OPEN SPACES
SACRED PLACES™
STORIES OF HOW NATURE HEALS AND UNIFIES

TOM STONER AND CAROLYN RAPP
WITH A FOREWORD BY G. MARTÍN MOELLER, JR.
All proceeds from the sale of this book will go to creating open spaces sacred places

The mission of the TKF Foundation is to provide the opportunity for a deeper human experience by supporting the creation of public green spaces that offers a temporary place of sanctuary, encourages reflection, provides solace, and engenders peace.

© 2008 by TKF Foundation

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from TKF Foundation.

Published by TKF Foundation
430 Severn Avenue, Suite 216
Annapolis, MD 21403
www.tkffdn.org
www.openspaceassacredplaces.org

Distributed by Chelsea Green Publishing
P.O. Box 428
85 N. Main Street, Suite 120
White River Junction, VT 05001
www.chelseagreen.com

Designed by Alex Castro, Castro/Arts, Baltimore

Printed by R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company

ISSN: 978-0-9815656-0-6

Publisher’s Cataloging-in-Publication Data
(Prepared by The Donohue Group, Inc.)

Stoner, Tom (Tom H.)
Open spaces sacred places®: stories of how nature heals and unifies /
by Tom Stoner and Carolyn Rapp, with a foreword by G. Martin Mueller, Jr.
p. : ill. : cm.
ISBN: 978-0-9815656-0-6
I. Rapp, Carolyn Fress. II. Mueller, Gerald Martin. III. Title.
SB454.3.S25 S76 2008
712 2008004150

Open Spaces, Sacred Places® is a registered trademark of TKF Foundation.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

MARY F. WYATT

OUR FOUNDING FIRESOUL

WHO NURTURED THESE STORIES AND THESE
OPEN SPACES SACRED PLACES
INTO CREATION.
CONTENTS

FOREWORD
by G. Martin Moeller Jr. Senior Vice President and Curator,
National Building Museum, Washington, D.C. 9

PORTAL TO DISCOVERY 15
1 INSPIRATION POINT 23
2 AMAZING PORT STREET SACRED COMMONS 35
3 MOUNT WASHINGTON ARBORETUM 51
4 GARDEN OF PEACE AND REMEMBRANCE 65
5 WHITMAN-WALKER HEALING GARDEN 81
6 MEDITATION GARDEN AT THE WESTERN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION 95
7 HEALING GARDEN AT KERNAN HOSPITAL 111
8 KIDS ON THE HILL SCULPTURE GARDEN 123
9 GARDEN OF LITTLE ANGELS 135
10 GARDEN AT CEDAR HILL 147
11 JOSEPH BEUYS TREE PARTNERSHIP: 7000 OAKS 159
12 THANKSGIVING PLACE 171
PATH TO THE FUTURE 185
Like so many inner city neighborhoods in America, the area that surrounds Reservoir Hill in Baltimore City is deeply challenged. Despite many caring and dedicated residents, there are abandoned lots and abandoned homes, an active drug trade, a struggling school, no supermarket, and no economic infrastructure—leaving residents without essential resources.

Growing up in a lower income neighborhood can have a devastating impact on youth. These children face challenges that many people could never even imagine. They are forced to take on responsibilities that are beyond their capacity to fulfill. Their childhood is too quickly sacrificed, replaced by the struggle to survive. When youth and creativity are robbed, something very valuable gets lost along the way: confidence, goals for the future, and hope that one’s life could make a difference. Many young people, under this pressure, can become a source of crime in their own communities.

Rebecca Yenawine moved to Reservoir Hill in 1991 to study art at a nearby college, but the native New Yorker quickly learned that the true classroom was in her backyard. She focused her attention on the kids, determined to

It’s not rocket science to get the kids on your side. You have to make them feel a part of the community rather than apart from the community.

— Rebecca Yenawine, Fire soul
use the arts to help them combat stereotypes and discouragement. Using her skills as an artist and listener, she helped to bring out the creativity and insights of the young people. Through art, they grappled with disruptive forces and transformed the issues into something uplifting and hopeful. As a result, the kids began to see the possibility of a better community for themselves. With Rebecca’s guidance, the kids created a very special sculpture garden that is now an oasis in the neighborhood. Through nurturing the young people’s creativity, Rebecca helped them become part of the solution. As new neighbors moved in and became invested in the community, they saw the role that young people could have in revitalization, and they in turn were inspired.

Rebecca had no map, no institutional plan in place to help her accomplish this vision. She had only her belief that art and imagination could transform a disconnected community into a unified one, through the creation of a laboratory for creative expression. She and the kids turned an abandoned lot into a place for all to experience and enjoy. Woven in with the Kids on the Hill sculpture park is a small garden area with a bench and a journal, so that nature also plays a part in the healing. This project brings the best part of human nature together with nature itself. Rebecca then convinced the City of Baltimore to partner with her organization. This valuable step gave an added sense of permanence and empowerment to the budding enterprise. Adults and youth together have contributed to a sculpture park that depicts their dreams for a better life and a better neighborhood. Together they converted a place of turmoil into a space of safety and sacredness.

Today, Rebecca and her co-director, Mark Carter, have a plan for making neighborhood changes happen. They use the idea of “art for social change” as their motto and have set in motion another valuable legacy: they have inspired young teachers to join in, like sculptor Jesse Reid. Rebecca’s combination of creative and entrepreneurial skills along with the dedication of her neighbors and the young people themselves ensure that the Kids on the Hill sculpture garden can remain a viable and valuable part of this community for years to come.

—T.S.
wonderful and brighten the whole block. The girls were proud of their art, and when the younger children walked by, they felt proud of their older friends. Instead of seeing graffiti and the negative statement it sometimes makes, adults saw how creative and talented the neighborhood teens were. This was the first time I was able to see how art had the possibility for changing a group of young people—and possibly even a community.

At this point, my projects with the kids had outgrown my house, so we found another location to meet. I started raising money for an after-school program, which became Kids on the Hill Inc. in 1997. I think that after-school program often conjures up a vision of a lot of kids chasing a basketball around a gymnasium. I’m not saying that isn’t a valuable thing to do, but our program is different. It’s an art and media program that focuses on social justice. We provide young people with higher level skill-building opportunities so that they can become media-makers, artists, good citizens, and competent leaders.

In 1999, with funding from the TKF Foundation, we started to create a sculpture garden, which was a project of our first summer camp. The site where the garden now stands was a vacant park that was nothing more than a big piece of concrete with broken glass scattered across it. It had become an open-air drug market, with neighbors complaining about the drug activity and about people getting drunk and being noisy late at night.

We began our garden project by focusing on the theme of castles. Every child knows that castles are where kings, queens, princes, and princesses live, and they are powerful people. So we set out to create a castle in our neighborhood where youth could be powerful. At the same time, we gave them a way to address issues of power and class. We asked the children, “If you were king or queen, what would you change about your world to make it better?” The answers to that question are embedded in the sculptures in the garden:

“I if were king for a day, I would make a type of skin lotion so everyone would have the same skin color, so no one could be racist.”

“I if were queen, I would give all the poor people money and toys.”

Every project we do has three parts. First, we study. The children learned about castles, they looked at pictures, and they figured out what imagery appealed to them. The second phase was for them to design the imagery they wanted in the garden. For example, they wanted a tower, so each child drew a picture of a tower, and the group voted on the one they liked best. Then, finally, the children brought their images into reality. They created three weoked metal towers, a mosaic throne, a mosaic table and benches for games and picnics, numerous images, and a wall of tiles that surrounds the garden. The words of the children are included as well, expressing their visions for a better world.

The towers are big—one is nine feet tall—so we’re talking about an ambitious project! We had artists working with and teaching the children all summer long—a mosaic artist, a casting artist, and a welding artist. Learning how to use power tools was a very empowering experience for the
young people, especially for the girls. They used circular saws, jigsaws, plasma cutters, and welding electric grinders. To see one of the “girliest” girls wearing a welding hat and feeling comfortable with getting dirty was exciting for me. The project built self-confidence in every one of the children who worked on it.

But it empowered them in another way too. Their art is visible in their community, and therefore they are visible. Every time they walk by the garden, they get to say, “I made that. That’s my piece right there. That was my idea.” They also get to see other people, both youth and adults, interact with their art, and that enhances their sense of self. The garden gives young people a voice in their neighborhood, a way to be seen and heard, a way to have ownership in their community.

You can see that ownership in the way they take care of the garden. Often, when adults think of what young people can do for their community, they ask them to come out for a cleanup day. In my experience, that’s not really what young people enjoy. But I’ve noticed that when they pick up trash in their sculpture garden, it’s a very different experience. It doesn’t feel to them like they are being used to pick up somebody else’s junk. It feels more like they are cleaning up their own rooms, and they get to enjoy and appreciate their artwork. There’s no dignity in picking up someone else’s trash, but keeping the sculpture garden clean has a lot of dignity, because it’s theirs.

Another thing that has strengthened their connection to each other, and therefore strengthened the community, is the teamwork they’ve learned from creating the sculpture garden together. Whether it’s drawing designs, learning to use a tape measure, marking, cutting, or welding, we break the tasks down as much as possible, so that each person knows what he or she is contributing to the group and how that group is contributing to the final goal. It is always a group effort, a collaboration, to get a project created and finished.

In the eight years since we began the sculpture garden—and it remains an ongoing project—its young creators have witnessed the impact that their work has had on the community, each year we have a festival in the park. One of the neighbors is our grill master. We count on him to bring out his giant grill and cook up hamburgers and hot dogs. Another neighbor is a musician, and he puts up his huge speakers so that people can hear his music all over the neighborhood. I truly feel transported when we have our summer festivals, as if I’m in a different world.

On summer evenings, people bring folding chairs and sit and watch movies shown on a screen hung from the stage we designed in a corner of the park. There is also a fountain. Playing in it provides the children endless entertainment. In another part of the park, there is a lovely bench from TFK, which people use to read or meditate. All around it are flowers, many of them
planted by a neighbor. She said her yard just wasn’t big enough for all the flowers she wanted to grow, and she asked if she could extend her garden to the park. Now she and the Kids on the Hill children tend the flowers together.

Not all of the activities are planned. Recently, the neighborhood had a cleanup day and afterward, people spontaneously came to the park to grill and picnic and talk together. The sculpture garden—the vision and the work of the neighborhood children—serves as the center of what has become an important and vibrant community gathering place. This place that was once a drug hangout is now used by neighbors of all ages, and lots of people, young and old, consider themselves guardians of the space.

I always learn as much from young people as they do from me, and one of the things I’ve learned from creating this sculpture garden with them is how powerful it is for a community to have a youth space. In communities that are newer and more middle class, they plan for children to have play space. I think it’s absolutely vital to provide that same thing in older communities as well. Young people have an incredible amount to contribute to community issues.

If they aren’t engaged in some way in the life of the community, they won’t be on the community’s side—the side of making a positive difference. It’s not rocket science to get the kids on your side, and it’s not rocket science to figure out what leads them to be vandals. You have to make them feel a part of the community rather than apart from the community.

There’s no end of ideas that we can come up with to add to the sculpture garden. Each year, we have initiated a new project to involve more children. So far, more than a hundred children have contributed to the garden. This is vital to creating an ongoing sense of ownership that will make younger children want to be the guardians of the art of those who came before them. But as the years pass, we also have to focus on repairing and maintaining what we already have, so that people continue to respect it. At this point, we must balance the two.

Fortunately, Kids on the Hill continues to attract other staff members like Jesse Reid, who are as passionately dedicated to sculpture instruction and the garden as I am. Ironically, Jesse found his way to Kids on the Hill through an internship with the Maryland Institute College of Art. He was earning his master’s degree in their Art and Community Arts program—the kind of program I wanted sixteen years ago but wasn’t available—and the sculpture garden attracted him. What a blessing he’s been! Watching Jesse’s commitment to the garden grow and deepen over the year we’ve worked together has taught me something very important about sacred places: No one person owns them. You put the torch into the hands of the next Firesoul and pass it on.