

DIEZ: Project has taken on a life of its own for Sisters woman

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the museum and made sure she'd really won. "They said it was real!" The museum launched last summer, with her seeds on display.

"The museum looks really neat — it's a small place in downtown Copenhagen," said Diez. "Simple, clean lines, very tastefully done. Someday we'll get to go."

Comfort Seeds began with the tiniest impetus: a tomato seed, dried out and clinging to one of her father's old shirts. He had passed away from cancer ten years before, and Diez was ironing the shirts, intending to make a quilt. The stuck seed caught her eye. She planted it and, astonishingly, grew a healthy tomato plant in her laundry room.

She saved seeds from the plant, and gave some away

to people who were grieving. Now Diez replants the seeds every year — together with her students. Many of the kids she works with are in behavior-intervention programs and have experienced trauma and grief in their young lives.

"These kids are all in their own processes of healing," she said. "There's something so magical about their little hands planting the seeds. Two years ago, every single plant came up. Like 50 seeds — and every plant germinated. There's something behind that."

Diez doesn't consider herself an artist. A generator of ideas, she enjoys collaborating with Severin, whose colorful, earthy illustrations give Diez's concepts new dimension. Together they are working on a book and have launched a website, comfortseeds.com.

On the website, visitors of all ages are invited to share memories of loved ones passed. People can download a beautiful page to color and decorate in their memory. Grief stories and resources sit alongside friendly paintings.

"We want this website to be a place where multi-generations can come and submit stuff. Grief, beauty, healing, art, and poetry," said Diez.

Punchy, garden-bright tomatoes and cool nighttime owls are among the site's recurring illustrations. Some are available as merchandise,



ILLUSTRATION BY MANDA SEVERIN

Katie Diez combines art and healing with the Comfort Seeds project, which recently won an international prize.

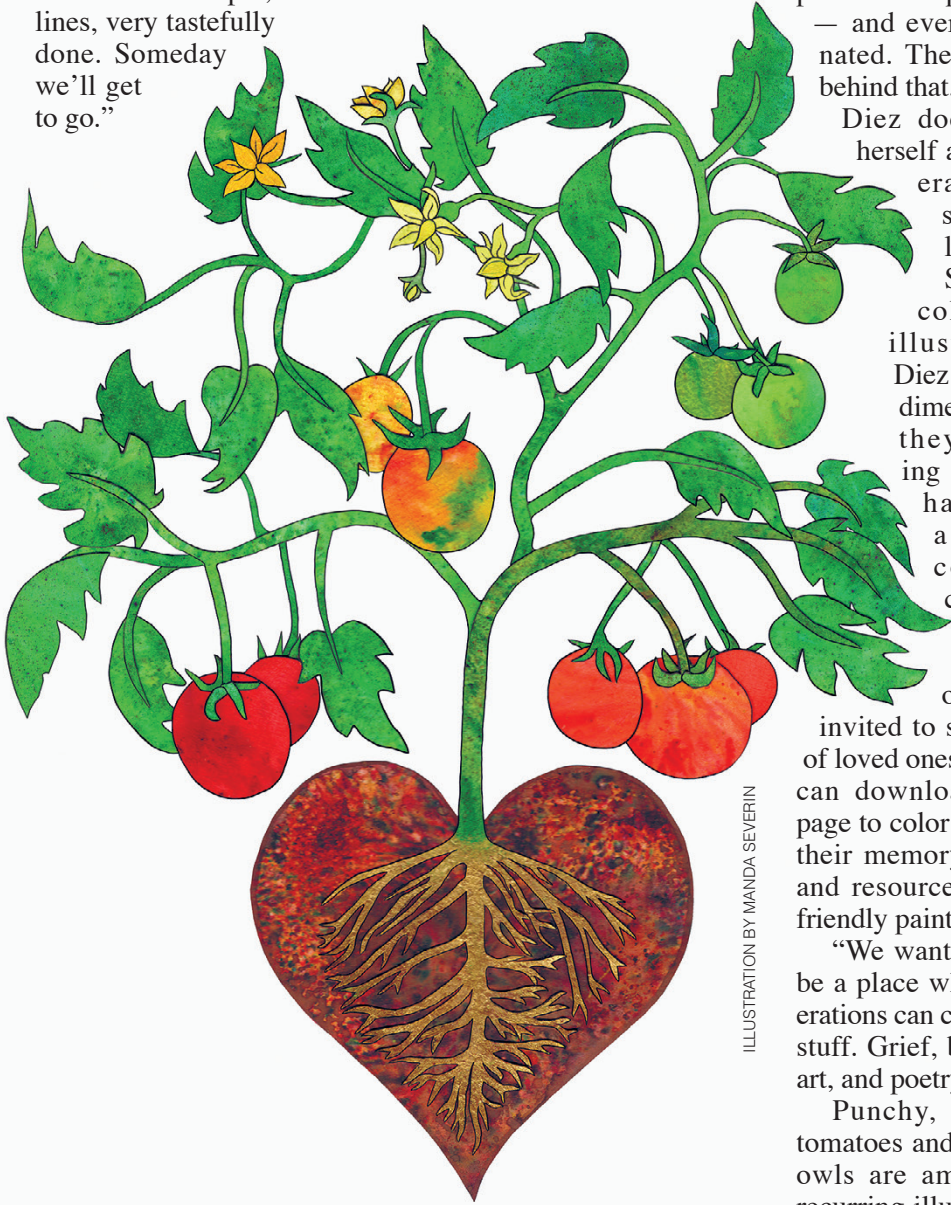


ILLUSTRATION BY MANDA SEVERIN

such as shower curtains and coin purses.

Seed requests come from people who have lost loved ones themselves, and from their friends and families. Diez wanted to make something that would be appropriate to give a grieving person: a little story with a packet of seeds, something meaningful a friend could easily slip into a greeting card.

"When my dad died I was relatively young, and people just didn't know what to do," Diez said. "They were afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, so they didn't do anything."

Sometimes people are shy about asking for the seeds, which do not cost money. Diez noted that accepting an item that is free of charge benefits the person giving. "By receiving," she said, "you're giving a gift as well."

Diez is very observant and takes time to be in the present. "Through this whole process, it's been about noticing and paying attention to the little things, and being curious,"

Diez said.

She came to hone her powers of observation and appreciation through the practice of mindful meditation. Reading the words of Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh inspired her to take a class on teaching mindfulness for children.

Diez figured she would learn the practice in order help her students. The practice changed her life and outlook, and enhanced her students' experience and education. The practice can be difficult, though. "I still struggle," she said.

Giving away the seeds continues to be rewarding for Diez.

"It's been a wild ride, not anything I expected when I planted the tomato seed!" she exclaimed. "It's taken on a life of its own."

That wild ride connects her to one she loves. Said Diez, "It feels like my dad's behind it."

Read about how Katie Diez copes with grief in "Grief in Tough Times," on page 9.

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