

THE HEALING POND

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Little did we suspect the great spring of riches we'd receive when our Activity Director proposed to construct an outdoor water garden to utilize a weed- infested corner of our building. What began as simply an eye-pleasing solution to remedy a problem area over time became a fountain of therapeutic treasures.

Labor was provided by staff and local garden club volunteers. The noise of gardeners measuring and beginning to dig raised a curious crowd of the more mobile residents. Word spread, and soon the site became a magnet, drawing residents from all corners of the building. A captivated group of "supervisors" formed to watch and critique the operation. They began to gather regularly right after the morning meal to await each day's work. This group remained stalwart in their overseeing duties. As others would come and go, they dutifully reported updates on the progress made to new arrivals.

Through the weeks of excavation, much conversation and socialization ensued. Memories about digging, shovels, and gardening flowed like a stream. Residents talked about growing up on farms, crops, chores, and hard times. This led to talk of labor, sweat, and WPA projects. It was memory sharing that evoked rich conversations with never-ending associations. Lifetimes of the individuals were different yet interlocked like pieces of a wonderful quilt being stitched before us.

Stone by stone, shovel by shovel, the depth and expanse of the pond was finally reached. The rocks of the waterfall were positioned. A black plastic liner was ceremoniously laid over the cavern and weighted down. Everyone waited for the first trickle of water.

We discovered the next stage of therapy, the soothing sounds of moving water. Its hypnotic and calming properties worked its magic on the crowd. Residents within ear range seemed to breathe deeply and visibly relax, adrift on the sweet memories of long, lazy days on a riverbank fishing, Sunday picnics at the lake, swimming holes, wading pools, and gentle pattering of warm springtime rains washing the aches and pains of lives long lived.

With water comes new life. Aquatic plants softened the bed for the brightly colored koi that were given a new home. Soon, a pair of neighborhood frogs moved in. A sudden jump and plop into the water would stir the crowd and be excitedly reported to each passerby. Male and female mallard ducks were welcomed with open arms. Their antics delighted one and all.

Our residents eagerly adopted the pond-dwelling families into their own. Astute observers all, they knew the unique characteristics and habits of each member. Many began to look beyond their own situations and focus on the determination and successes of other creatures adapting to life in a new environment, not unlike their own stories.

The cold weather approached, and the frogs snuggled into their winter sleep. The mallards flew away for a warmer locale. The pond froze over. All seemed quiet as the snow fell. But with the fish still under the ice, there was much speculation about whether or not they could survive. Failing eyes strained daily for signs of life. A constant debate ensued. The camps were divided, those who believed the fish would emerge victorious and those who had doubts and considered it cruel they were victims of the ice. Residents gathered to discuss these issues each day. Reminiscing over the bitter cold seasons of their past, ice fishing, sledding, and keeping warm fueled the interest that stayed alive over the long months of winter.

One day, the spring thaw arrived. Much to everyone's relief and excitement, the koi had made it through the winter. The frogs reemerged searching for insects. The ducks returned to entertain everyone with their antics. Residents drew around, gathered by common purpose. The miracle of life, the cycle of healing, continued, therapy only nature could provide. CF