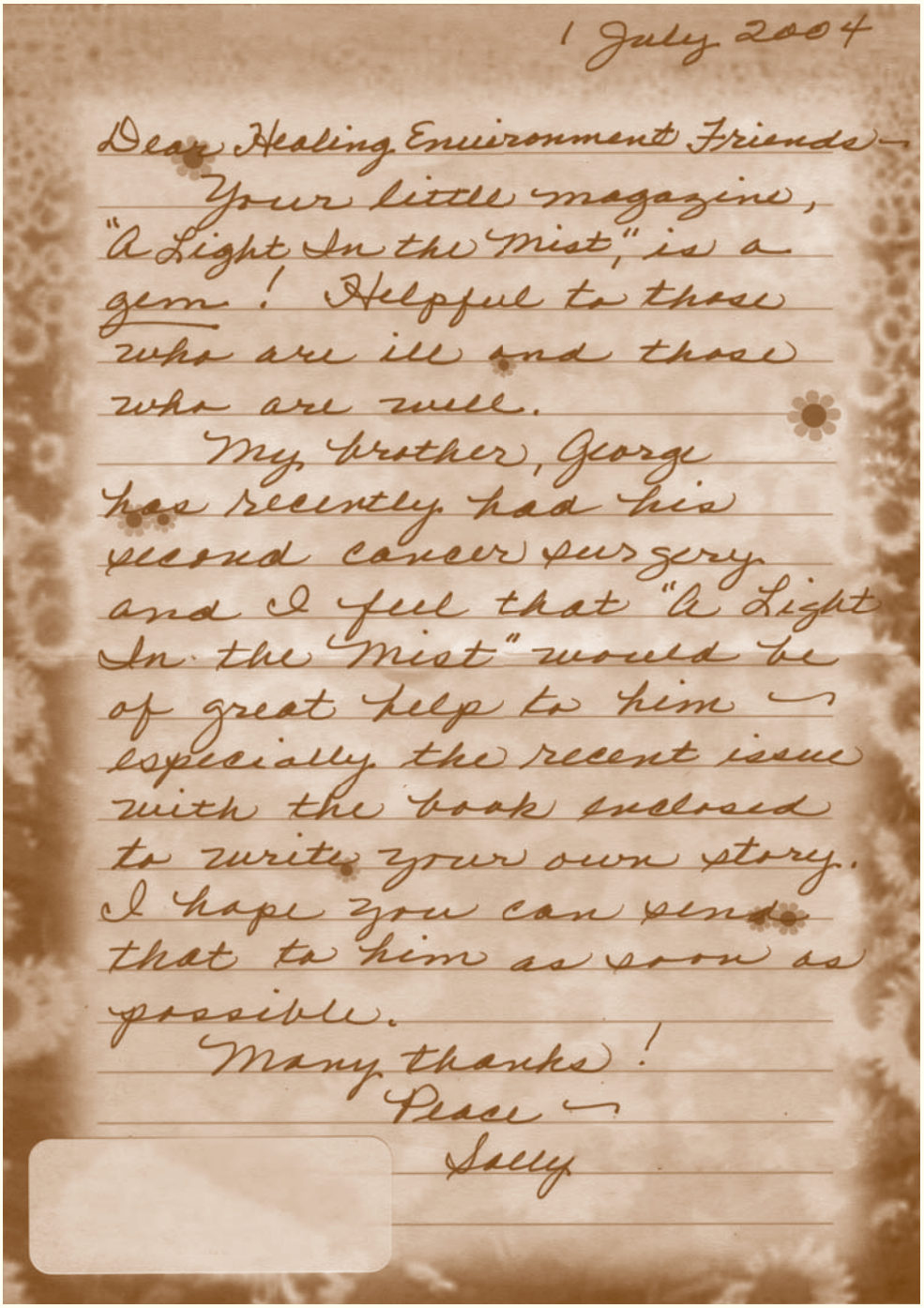
I want you to live while I wait for you, asleep.
I want your ears still to hear the wind, I want you
to sniff the sea's aroma that we love together,
to continue to walk on the sand we walk on.

I want what I love to continue to live,
and you whom I love and sang above everything else
to continue to flourish, full-flowered:

so that you can reach everything my love directs you to,
so that my shadow can travel along in your hair,
so that everything can learn the reason for my song.

– Pablo Neruda

(excerpted from 100 Love Sonnets)



1 July 2004

Dear Healing Environment Friends –

Your little magazine, "A Light In the Mist," is a gem! Helpful to those who are ill and those who are well.

My brother, George has recently had his second cancer surgery and I feel that "A Light In the Mist" would be of great help to him – especially the recent issue with the book enclosed to write your own story. I hope you can send that to him as soon as possible.

Many thanks!

Peace –

Sally

Prayer

When the tragedy of 9/11 occurred, Traci, Sam, and I were aware that our lives had changed forever — just as a cancer patient's life changes drastically with a diagnosis.

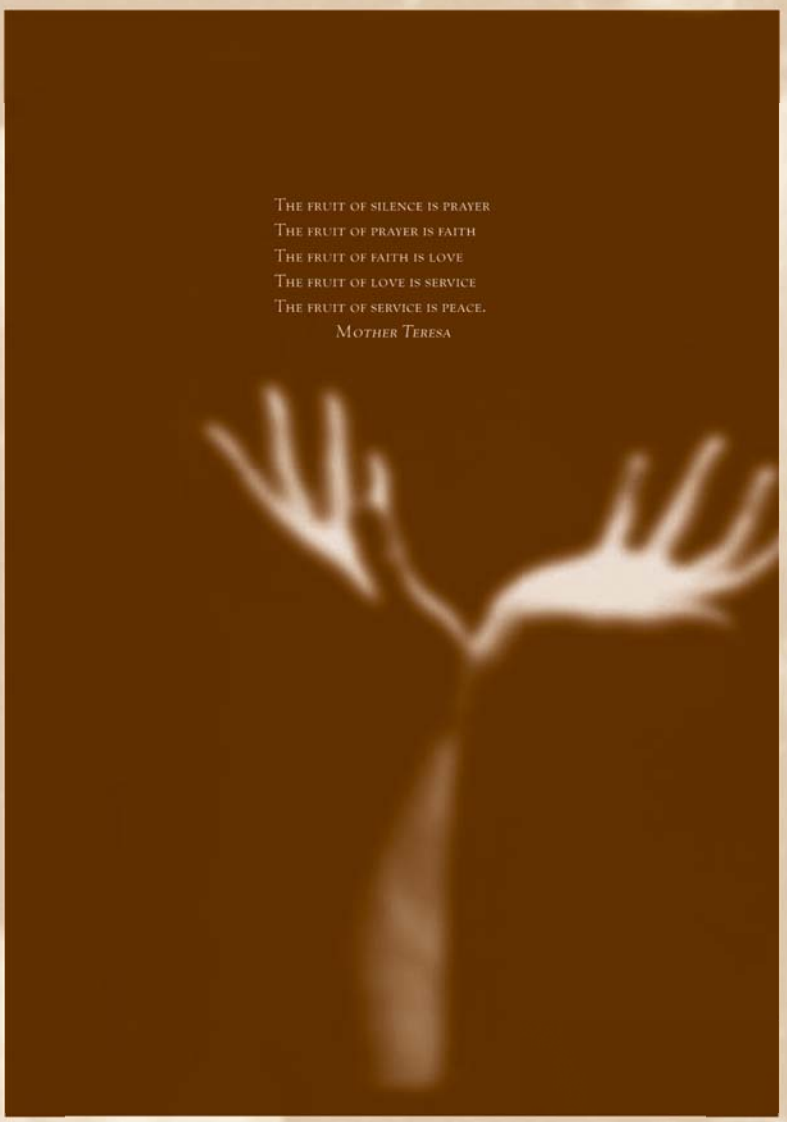
The Prayer issue was our response to a world that had suddenly become threatening and terrifyingly insecure. How could we find comfort ourselves and help others find comfort in a frightening new world, whatever their spiritual beliefs?

Text from Cover →
The fruit of silence is prayer
The fruit of prayer is faith
The fruit of faith is love
The fruit of love is service
The fruit of service is peace.
-Mother Teresa

A Light in the Mist

THE JOURNAL OF HOPE

A HEALING ENVIRONMENTS PUBLICATION
VOLUME SIX, NUMBER THREE, 2001



Take Peace
by Kate Strasburg

It was Christmas Eve. Joanne had had an incredibly difficult year. Not only had she lost her husband and sister, she had lost her only child as well. She sat in utter despair, immune to the joy in the world around her. Suddenly, it occurred to her to look at one of our publications that she had never read — *Take Peace*, written by Fra Giovanni, an Italian monk, in 1513, coincidentally on Christmas Eve.

"There is nothing I can give you which you have not. But therefore that which I cannot give, you can take. No heaven can come unless our hearts find rest in it today. Take heaven. No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in the present instant. Take peace. The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within reach, is joy. Take joy. And so at this time I greet you. With the prayer that for you now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away."

Miraculously Joanne no longer felt alone. She was filled with peace that was beyond understanding. Joanne was convinced that her sister had led her to that reading to comfort her on the loneliest of Christmas Eves.

Kate,

As we move into the second week following the horrendous events of September 11th, I am reminded how important the healing professions are at this time. I am sure that the next issue of A Light in the Mist will be read with a heightened awareness of how important it is to talk about, and learn from, our losses.

I wanted to thank you, again, for featuring the Tribute Journal in the last issue of your newsletter. There is a cancer center in Tennessee using the Tribute Journal for their grief support group because they saw the book in your publication. Also, the author of the foreword, Traci's husband, Tom, was overjoyed at the write-up.

Thank you for all you do to help people grieve, heal and celebrate life.

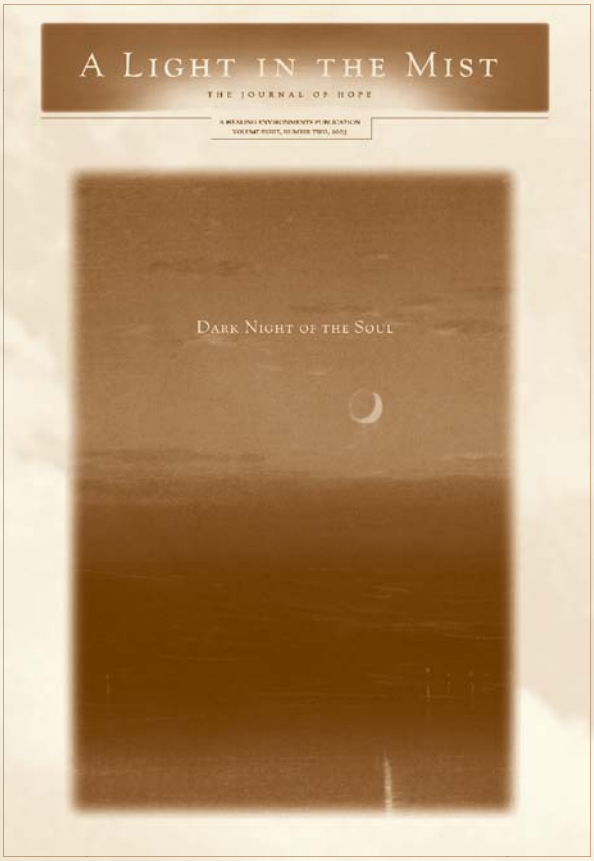
Blessings,

Lynne

Dark Night of the Soul

The country was at war. Once again the analogy of a country at war and an individual in crisis occurred to us. How could we help people cope with tragic situations over which they had no control? How could we give our readers the resources to weather a spiritual crisis regardless of their beliefs?

This issue has proven to be one of our most effective in bringing comfort to people in all kinds of crisis — from cancer to depression, from difficult transition to grief and loss.



Text from Cover →
Dark Night of the Soul

A Light in the Mist
THE JOURNAL OF HOPE
A HEALING ENVIRONMENTS PUBLICATION
VOLUME EIGHT, NUMBER TWO, 2003
Dark Night of the Soul

Dark Nights of the Soul
by Thomas Moore

Life is a continuous cycle of births. Imagine yourself as made up of three parts. One part arrives at birth and never changes, the eternal self. At that level, you are eternal, and throughout your life you recognize that unchanging self in the midst of developments, a quintessential star ever shining in the deep interior of the soul. A second level is so completely defined by events and environments that it changes all the time. This is the self that tries to survive and thrive in the everyday world, the practical self. Yet a third level is the caterpillar-and-butterfly part, the unfolding self. This self is always becoming, always evolving, unless it is blocked, and goes through deep transformations. It is the go-between that links the eternal with the everyday. Ancient societies focused their attention on the unfolding self, while we favor the practical self. At every moment, we are a star, an agent, and an emerging butterfly.

To keep the unfolding self alive, you have to open yourself to change, every step of the way. Of course, there are times when it is appropriate to step back, settle down, and maybe not move for a while. But to be a person means to be faced every minute with the decision to live or to die, to accept the invitations for yet more vitality or to decline them out of fear or lethargy. Dark nights of the soul seem to seek out this unfolding self and create a mood in which the necessary developments can take place. You may not go through the deep initiations when you're busy or carefree.

Source: Transformation Issue

To Kate:

I wanted to take a moment from my experience of your wonderful materials to thank you for creating them and sending them to me. It is slow going; yet in the moments of my stillness, that is what feels right. A healing journey takes its time, and I am not in control of that! Your wonderful, heartfelt gifts of sharing are helping me find help and hope a step at a time. I am willing to take these steps, no matter what they are. It is a start. And for that, I am deeply grateful.

I was not able to do more than put one foot in front of the other in the outer world for a very long time; pay the bills, put food on the table, a roof over my head; I wanted to fall apart and could not. Now, I don't feel so much the need to give in to that desire; I can put one foot, and in time, another, into my inner world of grief and find what surprises me there.

Again, thank you.

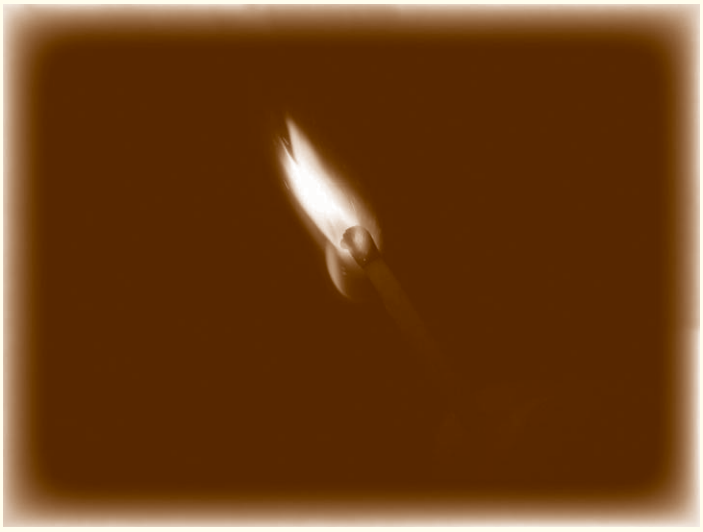
Joanne

The Power of Ritual
by Kate Strasburg

To a large extent, modern man has lost the power of ritual. In his efforts to be rational he has forsaken the mystery of the universe. Many of us have left organized religion behind, creating a void of meaning.

As the century ends and we face the new millennium in fear and uncertainty, more and more of us are exploring ancient ways and forgotten wisdom to replace what we have lost. The twentieth century, born in arrogance and boundless optimism, humbled us with the limits of our knowledge. Let us use our newfound humility to ask for guidance, to seek for solutions larger than science, deeper than materialism. Let us create personal rituals which connect us to our common humanity, which infuse our struggles with meaning, which frame our search for solutions. Let us reopen the mystery of existence.

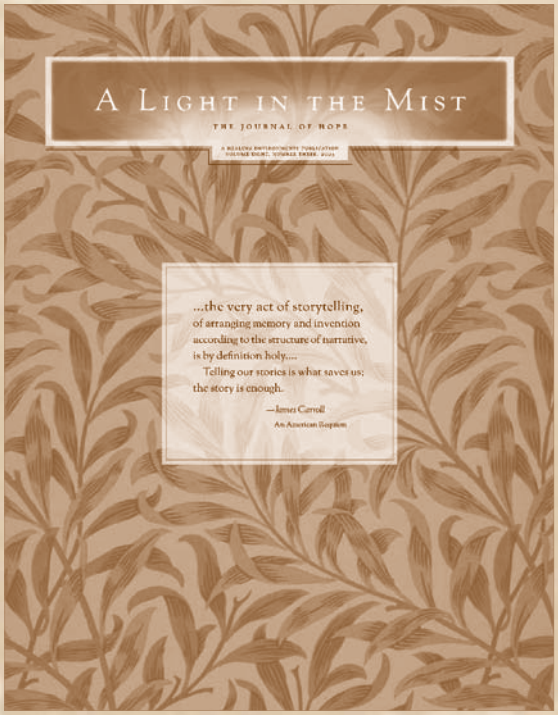
Source: Ritual Issue



Storytelling

One of the things that is the most fun about *A Light in the Mist* is finding out where it ends up. Like those old-fashioned chain letters, it winds its way around the world. Who would ever have thought it would be read in Nepal and New Zealand, Kazakstan and Kuwait, Brazil and Bangladesh, Iceland and India — more than sixty countries (not to mention all fifty states).

Imagine our delight to learn that our *Storytelling* issue was placed in every guest room of The Golden Door Spa in Southern California and Healing Elements of Design in Rancho La Puerta, Mexico!



Text from Cover →

...the very act of storytelling, of arranging memory and invention according to the structure of narrative, is by definition holy...

Telling our stories is what saves us; the story is enough.

-James Carroll

An American Requiem

A Light in the Mist

THE JOURNAL OF HOPE

A HEALING ENVIRONMENTS PUBLICATION
VOLUME EIGHT, NUMBER THREE, 2003

...the very act of storytelling,
of arranging memory and invention
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Telling our stories is what saves us;
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—*James Carroll*
An American Requiem

A Midnight Tale of Transformation
by Kate Strasburg

It was four o'clock in the morning. I sat bolt upright in bed, awakened by the realization that I had failed to pay for my airline ticket by the midnight deadline. I dialed the 800 number. A very pleasant man answered and we proceeded to have the most unusual middle-of-the-night conversation I have ever had with a stranger.

Besides being pleasant, he was actually humorous, all this at four in the morning. I don't remember exactly what he said, but I complimented him on his sense of humor. "That's the only thing my mother-in-law ever liked about me," he volunteered. Something about my energy has the odd effect of eliciting people's life stories. I can't tell you how many horrific stories of drownings I have heard while having my nails manicured by lovely Vietnamese refugees.

My middle-of-the-night companion proceeded to tell me the saga of his mother-in-law. She clearly had been a hateful woman. He had broken off his engagement with her daughter because her mother had refused to invite his friends (of whom she disapproved) to the wedding.

On one of her visits from out-of-town, he picked up his mother-in-law at the airport, and found her so despicable on the ride home, he actually turned around and returned her to the airport from which they had come. When she said her ticket would be invalid for an early return, he vowed to buy her a new one.

All this began to change when his mother-in-law was diagnosed with cancer. She began to soften and gingerly he agreed with his wife that she might move in with them. They began to build a new home to accommodate her. By pooling all their resources, he and his wife were able to achieve the home of their dreams. Meanwhile, as the planning progressed, the husband found conferring with his mother-in-law less and less odious. He even found their design sessions pleasant. Her gratitude began to heal old wounds.

As his story drew to a close, I could tell my narrator was becoming more and more emotional. I was curious as to how his story would end. "The day we were all to move into our beautiful home," he said, choking with emotion, "my mother-in-law died. I actually miss her," he added incredulously, "And I thank her for our new home everyday."

Resource: Transformation Issue

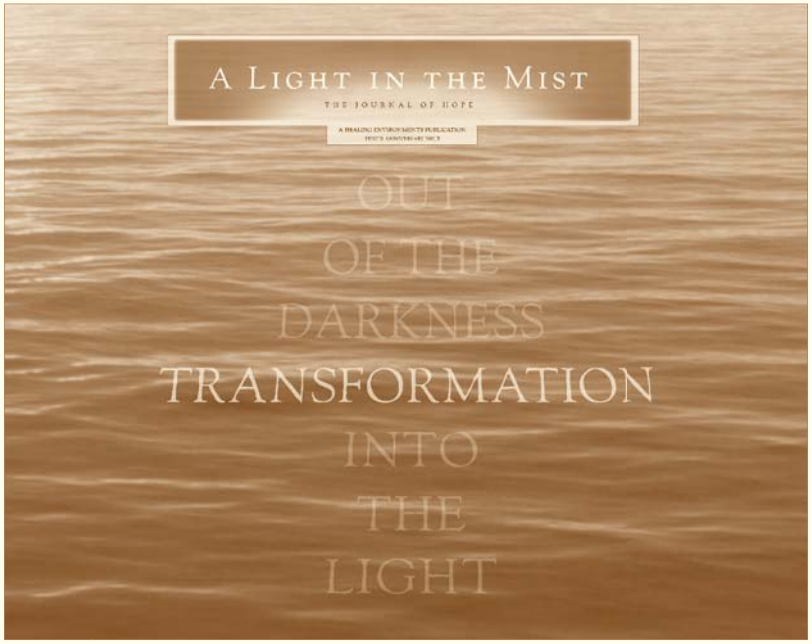
This issue on storytelling is one of the best I've seen yet. Keep up the good work, and please put me back on your mailing list. Thanks

Helen

Transformation

For our tenth anniversary, we decided to create an anthology around the subject of transformation — so central to our work. Mystically speaking, the issue compiled itself. In one hour, Kate discovered thirty of the forty-seven excerpts which found their way onto our pages. Transformation in illness, in death, in creativity, in spirituality.

This issue has remained one of our very best — an inspiration to all who are faced with overwhelming challenge.



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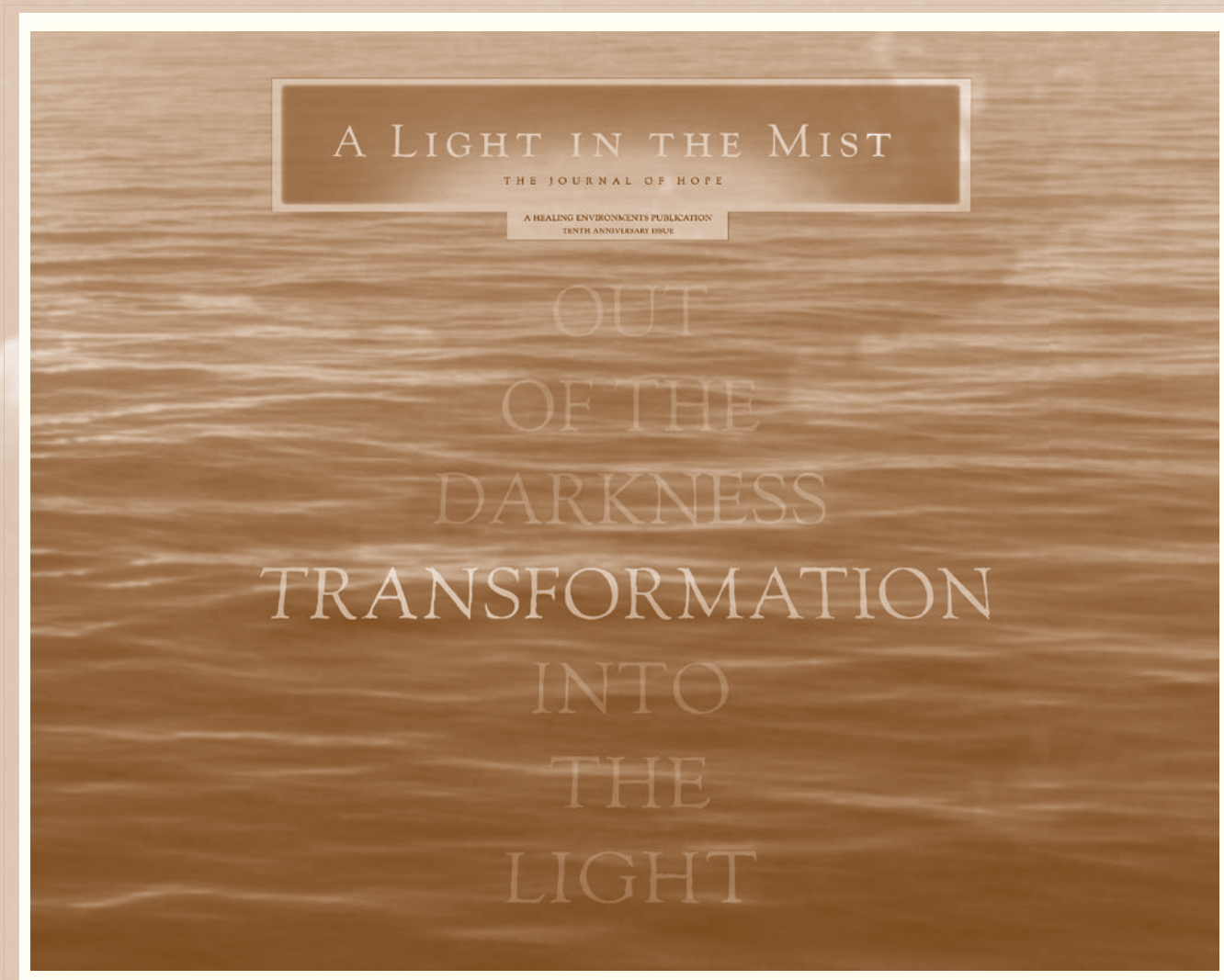
Out of the Darkness
Transformation into the light


A LIGHT IN THE MIST
THE JOURNAL OF HOPE
A HEALING ENVIRONMENTS PUBLICATION
TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
OUT
OF THE
DARKNESS
TRANSFORMATION
INTO
THE
LIGHT

Book Angel
by Kate Strasburg

Throughout our fifteen years, we have had the unmistakable feeling that our work was being aided and blessed by unseen forces. Up until now, we have hesitated to share these stories with our readers, fearing that their belief systems might be stretched and our credibility threatened. But now that we face the end of our funding, we have decided to share them all, in the hope that it may help others have faith in times of need.

One of the first mystical experiences occurred when we were desperate to find the meaning of Maitri, the Sanskrit word for compassionate friendship, for our issue on compassion and Maitri. I remember vividly standing in front of the bookcase in the library and asking the universe to please help us find the source. Suddenly as if a puppet on a string, I reached into our bookshelf of spiritual readings and pulled a book I had never read off the shelf, Inevitable Grace. As if in a trance I opened directly to page 146 and read, "Just as a mother loves her only child, so..."

The most dramatic experience I ever had while creating A Light in the Mist occurred when we were compiling the tenth anniversary Transformation Issue. I walked into my favorite independent bookstore and asked its owner, Tom, if he had any books on transformation. "I'm afraid not, Kate, but feel free to look around." In the next ten minutes I pulled thirty books off the shelf, only one of which contained the word "transformation" in its title. "Do you mind if I browse through these in the store?" I asked. "Not at all, Kate." (I was one of his best customers). For the next hour I sat, examining each of the thirty books in turn, each time opening directly to a passage which pertained to transformation. "Just as the caterpillar forms a chrysalis to emerge later as a butterfly, so you..." In that one hour I found 30 of the 47 excerpts which later appeared in our Transformation issue.

There was absolutely no way in which that could have been a random event. Finding one quote perhaps, but thirty? One every two minutes? I was stunned, even frightened by magnitude of it all. Half of me remained skeptical. How could that have happened?

Some time later I received an explanation, albeit one that was almost equally incredible. I was attending a conference at the Institute of Noetic Sciences in California. At lunch one day I found myself seated with a group of theoretical physicists from Princeton. At the end of the meal I turned to one of them and asked casually, "I had an unusual experience a few years ago and I was wondering if there were any phenomenon in theoretical physics that might explain it?" I then recounted the finding of the thirty passages in an hour in the bookstore. To my amazement, the physicist from Princeton laughed and said, "Oh, my yes! That phenomenon is very well documented in research. You simply have a library angel!" Only he didn't mean an angel as we understand it. The explanation which followed was much harder for me to understand than a belief in angels. "The universe is made up of layer upon layer of energetic connections," he explained. "Those quotes simply wanted to be found as much as you wanted to find them." I prefer our explanation that we have an editorial committee in the sky!

The third instance of my "book angel's" help occurred when we were putting together what we call our Poetry Package. We were searching for the most soothing poem we could find about death. I had gone to the bookstore with Traci and silently asked my book angel for help in locating such a poem. Perusing the poetry section, no book caught my eye. Finally, in frustration, I pulled five books off the shelf of poetry by some of our favorite poets: Rumi, Neruda, Tagore. Back in the car, I muttered under my breath, "Well, this time you finally let me down!" At the stop light, in irritation, I leaned down and picked up the volume by Tagore, the Shakespeare of India. At that moment I opened directly to "Toward a Higher Existence," the most beautiful poem about death we have ever seen, the cornerstone of our Poetry Package, the center of our butterfly print: "Peace, my heart, let the time for the parting be sweet. Let it not be a death but completeness. Let love melt into memory and pain into songs..." If I allow myself to think seriously about these experiences, I wonder if I lived with pure intention what the universe might have in store for me. Why do I hesitate to explore such a possibility?

I am reminded of a story I read about one of my favorite authors, Graham Greene. A Catholic convert, Greene waited two years for an audience with Padre Pio, the last saint to be canonized by the church. When the time for his appointment arrived, Graham Greene could not summon the courage to meet him. When asked why, he replied that he was not ready for the changes in his life that would follow from such an experience. Similarly, I do not feel ready for where such a surrender to intention might lead me. But surely it is worth considering. As theoretical physics tells us, the universe is far more mysterious than we imagine. Instead of the three dimensions we are used to, the universe has been proven to hold no fewer than ten. What wonders lie beyond our comprehension? What miracles might be possible beyond our understanding?

Leap into Faith
by Kate Strasburg

A few months ago I encountered a serious stimulus to transformation. I had been experiencing low-level back pain for nine months. Nothing that couldn't be managed with Advil. But as it became progressively worse, I consulted my internist, who ordered an MRI. The day that he read it he phoned and told me to see a neurosurgeon immediately.

I walked into Dr. Kim's office determined to talk him out of surgery. He pointed to the image on the wall. "We can operate tomorrow or next Tuesday," he offered. "If you wait much longer," he admonished gently, "I cannot promise that you will not end up in a wheelchair." His reputation for excellence was equaled by his compassion and so I agreed to Tuesday. Little did I know that having my back realigned would prove to be a spiritual and psychological realignment as well.

The first epiphany after surgery occurred on day three. My surgeon had optimistically told me I would be walking the day after surgery. The reality was far more daunting. Without appetite, without energy, feeling immeasurably vulnerable and frightened, I could barely shuffle with a walker to the foot of my bed. Yet I knew walking was essential to my recovery. My gentle nurse, aptly named Faith, tried to encourage me.

Suddenly, I remembered a course I had taken entitled "The Psychology of Peak Performance." The professor, Jeffrey Wildfogel, had coached Olympic gymnastic hopefuls. Puzzling over the fact that they performed so much better in practice than in competition, he asked them what their thoughts were immediately preceding their events. Without exception, the Olympic hopefuls envisioned failure. Wildfogel programmed them to visualize a perfect performance instead. The results were astounding.

I said to Faith, "Let's walk out in the hall." And for the first time I not only got past the foot of my bed, but successfully completed my first lap around the floor. I needed to move through the pain and fear I had been experiencing in order to take the leap to launch myself into faith.

Source: Transformation Issue

Learning to Fall
by Phillip Simmons

AND HERE IS where we go wrong. For at its deepest levels life is not a problem but a mystery. The distinction, which I borrow from the philosopher Gabriel Marcel, is fundamental: problems are to be solved, true mysteries are not. Personally, I wish I could have learned this lesson more easily—without, perhaps, having to give up my tennis game. But each of us finds his or her own way to mystery. At one time or another, each of us confronts an experience so powerful, bewildering, joyous, or terrifying that all our efforts to see it as a "problem" are futile. Each of us is brought to the cliff's edge. At such moments we can either back away in bitterness or confusion, or leap forward into mystery. And what does mystery ask of us? Only that we be in its presence, that we fully, consciously, hand ourselves over. That is all, and that is everything. We can participate in mystery only by letting go of solutions. This letting go is the first lesson of falling, and the hardest.

I offer my stories not as illustrations of a problem but as entrances into the mystery of falling. And now I'll offer not advice, not bullet points, but mystery points, set off in my text not with the familiar round dots but with question marks:

??? If spiritual growth is what you seek, don't ask for more strawberries, ask for more tigers.

??? The threat of the tigers, the leap from the cliff, are what give the strawberry its flavor. They cannot be avoided, and the strawberry can't be enjoyed without them. No tigers, no sweetness.

??? In falling we somehow gain what means most. In falling we are given back our lives even as we lose them.

Source: Tranformation Issue

5.30.07

Dear Kate, Traci and Sam,

I want to tell you how wonderful I think your new gift packet is. I took it with me when I went to visit my mother a few days ago. She has cancer and I go to visit her often now. I gave her your gift packet and she so enjoyed and appreciated it. It allowed us to venture into some new areas in our conversation that we hadn't gotten to before. Thank you so much for this wonderful work that you're doing and the beauty and inspiration that you are providing.

I am enclosing a check for 6 more packets that I would like to have to share with family and friends.

with much appreciation,

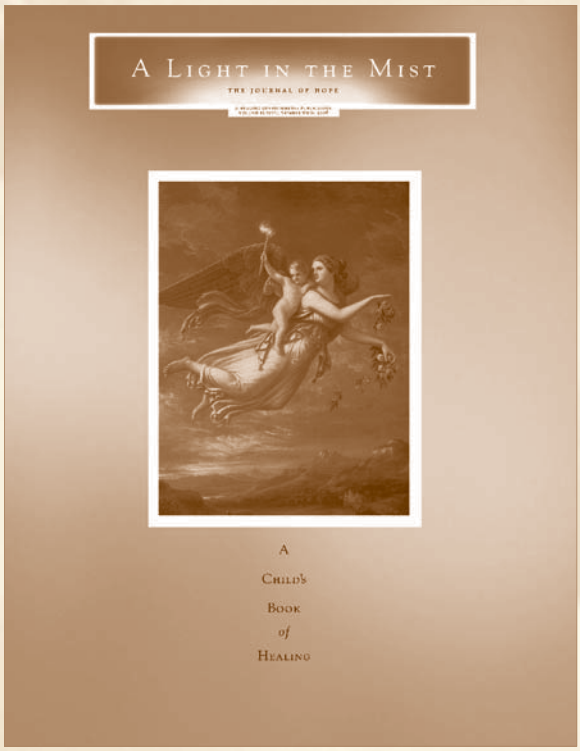
Cherry

Children's Issue

A preschool classmate of Traci's son, Alexander, had been diagnosed with cancer. Then one of Traci's closest friends lost her baby in an unspeakable way. The overwhelming grief of losing a child compelled us to reach out to others in that unbearable situation... as well as to young children losing parents.

I stumbled upon two beautiful images of angels carrying babies to heaven: one sad, one triumphant. It was Sam who said we must put the uplifting one on the cover.

Then I had the idea of enclosing a small children's book on the power of love to overcome death. The tiny books of healing were born.



Text from Cover →
A Child's book of Healing

A Light in the Mist

THE JOURNAL OF HOPE

A HEALING ENVIRONMENTS PUBLICATION
VOLUME ELEVEN, NUMBER TWO, 2006

A Child's Book *of* Healing

The Alchemy of Love: Transforming Loss
by Kate Strasburg

What can be done with unbearable loss? How can unspeakable pain be transformed with courage and vision, into an exquisite gift to the world?

We recently read of a woman who had lost her two children to a rare degenerative nerve disorder. Her response was to create a website for children with serious illness — BraveKids.org — as well as support their grieving parents.

On a recent trip to Denver to explore educational options for my teenage son, I met an extraordinary young man, Daniel Conroy. With his intense warmth and infectious good humor, I liked him immediately. But ours was to be a stronger and deeper connection. When he asked me what our nonprofit did, a strange thing happened. I answered with words I have never used before or since: "We help people die."

Immediately Daniel's demeanor changed. In a hushed and reverent voice he shared his story with me. "We lost our first baby. It was absolutely horrible. She lived sixteen days. We watched her go from the most beautiful baby in the world to a shriveled and lifeless form. Seeing the life literally drain out of her. For sixteen days, we held her and tried to comfort her in the most cold and impersonal surroundings. I hated the hospital! How could my beautiful baby die in such an ugly place! I even brought pieces of beautiful silk in to beautify and dignify her environment."

Overcome with grief, Daniel and his wife, Mae, started a foundation in memory of their daughter Mclaine. Joining forces with Children's Hospital and Centura Home Care and Hospice, they helped fund The Butterfly Program — a beautiful gift to dying children and their parents. The Butterfly Program's mission is to create healing environments for those who must suffer the pain of such excruciating loss — and to transform that loss into a healing transition — for parents and their children. Daniel and Mae want no other parents to suffer as they suffered.

Kate and Traci,

During the summer of 2006 after 9 weeks of pregnancy my wife and I experienced the miscarriage of our second child. It was, at least for me, surprisingly emotional and painful. I guess I could not imagine that I would have grown so attached to a child I had never met. A couple of days after we returned from the hospital we received a copy of A Light in the Mist, A Child's Book of Healing along with it's companion booklet. It was totally unexpected because I do not remember requesting it but I was very glad to receive such a tender and heartfelt gift.

At the time I was taking care of my wife and our first son and did not have the opportunity to give myself time to grieve the loss. Your gift provided me with the opportunity I needed to experience the feelings that were welled up inside. I thank you for that gift and what you have done for me as I grieved the loss of that child. I am sure countless others around the world have experienced similar blessings. I am truly grateful for all you do to help people while they are grieving or experiencing some form of suffering. I work as a child life specialist with pediatric oncology patients and know how important it is to make a connection with someone while they are grieving. To give them a sense of hope, unconditional love and honor their experience. Through your journal and writings you were able to give that to me at a time when I needed to feel connected to something bigger than myself.

The feeling of gratitude that I have is one that cannot be adequately expressed in words but I have a sense that you understand what I wish to express. Thank you so much for all the work you are doing and have done. People are in need of this type of work and human connection even if we are not aware of this need ourselves.

Rob

Standing On The Precipice
By Traci Teraoka

Early in 2005 one of my dear friends called me at the Healing Environments office. "Traci, the baby died. I might need you to help me." This was completely unbelievable. The nursery was ready to receive its occupant and at 36 weeks the umbilical cord had gotten tangled and then knotted around baby Elliott's neck. At that moment however, we didn't understand the "why" but only the immediacy of Tucker sitting in a examination room during a routine exam. My disbelief was quickly thrown into "what now?" and when she replied that her labor would be induced and that she needed to deliver the baby I realized that the worst was not over. Her husband had already left work and was heading to the hospital. I stood there crying, utterly lost for a moment in the depth of this tragedy. I must have been in shock myself when another friend called a few minutes later. Somehow she understood Tucker needed me and I needed to leave and go to the hospital. I gathered my things and headed over the Bay Bridge to Berkeley. As I was driving it occurred to me that I had no expertise to really lend — so I called my dearest friends in hospice and asked for help. The response was to simply show up and love her. "Could you give me something a little more concrete?" I asked. "Show up and love her." So I did. Tucker and Dave had a blessed team from Alta Bates Hospital that night when she delivered. Spring Childers, their doula nurse Mary Rose, and Dr. Isenberg.

There is very little that can be said to make someone feel better about the loss of a child. In fact, trying to justify the loss just makes it worse. Showing up and learning to comfort through presence was my only gift. I admit I did do other things for them — running errands for them and trying to ease the clean up of sympathy cards and dead flowers — but it really came back to being comfortable with their pain that seemed to make the most difference. It became a stronger part of the foundation of our relationship — literally strengthening our connection with sorrow and presence.

Several weeks after their loss, Tucker and Dave held a memorial for their son, Elliott. They created their own ritual for honoring and remembering him. Amongst their families they buried his ashes under a weeping Japanese maple. It has delicate soft green leaves that will return every spring.

They asked Tamara, a vibrant 75 year old spiritual teacher to serve as the officiant. She led us through visualizations and meditations of healing and love for ourselves. The exercises relaxed, grounded and cleansed us in the spirit of love and beauty and connected us in grief. Then she continued the meditation to completely focus on the child, Elliott, and to hold his loving spirit in our love. As she did this she led a group meditation of love and release. As everyone was ready to receive this child in life there also needed to be a way to collectively acknowledge his spirit in death. Tamara did this in a sacred way.

Nine months later within the same year they held a baby blessing for the safe arrival of their second child, Joseph. Tamara was back to hold the space and lead a smaller group of women in an intimate blessing. Tucker and Dave choose sacred objects that were special to them: lavender and rose petals, a glass vial with ocean water, tiny sea shells and amethyst and rose quartz crystals that fit in the palm of your hand. Following a cleansing with sage we once again traveled with Tamara on a visual journey into love — to send our welcoming messages for Joseph's birth and arrival.

I asked Tucker recently, "Looking back on this whole experience, what got you through it?" "Spending time trying to walk through the experience carefully — not numbing out or checking out despite how dark it was. I don't think we could have gotten through this without acknowledging what had happened. We received support from our family, friends and support counselors and we found ways to create rituals for remembrance and release." There were always a couple of days a month that the depression would get very intense — very dark. Though those days always passed. I was always thankful that she had taken time on her "better days" to seek support for the times when she would really need it.

Even in the moment, as the unimaginable was happening, she seemed to know that life was going to go on and that there was a very real strength in her. Tucker felt it was essential to follow through on the promise of life for Elliott – that her life would be part of his legacy. And trusting that their desire to be parents would be honored in time.

It has been exceedingly difficult to write about the loss of Elliott. I can see how grief is our companion after loss and how we need to find a way to get through the dark night.

3-20-07

Kate-

I appreciate your publication and always find someone in need to share it with after I've read it.

I have a friend who is in prison who lost his daughter in an accident when she was 14 years old. He has never been able to work through his grief. I sent him my copy of A Child's Book of Healing - hoping he would be able to find some threads that would be heepful to him - Could you recommend anything else that might heep him. He is a simple but good-hearted person.

Please accept the enclosed "widow's mite" to help with your postage needs etc.

Many thanks

Jean

Dear Kate and Traci,

Yes, please keep me on your mailing list. It is always a special day when I receive something in the mail from you. I read the book on the loss of a child and passed it along to a woman who has organized a group for grieving parents. I am a Hospice volunteer and find that often the things you send contain helpful words for that work. Everything you create is so very well done!

Also I would be interested in receiving the gift packet of cards, prayers etc. Thank you so much for the work you do. I am sure your materials are blessings in many people's lives.

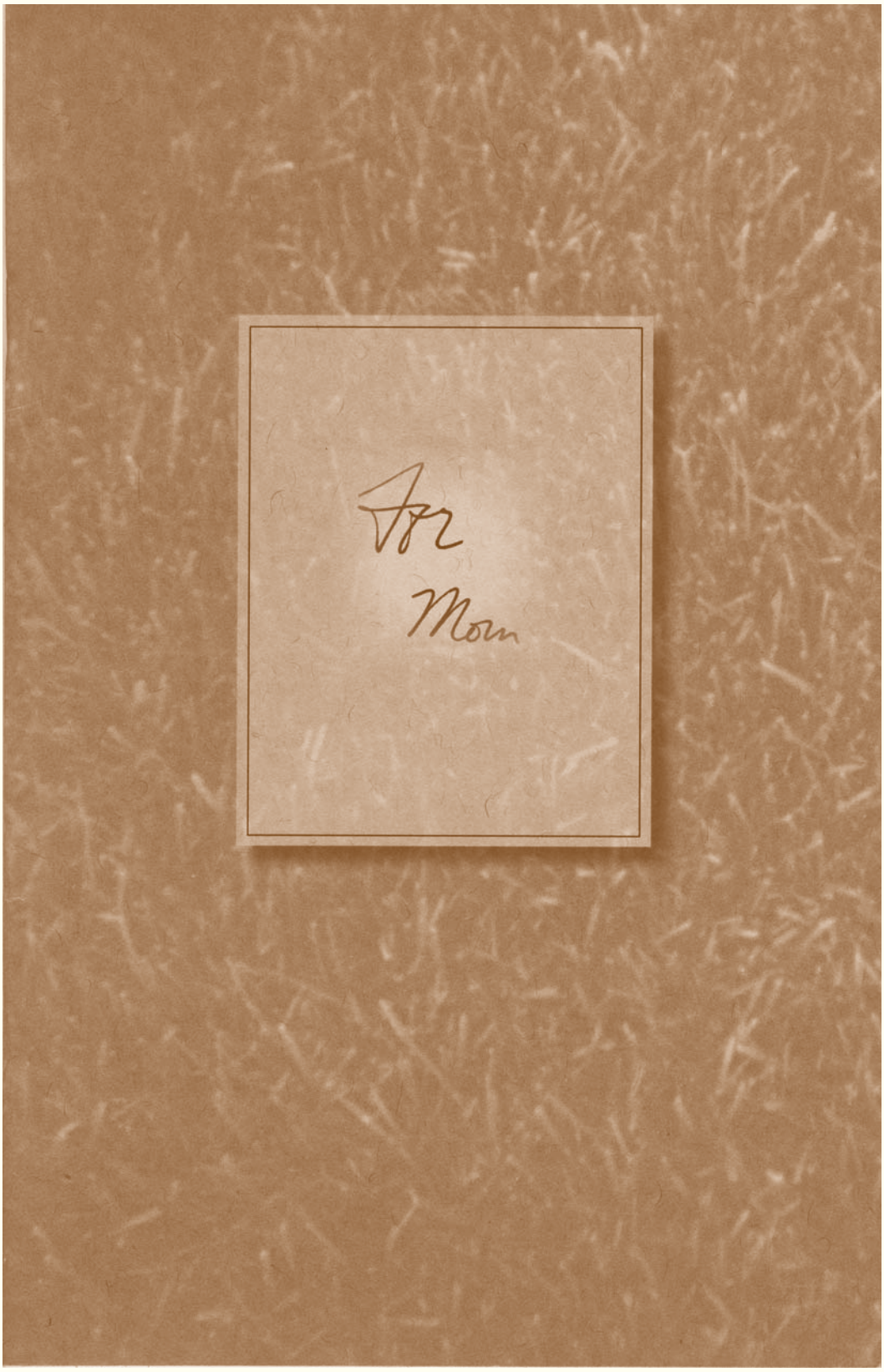
Love,
Mary

For Mom

Hadleigh is the son of my best friend Barbara, who died twenty years ago of ovarian cancer after a valiant seven year struggle, when he was only thirteen. Hadleigh began to volunteer for Healing Environments in his late twenties and a few years ago we brought him on our staff part time.

For Mom is Hadleigh's touching tribute to his long departed mother and the magical memories which she created for him before her death.

Shortly after *For Mom* appeared, the head of the Smithsonian was made aware of it and ordered 500 copies for Christmas for his staff, to share with them the important role the Smithsonian had played in the life of a young boy.

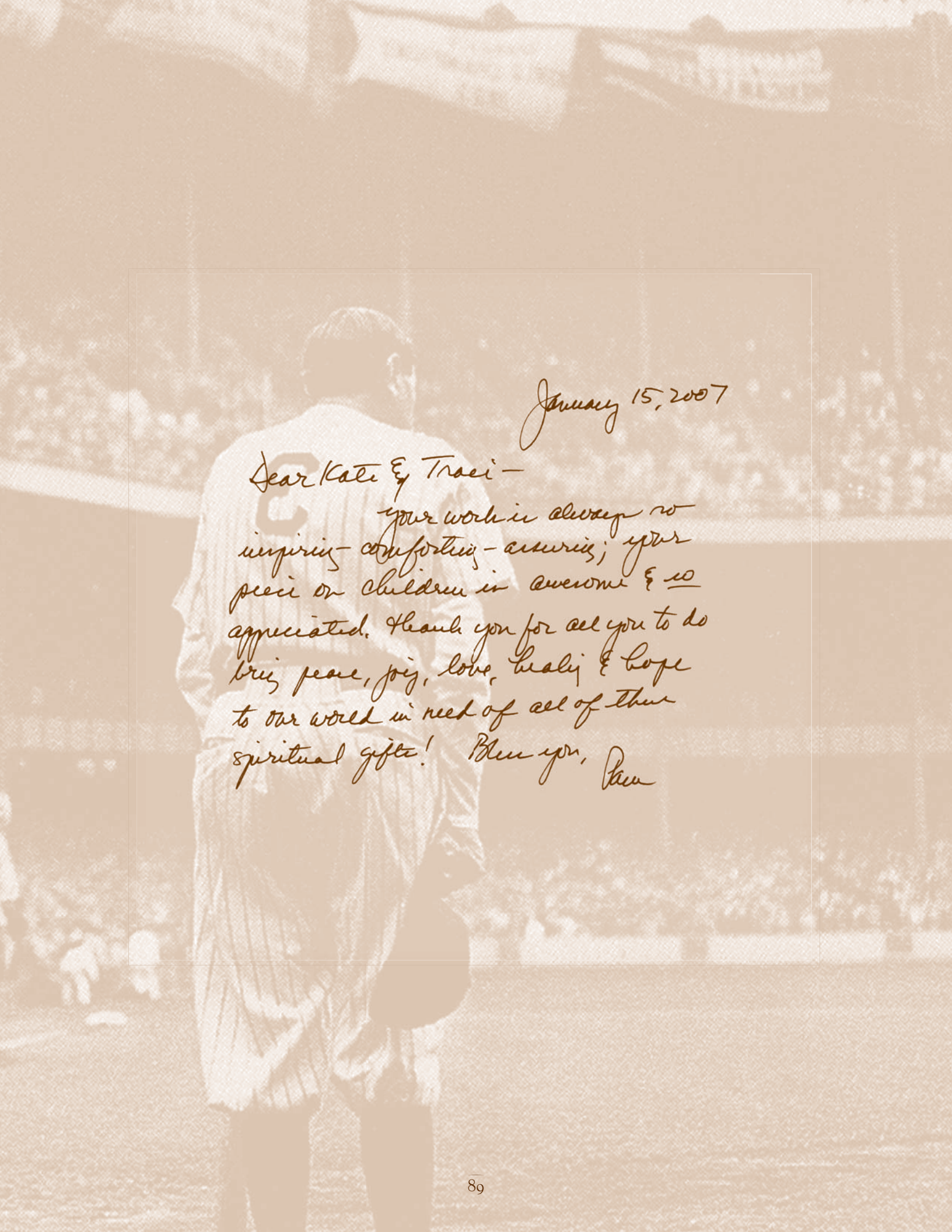

For
Mom

For Mom
by Kate Strasburg

In our fourteen years of publications we have often felt that an unseen hand was involved. Jokingly we have spoken of our editorial committee in the sky — but only half-jokingly. One of the most poignant examples of divine intervention occurred when we were putting together Hadleigh's touching memorial to his mother, Barbara.

For Mom is a memoir of his trip to the Smithsonian with her, to view the baseball memorabilia he loved. When the question of graphic design arose, Sam said without question, "What we need is a baseball card... a 1933 Babe Ruth baseball card!" I interjected, "Yes, Sam, a baseball card — but it should be one that has meaning for Hadleigh." I gave Had a call. Was there a baseball card that had special significance for him, I asked.

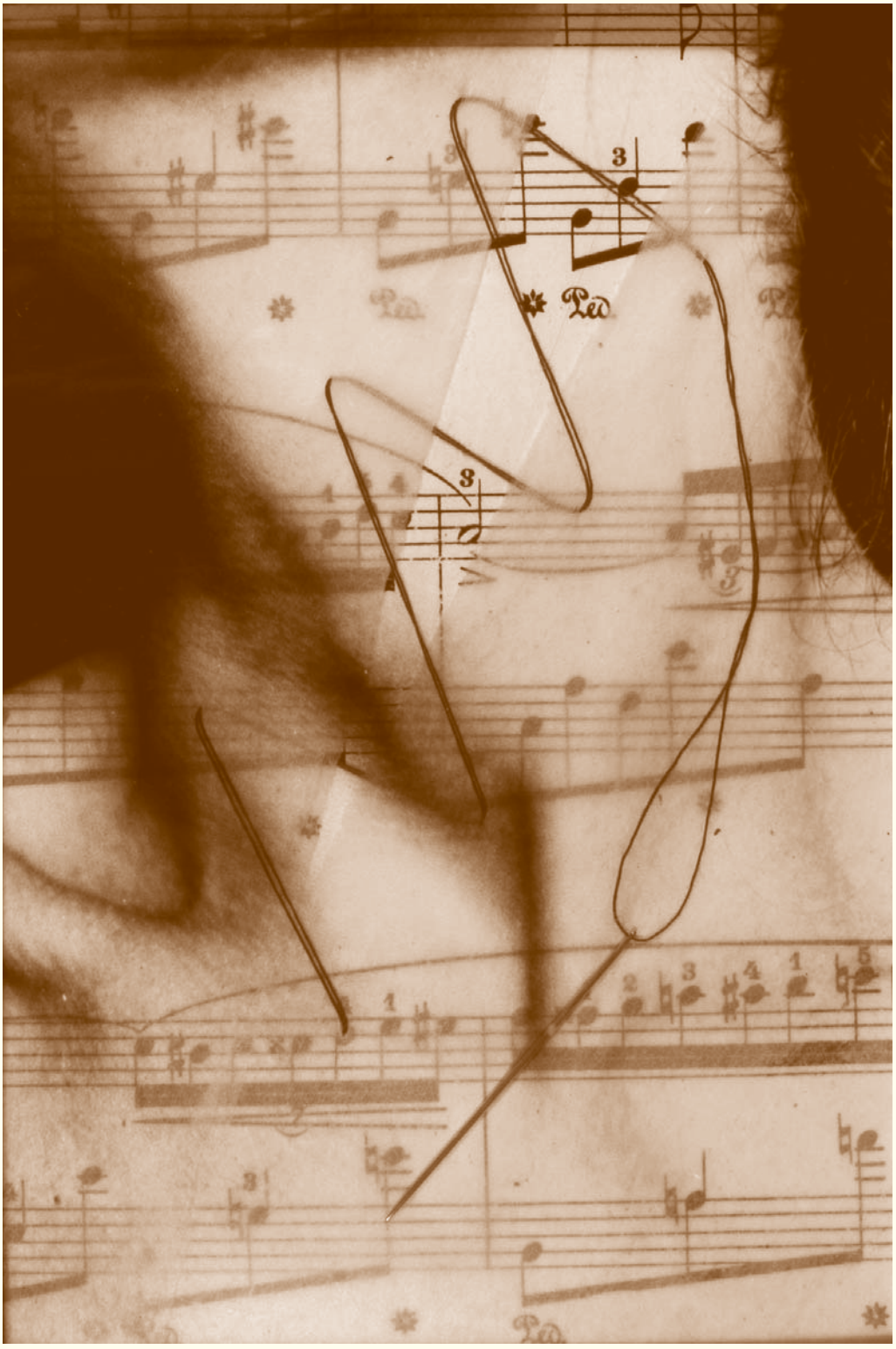
"I never told you, Kate, but the only thing my mother left me was a 1933 Babe Ruth baseball card."



January 15, 2007

Dear Kate & Traci –

your work is always so inspiring – comforting – assuring; your piece on children is awesome & so appreciated. Thank you for all you to do bring peace, joy, love, healing & hope to our world in need of all of these spiritual gifts! Bless you, Pam

MAPPING THE
JOURNEY:
Body and Soul

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Pain and Creativity
by Mary Daniel Hobson

"Discomfort, even pain, often acts as a handmaiden to good fortune."

This connection between pain and personal evolution often appears in Hobson's work. She says she is exploring "that crack in one's world that initially is unbearable, but often yields an unexpected gift."

These are the unwelcome events that are foisted upon one, such as the time Hobson spent nearly one month bedridden by excruciating back pain. "It was months before I could walk more than a couple of blocks," she said. "Pain can be very isolating. Ultimately, as a result of that experience, I became much more aware of my body as a signal. I had been a competitive runner and this forced me to slow down. I see it as a time of getting back on my path... it confirmed my passion in photography."

In hindsight, Hobson sees a connection between the decisions she had made in her life that were leading her away from her art and her back "cracking." After graduating from Vassar College with a degree in art history, she was working as a teaching assistant in an elementary school. It wasn't fulfilling, but the fear of not finding a better job tempted her to commit to another year. Within a short time, she was flat on her back.

Physical mutiny during times when one's head is leading one's being away from the heart's desire seems to be part of the Hobson family heritage. When Mary Daniel Hobson was 15, her father almost died from a blood disease. He had been working as a corporate lawyer in San Francisco, in opposition to his desire to be an artist. Once he recovered, he traded his high-powered life for the deliberate pace of a print maker. Hobson muses that "...if you don't do what you want, you get very ill."

For more information visit: *http://www.marydanielhobson.com*

Our Tiny Books of Healing

The response to our first tiny book was overwhelming. We had the idea to enclose a children's book on the triumph of love over death in our Children's Issue.

Letters and orders poured in. Children and adults alike found comfort in the simple words and Sam's lovely illustrations. We were asked to translate it into Spanish.

Then circumstances led us to create tiny book after tiny book. A chaplain asked Kate for copies of *Love is Forever* for a dying young mother to give her children. Kate realized it was not what was needed for that particular situation — the pain of leaving loved ones behind. *My Wish for You* was born.

Book after book followed effortlessly until we had sixteen in all. The tiny format, the simple words, Sam's lovely illustrations — all have made this series uniquely accessible.

The tiny books offer words of comfort to those in unspeakable situations. They have been passed out to patients, to families, to mourners at funerals and wakes. They have comforted care givers and health care professionals. Given words to assuage the unbearable suffering that life can present.

love
is
forever

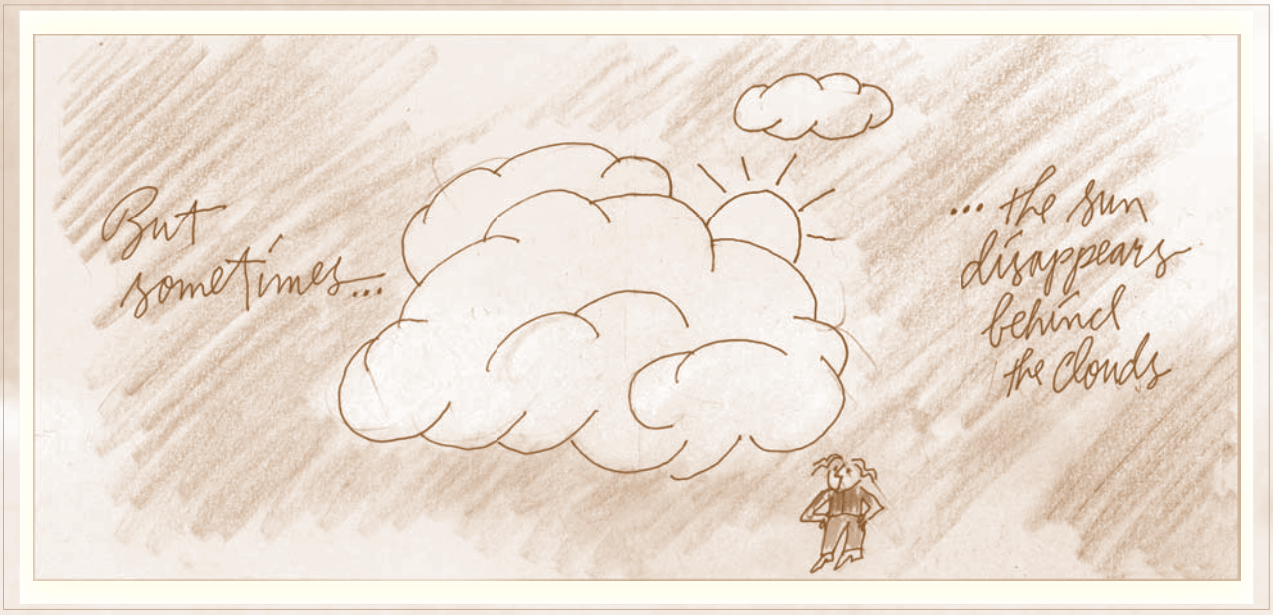
Mapping the Journey

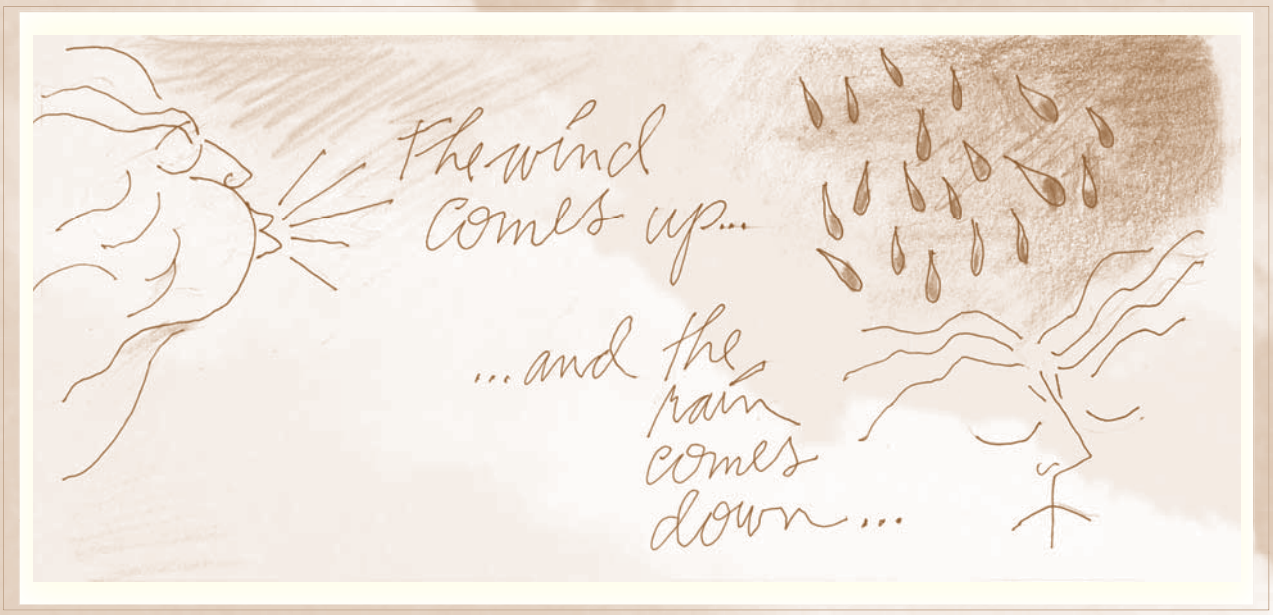
By far the most difficult project we have ever undertaken, our most recent, Mapping the Journey, took two years to complete. Traci, Sam and I were not made for such marathons. But we were delighted with the final product.

Inspired by a wonderful book which Traci gave me entitled *You Are Here: Personal Geographies and other Maps of the Imagination* by Katharine Harmon, Mapping the Journey is a collection of visual representations of various people's personal life journeys. Patients, healthcare providers, artists, photographers and Healing Environment staff members all tried their hand at it. You should too.

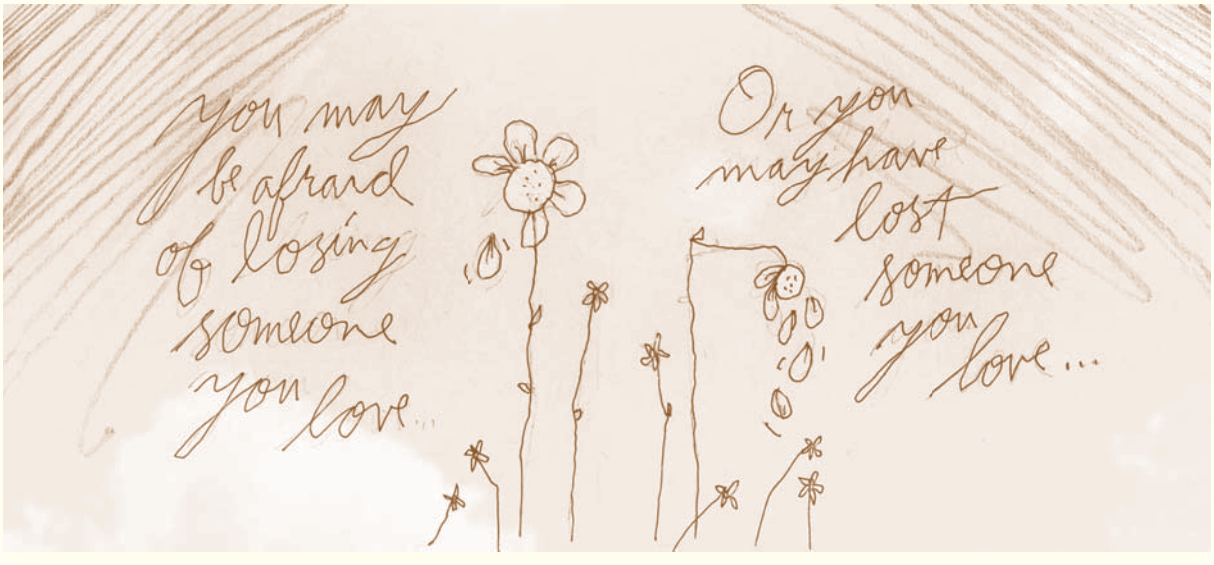
love
is
forever
by
kate
Strasburg

life is
good...


But sometimes...
... the sun disappears behind the clouds

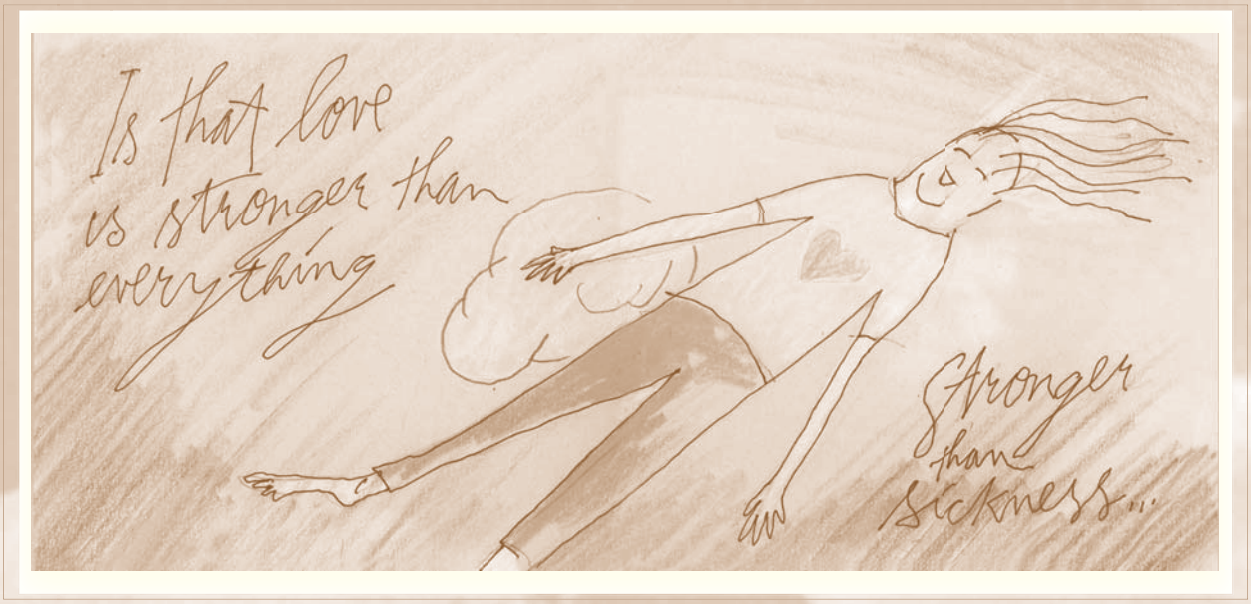

The wind comes up...
... and the rain comes down...

And life becomes hard...
And you become sad...


You may be afraid of losing someone you love...
Or you may have lost someone you love...

Or you may be sick yourself...
and afraid...

What you need to remember
then and always...


Is that love
is stronger than
everything
Stronger
than
sickness...

Stronger
even than
death...
Once
you
have
been
loved...