Reestablishing the Connection Between Healing and the Landscape

Stephanie M. Penrod
In finding out things we did not know, we learn.
In encountering and entering into worlds we did not make, we discover.
In the learning and discovery, we uncover in ourselves things we did not know were there.
We find out we can be more than we are.

Anonymous
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Chapter One

Introduction
Introduction

While watching the events of the Oklahoma City Bombing unfold over the course of several weeks, I became very emotionally involved in this tragedy.

Having an interest in healing and the landscape, and after hearing on National Public Radio that there was a possibility of a design competition, I felt compelled to use my training in landscape architecture and my background in psychology to take this event and turn it into an opportunity to design a memorial.

The following is a documentation of my journey to a solution.
Chapter Two

A Time Sequence
Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
April 19, 1995  
9:01 A.M.
Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building before bombing
Site History

The Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building was opened in October of 1977 under the presidency of Jimmy Carter. The nine-story glass and granite building was named for Alfred P. Murrah, a distinguished circuit court judge from the state of Oklahoma.

The building was designed by the architectural firm of Shaw Associates/Locke, Wright, Foster, and was built to reenergize the economy of Oklahoma City.

Owned and operated by the United States General Services Administration the building housed 16 government agencies, a day care center, a 604 car parking garage, and employed more than 500 people.

Built using the most modern of technologies of the time, the building, because of Oklahoma Citys' location in tornado alley, was said to withstand anything . . . well, almost anything.
Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
April 19, 1995
9:02 A. M.
Tragedy in the Heartland of America

Wednesday morning, April 19, 1995, started off like any other Wednesday in Oklahoma City. It was a cool and cloudy day, temperatures were predicted in the seventies, as people scurried off to work, and to get their children to daycare and school.

For the occupants of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building it was business as usual. The children in the America's Kids daycare center located on the second floor of the Murrah Building were just sitting down to breakfast.

A little before 9:00 A. M. a large Ryder rental truck pulled up to the dock in front of the General Services Administration Office. The truck was not an unusual sight since deliveries were always being made to this location.

What was unusual was that the truck was loaded with a deadly cargo of fertilizer and diesel fuel, two tons to be exact.

At 9:02 A. M. the truck was detonated, and the rest is history.
Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
May 23, 1995
7:02 A. M.
The site as it appears today
Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
December 14, 1995
3:30 P. M.
Chapter Three

Problem Statement
The Problem Statement

The landscape design process is a systemic approach to the planning and design of a landscape. To start, a situation or problem is given as a focus for the process.

The site where once stood the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building has been the topic of discussion with residents and city officials. Last summer the National Endowment for the Arts hosted a charrette of planners, architects and artists to consider the future of the bombing site and the area immediately surrounding it. Public sentiment leaned strongly toward the need to build a memorial.

In this case, the problem is to develop a lasting memorial in honor of the victims, and rescuers which will allow for the healing . . . the closure . . . yet, dignify the remembrance of this tragic event..

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Eric's Dream
by Eric Baker

I dreamed that all the babies and people that died in the explosion came down from heaven to help fix the buildings and find all the victims and survivors. They helped people's hearts so they could build the buildings the way they were before the bomb. Then they brought down roses on their wings so they could be planted all around in honor of the victims, the Firemen, the rescue workers and all the friends that helped.

They stayed until it was done. And as they left the babies told the people to never let this happen again.

Eric Charles Baker
age 10
Norman, Oklahoma

---

LETTER FROM A YOUNG POET
The bomb's effect on children often expressed itself in art; the poem above comes from Eric Charles Baker, ten, of Norman, Oklahoma.
Chapter Four

Goals and Objectives
Goals and Objectives

When looking at another catastrophic event such as the A-Bomb dropped on Hiroshima, the linkage between Hiroshima and Oklahoma City show the same characteristics: the disasters were sudden and unexpected, bodies are mutilated in ghastly ways; large numbers of people were killed, especially children; and recovering the remains takes a long time.

In my research, there are two psychiatrists that I found to be of particular interest. The first psychiatrist, Bonnie L. Green, in a Washington Post article, says that the recovery is especially hard on families because they can't get closure and get on with their lives.

The second, Catherine Sanders, a well-known psychiatrist on grieving writes:

Sudden death presents more symptoms of shock and consequent somatic problems than death that is anticipated. The mind has no time to prepare a rational explanation nor is there any opportunity to process feelings. The shock that is experienced reverberates through a survivor, causing an extreme assault on his or her physical state. As a result, the process of grief is slowed. (Sanders 99).

It was with these two articles in mind and upon hearing on National Public Radio that there was a possibility of a design competition that I chose to set three very simple goals.

1. To create a memorial park that will serve as a catharsis for people's emotions, as well as serve a historical purpose.

2. To design the space so it becomes not only a memorial but an icon representing this tragic event.

3. To submit the work to a national design competition for the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building Memorial.
Chapter Five

The Clients and Users
The Client

The client in this project was a given, but who are they and what did they want to see in the memorial? Part of my research methodology was to go to Oklahoma City and find out more about these people.

As it turned out the client is the Murrah Building Task Force in conjunction with the General Services Administration, a division of the Federal Government. The Task Force is a very broad based coalition which reflects all perspectives related to the bombing.

The Task Force is representative of all economic levels, ethnic backgrounds, racial dominations, geographical locations and levels of involvement in the aftermath of the bombing, including representatives of the victims, families, survivors and rescue teams.

The "want list" gathered from a survey that was put together by the Task Force, allowed me to use their wishes to set design criteria for the memorial.

The Users

The users would encompass a host of people, not only the families of the victims, survivors, the rescue and relief teams, but would include people across the State of Oklahoma, the nation, and the world whose hearts were impacted by the bombing.

The Want List

1.) A blend of the old and new to create a "New Normalcy".
2.) The Water Resources and Athenian Restaurant buildings to remain.
3.) Elm tree in Journal Records Building lot to remain.
4.) Spaces that allow people to interact with family and friends for social support.
5.) Spaces that use the element of water and plant material.
6.) Seating area for at least 100 people for future memorial services.
7.) They never want people to forget what happened there.
8.) To include the names of the victims and survivors.
9.) An interpretive center/museum to educate people about the event, and to store memorabilia.
10.) Show the bombing's violence.
11.) An area that honors those who helped.
Chapter Six

Design Hierarchy and Design Criteria
The Design Hierarchy

The next question was who was more important in the design hierarchy. By establishing a user hierarchy diagram (Fig.1), enabled me to see who belonged where in the scheme of things.

The diagram not only shows who is most important but shows the interaction between each group.

![User Hierarchy Diagram](image)

In my opinion, all that were involved in this tragedy are very important. My findings point to the bombing survivors as most important in the hierarchy. They carry not only the physical scars of the bombing, but emotional scars as well.

Next in the design hierarchy would be the rescuers. Their emotional scarring goes very deep, but they also have a deep connection to the survivors, families of the victims, and the victims.

Third, would be the survivors of the victims that have had to deal with the sudden death of their loved ones and were not given the opportunity to say good-bye.

The victims would come next, but because they cannot be heard, with the help of their survivors and as the designer we must speak on their behalf. This allows the others in the hierarchy to deal with their own scarring.

Finally, the general public, who suffered along with those immediately affected by the tragedy.

The Design Criteria

1. Places that allow a person to restore their sense of self.
2. Places that use nature to speed the healing process.
3. Spaces that evoke memories.
4. Spaces that allow people to interact with family and friends for social support.
5. Enclosed, connected "rooms" that provide safe havens.
6. Spaces using the elements of water and extensive plantings.
7. A functional and practical space.
Chapter Seven

Assumptions
The Assumptions

1. That there will be ample funding available to take the project to fruition.
2. The plaza will be restored to its original condition.
3. Zoning has been established to the surrounding area in order to protect the Memorial site.
4. The General Services Administration will donate the Murrah Federal Building block to Oklahoma City.
5. That the Water Resources Building and the Athenian Restaurant (two destroyed buildings on the site) will be structurally reinforced to maintain their current appearance.
6. Proposed interior remodeling of Journal Records Building Museum will be done according to this designers’ specifications.
7. That the site will be irrigated.
8. Construction documents will be completed by the designer and under the supervision of a local landscape architect.
9. That surviving elm tree on the site will survive. Assumption is that if the tree dies it will be replaced by another elm tree that resembles the original tree or is a clone of the original tree.
10. The site will become a part of the National Park system, and will have appropriate management and maintenance.
11. The empty lots that surround the site will be turned into parking areas to accommodate visitors to the site.
Chapter Eight

The Site
Site Context

Oklahoma "The Sooner State"
- Oklahoma, from the Choctaw Indian word meaning "Red Maa"
- Most of state is a great, rolling plain, sloping gently from Northwest to Southeast
- 24% of state's total area is forested, principally on region bordering Missouri & Arkansas
- Warm dry climate, Annual snowfall 2-25"
- Population: 3.2 million, or 1.3% of the U.S. population

Oklahoma City Demographics:
- Located in Oklahoma County
- Population 450,000
- Average Age 32.4
- Racial Distribution
  - 75% White
  - 25% African American & Native American

Site
- Located in Oklahoma City
- Bounded on the North by NW 6th St., on the South by NW4th St., on the West by Harvey, and on the East by Robinson
- Encompasses two city blocks
- Situated on the North perimeter of the Downtown Area
Site Inventory

There are three distinct areas that make up the total site.

1. The Plaza area on the south side of the building.
2. The area where the building stood.
3. The block on the north side of the site.

The utilities (see Fig. 2) that were disrupted after the explosion have all been restored and are operational. Dimensions of the blocks are 300' x 400'. The total site consists of approximately 96,000 sq. ft. of buildable area.

The Plaza area sustained the least amount of damage. Most of the damaged incurred is from paver damage in the process of being repaired. The Plaza area also contains alot of plant material that doesn't seem to be injured or suffering. The 604 car underground parking garage is now fully operational and open to Federal employees only. The children's playground is still in good shape.

The Murrah Building site, has a flat topography then slopes very slightly to the west. The soil consists of Port Loam Silt. The area is now sodded, and completely empty. Fifth Street which used to run in front of the Murrah Building has now been closed off, allowing the block north of the site to be included in memorial site.

The block on the north side of the Murrah site contains three buildings. The Water Resources Building and the Athenian Restaurant sustained irreparable damage. The Journal Records Building sustained internal and external damage, but is structurally fine. The old parking lot is strewn with rubble. This lot is bi-level, the upper lot sits approximately 3' higher than the lower lot.
The Site Analysis

Using site analysis I was able to address the site issues such as:

1. NW 5th Street is now closed
2. Three damaged buildings in the north lot
3. Views
4. Open space
5. Location of the elm tree
6. Pedestrian transition between the and the site
7. Location of Ground Zero
8. What to do about the site of the Murrah Building
9. Parking
10. Protective zoning
11. How the plaza would be reintegrated with the site
View Analysis 1

View looking south to downtown area, shows existing wall and obscured view of plaza area. Children's playground area located top left. Electrical transformers located at bottom left.
View Analysis 2

View looking east to public parking lot. More damaged buildings in the background.

15' wall up to plaza obscures view into plaza.
View Analysis 3

View from Robinson looking northwest into Journal Record’s lot. Elm Tree is visible, banner that reads "Strength, Courage, Compassion, Love United, Proud to be Oklahomans." Bottom right message painted by Team 5 reads "Team 5, 4/19/95, we search for the truth. We seek justice. The courts require it. The Victims cry for it. And God demands it!"
View Analysis 4

View from Robinson looking west. Shows destruction of the Athenian Restaurant and the Water Resources Building.
View Analysis 5

View from center of site looking west. Old Post Office Building. More destruction.
Chapter Nine

Project Guidelines
Project Guidelines

As a result of the site analysis the following project guidelines were set.

1. Pedestrian circulation - address movement of pedestrians between the plaza and the memorial site.
2. Street - Fifth Street which was a main thoroughfare in front of the Murrah Building has now been closed to traffic and needs to be incorporated into the memorial space.
3. The block north of the Murrah Building site - has now been designated as part of the memorial site and also needs to be incorporated into the memorial space.
4. Vegetation - tree in the parking lot directly in front of the Murrah Building site must stay.
5. Plant palette - used in and around the Murrah Building and in the Plaza area will be used throughout the memorial site.
6. Parking - there is no need for additional parking on the site.
7. Existing buildings on the site - the Water Resources Building, Athenian Restaurant, Journal Records Building, and the Murrah Building Plaza are to be kept intact.
8. Seating or gathering area - to accommodate approximately 100 people for future memorial events and possibly church services.
9. Ground Zero - this is where the design will start to emanate from.
10. Hardscape/greenspace ratio - approximately 1/3 of site will be hardscape, 2/3 designated as greenspace.
11. Ambiance - first impression of the memorial is key, establish what the designer wants people to feel when they go to the memorial.
12. Education - address what is to be learned from the memorial and the event.
13. Special spaces - for people who were directly affected by the bombing to grieve and heal.
14. Site design - design the space so it becomes not only a memorial but an icon representing the event.
Chapter Ten

The Concepts
The Concepts

**Concept 1** (Victims Focus Design) - Reflects - What if all the buildings on the lot north of the site were removed?

**Advantages:**
- Creates large open public open space
- Allows for a more "park-like" setting
- Makes Victims Memorial a center focal point

**Disadvantages:**
- No transition between site and existing plaza
- Very small museum space
- Doesn't provide a solid site boundary
- Mystery element does not exist to draw visitors into the site
Concept 2 (Perimeter Design) - Reflects - What if the Journal Records Building is added back to the site, and the victims memorial is placed up against the wall?

Advantages:
- Incorporates public open space with site
- Allows for a larger, more structured museum
- Has a more defined site boundary

Disadvantages:
- Difficult to distinguish specific areas
- No transition between plaza and site
- Not enough of a reminder of the past
Concept 3 (New Normal Design) - What if all the buildings on the north are left in place, leaving the Water Resources Building and the Athenian Restaurant as visual reminders of the bombing (without them the site itself looks as if nothing happened there)? What if the victims memorial was placed where the Murrah Building once stood, and Ground Zero is used as a water element.

Advantages:
- Provides a transition between the plaza and site
- Better integration of entire site
- Creates a good balance of the old and the new
- Site boundaries are well defined
- Allows for a metaphorical re-creation of the event
- Provides for a better pedestrian traffic flow
- Element of mystery now exists in the site
Summary of Concept Selection

Concept 3 was chosen was chosen for its ability to fit the clients "want list", the design criteria, and the project guidelines that I had set.

This concept provides a smaller public greenspace at the corner of Harvey and NW 6th Avenue, allowed the survivors garden to be placed around the surviving elm tree, the Murrah Building to be metaphorically recreated, the Water Resources and Athenian buildings to become visual reminders of the bombing, Ground Zero now has the opportunity to become a design element instead of what it is, allows the rescuers garden and the victims family garden to flank the recreated Murrah Building, Journal Records Building now becomes a museum, and allows the plaza area to be integrated into the memorial.
Chapter Eleven

The Solution
The Meaning

Before I started with the design I wanted to devise a meaning, something that would serve as the theme for the master plan.

Through much soul searching I came up with this meaning:

Even though tragedy is painful for the ones directly affected by it, it is good for the soul, it helps the rest of us believe in life.

Just as the bomb sent waves of destruction through the site and its effects were felt around the world, the world in return sent waves of sympathy, love, care and help to heal and return Oklahoma City to a "New Normal."

The Theme

This set up an implosion/explosion theme for the master plan. Radiating rings on the ground plane would symbolize the destructive powers of the explosion. While imploding rings symbolizing the healing, would overtake the explosion rings above grade with the use of water and plant material.
Chapter Twelve

The Master Plan
The Master Plan

By combining the concept and the meaning I was able to create this solution to the problem.

The purpose that drove this master plan was:
"To allow all people affected by this tragedy to go back into the space and find healing, closure and a New Normal".

Some general observations about the design.
The site has been designed with all ADA issues of accessibility in mind.
The site is comprised of 4 major components which work together to form the whole.

Component 1: Ground Zero Fountain, Rescuers Garden, and Victims Memorial.
Component 2: Survivors Garden, Water Resources Building and Athenian Restaurant.
Component 3: Murrah Terraced Park and the Journal Records Building.
Component 4: Victims Family Garden
Chapter Thirteen

Component One

Ground Zero Fountain, Victims Memorial, Rescuers Garden
Ground Zero Fountain

This is where the design emanates from. The fountain is designed to be participatory in nature. The fountain base is situated in the crater that was left by the bomb. The base is 30' in diameter, and approximately 3' in depth.

It was important for the designer not to ignore what took place in this spot. The fountains' placement and the design meets with the clients 'Want List' of never letting people forget what happened here, and the design criteria of creating spaces that evoke memories, and extensive use of water elements.

The fountain proper consists of jets of water that shoot from the outside lip of the fountain and collide with jets of water that shoot from the inside of the fountain. This collision produces a violent effect that mimics the water main directly under the fountain when it erupted after the bombing.

The fountain is connected to the other site elements by the Stream of Tears, which represents the tears that stained the face of the site on April 19, 1995.

The patterned area of the plan, directly surrounding the fountain, is made up of sandblasted, finished granite, possibly recycled from the Murrah Building. Large chunks of carnelian granite, also from the building, will be placed in this area to serve as informal seating. More rings radiate throughout the site, representing the bombs' waves of destruction.
Victims Memorial

The Victims Memorial is located directly south of the Ground Zero Fountain. This structure is a metaphorical recreated framework of the Murrah Building and appears as a apparition on the site, because many of the visitors expect to see the building there.

The irregular paver pattern within the framework of the building footprint is a recreation of the blast pattern that was left on the building by the explosion. The grassy area of the building is comprised of grass-crete, which allows wheelchairs to enter the space.

Hollow tubes, or pipes, which make a sound as the wind blows over them are placed within the framework of the building and mark the place in the air where the victims passed away. Each tube is marked with each victim's name.

The exception to this are the five tubes located at the west end of the site, which mark the five people that lost their lives outside of the Murrah Building.

Located against the wall on the site are two ramps at different levels, and are linked to create an observation platform. Stairs lead from the center of the platform into the framework of the building. The ramps allow physically challenged visitors to experience the site as they enter from the plaza.

The observation platform will serve as a speakers platform for future memorial services. Inset on the wall directly behind the observation deck is the "Great Seal" of Oklahoma, which was formerly located in the plaza marking the front entrance to the Murrah Building.

The Victims Memorial is not connected to the Ground Zero Fountain by the Stream of Tears, because their tears are no longer seen.
The Rescuers Garden

This garden contains the state flags of all the states that sent rescue and relief teams to help. The flags are situated in front of a retaining wall seat across from the Slab Fountain.

The Slab Fountain located on the perimeter of the Murrah Building footprint, contains a granite replica of the slab from the building that was painted by the rescuers it reads:

"Bless the children + the innocent".

The grassy area of the garden contains plantings of lilac that will be in bloom at approximately the anniversary of the bombing.

Again, the Stream of Tears flows from the Slab Fountain back into the Ground Zero Fountain.
Chapter Fourteen

Component Two
Survivors Garden, Water Resources and Athenian Buildings
The Survivors Garden

This garden is located directly north of the Ground Zero Fountain.

The elm tree that has survived an explosion and implosion is located in this area. The elm tree becomes an icon for the bombing survivors.

The large green concentric circles that radiate from the elm tree, symbolizes the strength of the survivors to go back into the Murrah Building space, and also symbolizes the implosion of love and caring from the world.

The smaller gray circles are pavered walkways through the garden. These walkways were designed not to direct visitors through the space. This allows visitors to cross to other areas at their own discretion.

The two reflecting pools are approximately 18" in height. This gives visitors the opportunity to dangle their feet in the water, or wheelchair bound visitors to touch the water. The pools also contain sculptures of children playing in the water. Other sculptures of children are disbursed throughout the garden.

The Stream of Tears flows from these pools back into the Ground Zero Fountain.

Fruitless crabapple trees stand as silent sentries to the elm tree and symbolize the people that have stood by the survivors and helped them in their struggle. Each tree is planted above the ground plane in its own separate mound.
The Waters Resources Building and
Athenian Restaurant

These buildings are located directly west of the Survivors Garden. They have been left in their existing state to serve as visual reminders of the tragedy.

The two buildings are surrounded by a small water canal approximately 10' in width, and 2' in depth, and a sidewalk. Water flows from under the sidewalk into the canal creating white noise. This allows visitors to walk completely around both buildings. The canal keeps visitors from getting an up close and personal view of the buildings.

This area is also connected to the Ground Zero Fountain by the Stream of Tears, located in the bottom right hand corner of the picture.

The walkway on the east side of the Athenian Restaurant allows visitors to enter into the site from the south side of the Journal Records Building Museum.

The turf berm located east of the walkway adds a vertical element to the space, and creates a mystery element to draw visitors around to the Survivors Garden side of the berm.
Chapter Fifteen

Component Three

Murrah Terraced Park and the Journal Records Building
The Murrah Terraced Park

This park is located directly north of the Water Resources and Athenian Buildings. Small retaining walls separate each terrace. The terraces are out of grasscrete to allow physically challenged visitors to enjoy a contemplative visit to the memorial.

Large Texas Red Oaks provide shade. The park takes on the same configuration as the Survivors Garden. This garden symbolizes that outpouring of the world to help Oklahoma City return to a "New Normal".
The Journal Records Building Museum

The Journal Records Building Museum is located directly north of the Survivors Garden. This building received external and internal damage, but structurally is sound. This building will contain all of the memorabilia that has been gathering on the fence that surrounds the site. The museum will also contain mementos of the victims, donated to the museum by family members. This is were the administrative and restroom facilities for the site will be located. The entrance onto the site is located on the south side of the building.
Chapter Sixteen

Component Four
The Victims Family Garden
The Victim Family Garden

This area is located directly to the south of the Water Resources Building.
The plaza area slopes gently to the west and allows physically challenged visitors easy access to the site from Harvey.
An outer retaining wall that surrounds the garden gradually slopes as it reaches the fountain area. This creates an embracing quality, that invites visitors into the space.
The garden steps up two steps to the fountain. A ramp is incorporated into the step configuration.
Smaller alcoves approximately 15’ in diameter surround the fountain. These alcoves also serve as seating areas for visitors and symbolize the closing of the circle.
The fountain contains a raised water clock sculpture that signifies that time heals all wounds. It will be a commissioned piece, to be created by a local artisan.
The Stream of Tears flows from the Water Clock Fountain through the framework of the Murrah Building and back into the Ground Zero Fountain.
The garden is planted with rhododendron and lilac shrubs, and Possum Haw trees. These will also bloom around the anniversary of the bombing.
Chapter Seventeen

The Conclusion
The Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with a reading from Dr. Catherine Sanders, in a way this summarizes what I tried to accomplish with this project. She writes:

"Closing the circle is synonymous with closing the wound; it signifies the true meaning of healing. Scar tissue will remain, probably permanently, but the open wound is closing. Many primitive societies have rituals and ceremonies that symbolize the new unit. Families close the circle by joining hands, sharing a ritual meal, or burning sacrificial foliage that creates dense smoke to represent the departing spirit. In each case, the purpose is to separate the living from the dead. The survivors are then released to continue their lives with a new commitment".


Photo Credits:

Page 12, 16, 18: Kathy Wyche, General Services Administration, April 1995.

All plan drawings, and diagrams by:

Stephanie Penrod, Ball State University, Landscape Architecture, Class of 1996.
The sunlight didn’t know what it was until it hit the wall.

Louis Kahn