

Local Artist Makes ‘Something Magical Happen’

Printed in the Westport News – February 1993 by Rita Papazian

The square form has a very strong and powerful meaning for painter Janet Slom of Westport. It represents a symbol to communicate Shambhala – a Tibetan philosophy embracing the total human goodness in mankind. Ms. Slom has embraced the Tibetan philosophy in her art and her heart. Last year, she joined with two other women in founding The Shambhala Project, a holiday hospice for people terminally ill with cancer, AIDS and other illnesses.

The women include Heather Swartz of West Hartford and Ingeborg Zeltner, of Bern, Switzerland. They initiated the program last September when they brought two groups of eight terminally ill guests to guesthouse overlooking Provincetown Bay for two-week holidays, complete with all the necessary support services. Next month, the women will return to Provincetown with two more groups of the terminally ill.

The Shambhala Projects has a very personal meaning for Ms. Slom who grew up on a farm in South Africa. On the farm, her father shared the Tibetan teachings with believers from far and wide. The Shambhala Project was created to capture this growing spirit and share its emotional healing with others. This year, the women hope to bring three successive groups to the guesthouse and to secure funding to support the hospice.

Monies raised enable the guests to have the support services of nurses, a doctor on call, and to have pocket money to enjoy recreational activities. Ms. Slom, an accomplished artist, donates a percentage of proceeds from the sales of her paintings to the project.

Ms. Slom leads guests in creative projects such as painting. In addition, they cook, play the piano, and even celebrate birthdays. Ms. Slom describes The Shambhala Project as a time when “something magical happen.” The women recalled one of their guests who remain vividly in their minds. His name was Bill, who has since passed away; but, during his stay at Provincetown last year, he said, “If I have to die, then heaven should be just like this.”

Sister Beth Fischer, director of Project Mercy, a group residence for people with AIDS, says the Shambhala Project offers nurturing support, acceptance, dignity and hope as well. Like flowers in a garden, the guests at the Holiday Hospice ask very little, yet, while they are there, “They bloom and bloom and bloom.”