

Renewed Hope

PHILANTHROPIST **AUDREY GRUSS** TAKES SOLACE IN HER PEACEFUL GLADE, REPLETE WITH LILIES-OF-THE-VALLEY IN HONOR OF HER LATE MOTHER.

BY JAMEE GREGORY PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSH LEHRER

When April showers bring May flowers, I find my friend Audrey Gruss sitting on a rustic bench in her garden, reading poetry and thinking of her late mother, Hope. Twelve years ago, Gruss and her husband, Martin, bought a six-acre property in Southampton studded with 100-year-old trees. They sought the counsel of Edwina von Gal (962 Springs Fireplace Road, East Hampton, 907-9040; azuroearthproject.org), who designed a Connecticut garden for them 25 years ago. She created a series of rooms, including a woodland garden, which contains the peaceful, 180-by-27-foot glade that

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Audrey Gruss, perched on her favorite bench in her Southampton garden.

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The vast sweep of lily-of-the-valley defines "Hope's Glade," leading to a rustic bench that's the perfect place to relax and reflect. CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Colorful wisteria covers the porch pergola, signaling spring; the delicate blooms of lily-of-the-valley appear only for two weeks in May; allium blooms open first in the Gruss's cutting garden.



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means something special to Gruss, who began the Hope for Depression Research Foundation in 2006. "I wanted to create Hope's Glade," Gruss says. "It is always the first thing that comes alive in my garden. Each year, when the shoots emerge, I feel that my mother is with me.

"I was thinking of my mother all the time," adds Gruss. "She suffered from depression since she was in her 30s. But back then, 50 years ago, no one would

talk about it. She was misdiagnosed, as no one would discuss mental illness because of the emotional stigma attached to it."

Gruss recalls how it was painful for her father, sisters, and her to watch the matriarch of their family go through trials of medications until she ultimately passed away in 2005. "Her doctors told me that since the development of Prozac, which half of depression patients do not respond to, in 1987, there had been

virtually no new medications for depression," Gruss explains. "I decided to do everything in my power, with the help of my husband, to create a foundation with a dual mission: to raise awareness about the issue and to fund the most advanced research to find the causes for depression, create new treatments, refine the medical diagnosis, and to prevent depression."

In just nine short years, the Hope for Depression

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This doughnut-shaped sculpture works perfectly in the garden, echoing the pool-house window and providing a focal point for people entering the fern-walk gate. INSET: Audrey Gruss creating the delicate arrangements of lily-of-the-valley she sends to her friends every spring.



The six-acre property, studded with specimen trees, was designed as a woodland garden by Edwina von Gal.

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Research Foundation has become the most advanced organization of its kind in the country, with a task force of seven leading neuroscientists, “each a pioneer, working together to share research,” says Gruss. “When I think of this, my thoughts always return to my mother and her love of lilies-of-the-valley, her favorite fragrance. I always associate her with the scent. When Edwina and I spoke of what to plant under the existing maple allee, I suggested lilies-of-the-valley.”

Gruss shares glories of the glade with friends, creating thoughtful arrangements tied with special tags and spring-green ribbons, dropping them off or placing them in tiny bags for her guests to take home after her dinner parties. The unique fragrance perfumes the air and signals the start of the summer season.

“I like to share all the good things my mother means to me,” Gruss offers. “With each blooming, hope, renewal, and continued commitment remind me of the positive difference we can make, the strides we can take in [combating] such suffering. New research, based on hope, renews my feeling that our foundation has taken root and will make a difference.”

When Gruss sits on her bench, surrounded by white lilies-of-the-valley, she feels peaceful and secure. “My best ideas come to me here,” she says. “All the noise and excitement of the Hamptons fades away. It is enveloping. Thoughts of my family and friends and the things that really matter take over. I can meditate, feeling close to my mother.”

The blooms may last for only two weeks, but the positive benefits of this serene glen will last for years to come, making a difference in the lives of others. hopefordepression.org **H**

