

OUTSIDE  
THE  
SQUARE

MEMORY  
OF A GARDEN

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DR. ANN POULSEN

# MEMORY OF A GARDEN

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A TRIBUTE TO THE JAPANESE  
GARDEN AND PEACE BELL

*Gifted to Waitakere by Sister City Kakogawa*

DR. ANN POULSEN

Dedicated to the Mayors  
Thank you for your service to our community  
- *Arohanui*

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#### Memory of a Garden

Here, in this place,  
we have a distinctive way of introducing ourselves:

*Ko Hikurangi taku maunga  
No Hea te aroha, te mihi nei, no Waitakere,  
E hapai, pikaukau ana matou te Kaupapa  
Hei manaaki te oranga whenua, oranga moana  
Ara te kaitiakitanga mo te iwi hoki  
Tihei Mauri ora*

*Hikurangi is my mountain  
Where there is love, it is here  
in this greeting from Waitakere  
Who raise and carry the message  
To look after the wellbeing of the land and the sea  
Thus as the guardian for the people  
Behold; there is life*

#### Memory of a Garden

To know who we are, we locate ourselves in the landscape around us; we are part of it and it shapes us in ways both subtle and profound. We are also the protectors of the land as it is both our inheritance and our future. Its wellbeing is our wellbeing.

Why insert another landscape, an entirely different landscape from another country, here, in this place? To gift an exotic garden from another culture, to defamiliarize what we know so well by condensing another country's philosophical and aesthetic traditions into a model composition, is to offer an alternative way of experiencing nature which might also let us think more deeply about our place in the world.

In 2006 the Japanese city of Kakogawa gave the residents of West Auckland such a garden as part of the re-development of a disused industrial site in central Henderson. The first major building project in Henderson in 20 years, it was undertaken by Waitakere Council as a catalyst for the revitalization and growth of this fading commercial area.

Designed to incorporate an integrated transport hub and a new eco building for council, this project demonstrated faith in a sustainable future while the name, Waitakere Central Civic Centre, expressed wanting to make a place for the community to come together, to take pride in its identity.

As a Sister City of Waitakere since 1992, Kakogawa had paid attention to its development as an eco-city at the forefront of environmentally sensitive practices, adopting some of these practices in its own approach to environmental management. By sharing aspirations and exchanging knowledge, by journeying together, the political alliance of two cities grew into a collegial relationship, tempering formality with an easy rapport and warmth.

Learning from each other, being changed by each other, these pivotal experiences are expressed in the Kakogawa garden with plants and rocks and water, the elements which brought the two cities closer together. And its position, alongside the new heart of the community, outside the window of the mayoral office, aligns this partnership with the project's radical optimism for the future of Henderson as the centre of opportunity for locals and business.

That was 2006. In 2010 Waitakere City was amalgamated into the new supercity of Auckland, and in this merging the Waitakere vision of creating an eco-city was relinquished. Without an institution there can be no institutional memory. But the Kakogawa garden remains as a marker, as a reminder and as a place of recollection.

No longer used as civic grounds for commemorations and celebrations, the garden has become isolated, neglected. Secluded by its location nestled between railway tracks and the rear of what is now a municipal office building, disconnected from the main walkways, it is an inconspicuous destination unlikely to be happened upon by chance.

The route to the garden still exists, but like a tramper in the bush, you need to be observant to find it. A setting out point is marked at the entrance to the administration buildings by a monumental pouwhenua telling the history of the area, carved by Sunnah Thompson and John Collins of Te Kawerau a Maki, local iwi and mana whenua of Waitakere. Carved from a single trunk of kauri, the pouwhenua soars up six meters to support the metal canopy above, story as structure, the past ever present to guide us.

Commemorating the stranding of a pod of 12 Bull sperm whales at Karekare Beach, 25th November 2003, this mighty kauri pillar dwarfs us, overawes us, like the leviathan, with the immensity of nature. Death is part of this immensity and the perishing of the whales is memorialized as a tragic mystery, as part of the essential unknowability of nature which is the paradox deep inside the kernel of the idea of an eco-city.

Turning away from the stairs, towards Great North Road, the footpath curves around the base of the building and following this curve opens up a new vista punctuated by another striking pillar, an obelisk by Waitakere Arts Laureate John Edgar. Standing about twice the height of a person, 'Transformer' is a slender column of grey basalt striated with bands of red and cream sandstone, resembling the geological layers of a core sample. Stone has been transformed into data, like the stripes of a bar code, and this data exceeds the human span, exceeds our senses and our memory. Edgar has intensified time, compressing the centuries into stone, creating a representation of the history of the land.

The obelisk form has its own history, beginning with its widespread use as an architectural object and public monument in ancient cultures as diverse as Egyptian, Byzantine, Pre-Columbian, and Assyrian. Looted as prizes of war, they were transported to Europe and later enjoyed a revival following the Enlightenment. 'Transformer' refers too to these predecessors, references cultural exchange and revival, overlaying natural history with cultural history as if suggesting we can only see the land through the lens of culture.

Expressing the relationship between people and land from a purely European perspective. 'Transformer' acts as a boundary marker for the Kakogawa garden. The garden itself remains hidden from view, not fully revealed until standing next to the obelisk. But here it is still seen at a distance, indistinct and somewhat nondescript, the entrance beyond the ceremonious space of a forecourt. 'Transformer' establishes the centre line of this space, an avenue between rows of Japan's national flower, the sakura or flowering cherry tree.

Traditionally, their exquisitely brief blossoming in Spring is celebrated with viewing parties, the whole nation taking time to enjoy reverie in nature, mark the changing of the seasons and meditate on the cycle of life. These trees more than decorate the forecourt and mark out the physical approach to the garden, they establish a philosophical approach, a frame of mind for experiencing the garden. Walking along this allée is a preparation, a transition from the commonplace thinking of everyday life to a meditative appreciation of the artificial landscape ahead.

And, perhaps, these trees also have other associations unique to the shared memories of the Sister Cities- Waitakere Mayor Bob Harvey often said, "*It is always Spring in council because we are always planting for the future*".

The transition from forecourt to garden happens underfoot with the change from regular, even-surfaced grey pavers to a poured concrete slab inset with pale chips of stone. Marking the threshold to the garden is a large, rough slab of rock. Linking outside to bounded inner space as it passes through the narrow gated opening, it is a place to pause, to feel the change in footing and think about what lies ahead.

Beside the entrance a sign explains the features and provenance of the garden, its design inspired by Japanese viewing gardens of the fifteenth century, places for contemplation. This leads into a reminder to the viewer to use all their senses to appreciate its simplicity and beauty, along with this poem:

*I can see the stones  
On the bottom fluctuate  
Through the clear water*

SHILKI (1867-1902)

What does it mean for appearances to fluctuate, for solid stones to ripple like waves, for clear water to distort what is in front of our eyes? If this is a metaphor, it is making a distinction between sight and insight, and likening the experience of viewing the garden to entering an inner world, to cleansing the doors of perception so that, in the words of another poet, William Blake, *“everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite.”*

The purpose of this garden is to change our perceptions, to help us see, hear, touch more clearly, to help us live more fully in the present, to become mindful, in order to become insightful.

The purpose of the garden is to change us through experiencing the presence of nature. This change is not a gentle therapy utilizing the restorative powers of nature to revive our laden hearts and complaining brains, although it may achieve this as well. We are being invited to prepare for revelation, for seeing ourselves in a new light.

Elegant in its precise simplicity, the pavilion is mostly floor, with gracefully spaced wooden posts supporting bare rafters, the skeleton of a roof. It is an enclosure that is open to the elements, providing not protection but a frame which defines the garden in pictorial terms. This frame is four times wider than it is high, proportions which compose a panorama, a visual device associated with representing landscapes as dramatic spectacles.

The scene it composes is of waterways and a pond surrounded by layers of greenery and rocks, the layers increasing in height, grading up to a highpoint at the rear. Enclosing the garden are tall hedges and full-grown trees, concealing the world outside, directing the eye to scan, scrutinize and dwell on this interior. To gradually appreciate the complex variations of leaves, stalks, seed heads and mosses, each a subtly different green; to ponder the slabs of rock with coloured striations like watermarks; to watch the water ripple and run; to gaze up at the hillock in the background and wonder how high it might be, how far away.

The wide-angle view of a panorama acts to distort scale, compressing vast spaces into a single continuous image of uniform perspective, organized so that the viewer is at the centre. This distortion is what produces the immersive experience, the illusion that the viewer is surrounded by the view, able to see more and with a greater fidelity. Here this illusion has another purpose as well. Without any geometrical shapes or lines in the garden, without any of the usual visual cues of perspective, depth of field is conveyed solely by the layering of foliage and rocks, their changing size and height. This manipulation of scale is being used to make the modest seem immense. What is a confined garden can also be seen as an expansive landscape, as space itself, a representation of the world.

From this establishing scene which takes in the whole vista, the garden unfolds in a series of vignettes. Paths lead to other carefully constructed vantage points, each with a specific view of the garden to reveal, requiring the visitor to enter, to walk through the changing landscape attentively, to enjoy the intimacy of being in this foreign scene, to exchange being an observer for becoming a participant, to discover how moving through the garden enlarges the space, and how the physical experience of movement creates a visceral connection to the surroundings.

Stepping of the pavilion platform onto a path of paving stones is to leave behind stability and sure-footedness. Each irregular stone has an uneven surface, so every step must be carefully taken in order to maintain balance. This challenge is increased by the random gaps between stones, their unexpected shifts in direction, with climbing up onto boulders an even greater test of agility. There are higher stakes involved here when awkwardly stumbling as each stone is an island amidst fragile mosses, ornamental grasses and, most alarming, water - the water may not be deep, but the bottom has rows of pebble spines pointing up like giant knuckles ready to inflict a bruising.

Walking in this garden is not a relaxing stroll, it is cautiously choreographed hops and jumps interspersed with precarious wobbles and recapturing of balance. It is energetic, playful exploration sharpened by just the slightest frisson of fear. The body is awakened, challenged and experienced as lively, robust, resilient. Which prompts the realization how rare this is, how leadened the body is by surrendering to elevator and lift, by wandering supermarket aisles and shopping mall halls, by the brief passages between car and door.

The serenity of contemplating the garden, being still and gazing at the diorama of nature, is replaced by being in nature and the realization that the body is part of, is continuous with nature - that indeed everything is infinite.

So while the journey starts from the viewing pavilion, circumnavigation of the garden finishes at an adjoining platform which extends out over the pond. Here there is no protective rail at the water's edge, no enclosing columns, above us only sky. We have found our place in the natural order. We are not the centre of all things; there is no centre, instead there is the infinite space of connection.

Water is at the beginning and end of our exploration, and also a vital spirit traversing through this space with us. Bubbling up out of the ground a few meters away, frolicking over pebbled ruts, filling and falling from a granite basin, sinking under paving and then, finally, emerging into the garden, a sinuous stream shimmies over stones, enlivening and irrigating the landscape.

The haiku at the gate poeticizes water, draws attention to it as a trope expressing the essence of the garden. This image of water as a way of looking at nature, transparent yet transformative, carries within it a reference to the significance of water in the Sister Cities relationship, a reminder of the metaphorical flowing of people and knowledge between Waitakere and Kakogawa arising from a shared concern for protecting water, for restoring environmental harmony with the natural water cycle.

In 2002 Waitakere City launched Project Twin Streams, an urban sustainability project to reinstate streams at the heart of Waitakere's local communities, restoring the mauri or life force of Waitakere waterways using a community development framework.

The kaupapa guiding this project was:  
*Working together for healthy streams and strong communities -  
creating a sustainable future*

Recognizing water as essential to life in both the natural and social world, looking beyond stream restoration to community sustainability, Project Twin Streams instigated a holistic approach to water management which strengthened the inter-connectedness of social, cultural, spiritual, economic and environmental wellbeing. Creative ways of learning, respect for heritage, valuing and celebrating different world views, these became the drivers of community processes for engaging residents with the challenges in their particular catchment areas.

Reconnecting residents with their surroundings and with their communities enabled radical change, both in the environment and in people's hopes for the future, with it seeming possible to have strong local economies evolving from embracing new skills and approaches to development, based on the restoration of biodiversity and the innovative management of natural resources. This is what was symbolized, what was pledged, in the building of Waitakere Central.

Best Practice became a community method as school children learnt how to measure water quality, as migrants with little English shared their cultures through creative projects sited on the riverbanks, as the disadvantaged and disabled joined work teams, as everyone learnt they too could make a valuable contribution to their city. Inclusion was no longer an ideal, it was a catalytic force transforming Waitakere.

But, of course, environmental problems are global because we all breathe the same air, rely on the same water, are all ravaged by the adversities of climate change. Sharing information and experience, promoting a transferable model of Best Practice, became part of Waitakere's mission. And so it is with noticeable pride that Bob Harvey recounts a recent visit to Kakogawa in his mayoral report to council of June 2004, writing that, *"I'm pleased to report that they are very happy with what have learnt from us....a simple plan for a modern city environment...Waitakere's fingerprints are there for all to see"*. (p.5)

The name Waitakere can be interpreted as cascading waters, and in this garden we are surrounded by them. In their gift to us Kakogawa has celebrated Waitakere by creating a garden which visibly demonstrates the mauri, the life force surging through the city, revitalizing it and civilizing it, making it a place for the enjoyment and betterment of its citizenry.

The garden was officially opened in March 2007 without any pomp and ceremony, ostentation being out of character for Waitakere, for the visiting dignitaries from Kakogawa, for the garden itself. Instead there was the gravitas and gracefulness of ritual, of the powhiri and the tea ceremony, a sharing of spiritual protocols to bless this site. There was the placing of a stone from the river at Tangiwai to commemorate the dead, to connect us to our past, to connect these waters to all the waters of Aotearoa New Zealand. And then the climax, the flourish of Taiko drumming, hard, fast, dramatically choreographed, filling the space of the garden and the space of the body with resounding energy, lifting us up and sending us back to our daily routines enlivened.

And yet this was not the completion of the garden. In 2009 there was an addition, another gift from Kakogawa, another chapter in the story of the shared vision uniting these two Sister Cities.

The year 2010 was to have marked the 20th anniversary of the founding of the city of Waitakere. Discussions with Kakogawa on a suitable gift to celebrate this milestone had begun following a visit by Harvey to the Engyo-ji Temple on Mt Shosha, where sequences from *The Last Samurai* were filmed. After climbing up the mountain for just over an hour, which pilgrims do to purify the body and spirit, Harvey entered the temple compound through the Niomon Gate, where an ancient bronze bell is rung in honour of peace. Profoundly moved by this pilgrimage, Harvey raised the idea of a Peace Bell for Waitakere.

This suggestion was enthusiastically accepted by Kakogawa and an 800 year old foundry commissioned to cast a matching bronze bell, a gift symbolizing the shared commitment to peace, a gift acknowledging the leadership role of Waitakere as a Peace City. This was to be a gift with a voice that rallied people - ringing the bell would become a message of peace reverberating throughout the community.

While the seeds of the Peace City had been sown decades earlier by former mayor Tim Shadbolt who had declared the area, then known as Waitemata, nuclear-free, it was Harvey who understood how peace in its broadest sense was essential to an eco-city, how the principles of participation, empathy, advocacy, community and empowerment enabled a sustainable society.

A highly visible and vocal champion for peace, Harvey instigated community campaigns such as promoting homes without violence and neighbours who support each other. Also active in the global peace movement, he was honoured in 1998 with both the Prix

UNESCO Villes pour la paix for his services to peace and the United Nations Mayors for Peace award. Later, in Nagasaki in 2009, he was voted Vice President of Mayors for Peace, an international organization with more than 3,000 members dedicated to achieving global nuclear disarmament by 2020.

Kakogawa recognized the vital role of peace in Waitakere, its role in the forming of Te Taumata Runanga, the Pacific Island Advisory Board, Trees for Babies, protecting the Waitakere Ranges, the new libraries, the commissions for local artists; and Kakogawa recognized the role of peace in the Sister City relationship.

The gift of this Peace Bell to their Sister City so inspired the people of Kakogawa that they nominated their Mayor, Mr. Kinosta, for a Royal honour, which he duly received.

So in November 2009 a Peace Bell arrived, a magnificent bronze bell measuring 95 by 49cms, weighing 105kg, inscribed with the dedication:

#### THE PEACE BELL

*This peace bell was presented to the city of Waitakere, New Zealand to commemorate the 20th anniversary by the city of Kakogawa, Japan in November 2009.*

At the unveiling, we all lined up, about 100 of us, to each ring the bell for peace, listening to its deep, sonorous tone ripple through the garden. It was a solemn, poignant ceremony because we knew the city of Waitakere would soon disappear, would never reach its 20th anniversary.

Memory of a Garden

In his acceptance speech Harvey said,

*“This bell is a message of peace...We will ring it on special occasions such as national days of celebration and to mark the loss of special people. I’m going to ask the council to get a set of protocols that will remain when the City ceases to exist so the bell does not sit silent. It needs to ring out across this city in the years ahead.”* (Mayoral Report 16th December 2009, pp6-7)

Sadly, this has not happened. And, as a safeguard against vandalism, the striker for the bell has been removed - the bell hangs in perpetual silence. The story of the Garden and Peace Bell is beginning to fade from memory, our history as a community is being lost.

How do we approach the future without knowing the lessons of the past?

Emerson wrote, *“Our life is not so much threatened as our perceptions”*. Each local moment of memory holds importance for us all and here, in lieu of written story, we have a garden of memory, a place to remember who we are, what we have achieved, what we might yet achieve.

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