



CONSTRUCTING

# A NEW KAHN

Louis Kahn had more or less completed his designs for Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park when he died in 1974. It finally opened last fall to glowing reviews—but it could easily have been a disaster. Or nothing.  
By Samuel Hughes

**THE** October rain was slanting down by the time the car from Philadelphia crossed the bridge to Roosevelt Island. Bill Whitaker, the curator and collection manager of Penn's Kroiz Gallery and Architectural Archives, was at the wheel. Though the snarly New York traffic hadn't fazed him, he was starting to experience some palpitations now that he had reached the narrow island in the East River.

His destination was Four Freedoms Park, the near-mythical monument to Franklin Delano Roosevelt designed by Louis Kahn Ar'24 Hon'71, the legendary architect and Penn professor. The four-acre memorial was the last project Kahn designed, and the fact that its ribbon-cutting ceremony was just two weeks away was prompting numerous variations on the word *miracle*.

Consider the circumstances: First announced in early 1973, it went through major changes in scope and materials as Kahn's vision adjusted to budgetary realities and his clients' taste. Then in March 1974, shortly before the final schematic designs were approved, Kahn suffered a fatal heart attack in a Penn Station men's room. His debt-strapped Philadelphia office was promptly shuttered, and most of his employees—including some key colleagues—were let go. Mitchell/Giurgola Architects' New York office, run by Kahn's friend Aldo Giurgola, took over the project, but the following year New York City was rocked by an epic financial crisis. Between that and a series of changing political administrations and sympathies, Four Freedoms Park was more or less dead in the East River for more than three decades, its empty site coveted by developers.

Building anything designed by a dead architect is considered a fool's errand. By the time the plans got jump-started seven years ago, the world—and certain codes relevant to architecture—had changed. Kahn was famous for last-minute alterations, and he might well have made some more had he lived. Yet any interpretations of his vision by others were bound to stir powerful passions.

Over the past few years, Whitaker had become deeply involved in the project. Trained as an architect himself, and intimately familiar with Kahn's work (the Kahn Collection forms the keystone of the Architectural Archives and represents the most significant repository of Kahn materials in the world), Whitaker had painstakingly recreated the evolution of Four Freedoms Park. His scholarly detective work—call it forensic architecture—would prove invaluable.

Now, on this rainy October morning, Whitaker suddenly had a sobering realization—that despite having given hundreds of tours of Kahn's buildings over the years, this was the first time he had ever visited one that was brand new. And in just a few hours he would be leading a tour of the memorial for a large contingent of Penn Design alumni and friends—not exactly a lightweight crowd, since many had known Kahn personally, some had studied under him, and all revered him and his work.

The two passengers in Whitaker's car had even deeper connections. One was Harriet Pattison GLA'67, the landscape architect and romantic companion of Kahn who had worked closely with him on the landscape side of the memorial for the last 13 months of his life, only to be let go a few days after his death. The other was their son, Nathaniel Kahn, whose brilliant, poignant film, *My Architect: A Son's Journey*, is widely credited with bringing his father's work to a broad audience—and with rekindling interest in the moribund FDR memorial. In recent years Whitaker had gotten to know both of them well, and the more he learned the more he came to appreciate the vital but unknown role Pattison had played in the memorial's design. She had also given the archives more than 100 drawings and other materials pertaining to the project.

As they walked past the decrepit 1850s smallpox hospital known as the Renwick Ruin and approached the row of copper beeches standing sentinel at the park's entrance, Whitaker could sense Pattison's anxiety. She had been cut off from the project for nearly 40 years, and the one time she had been asked to attend a meeting with the key players two decades ago, her frustrations had spilled out. She was not asked back, and her isolation from the project only grew. By now she was dreading what she might find.

"I think anyone who's been involved in architecture, when you go and visit a building under construction, when it's being finished—and you were a part of it—you get incredibly excited," says Whitaker, whose thick head of brown-gray hair and steady gaze somehow combine to suggest a boyish unflappability. "Because you see all the wonder—and all the flaws."



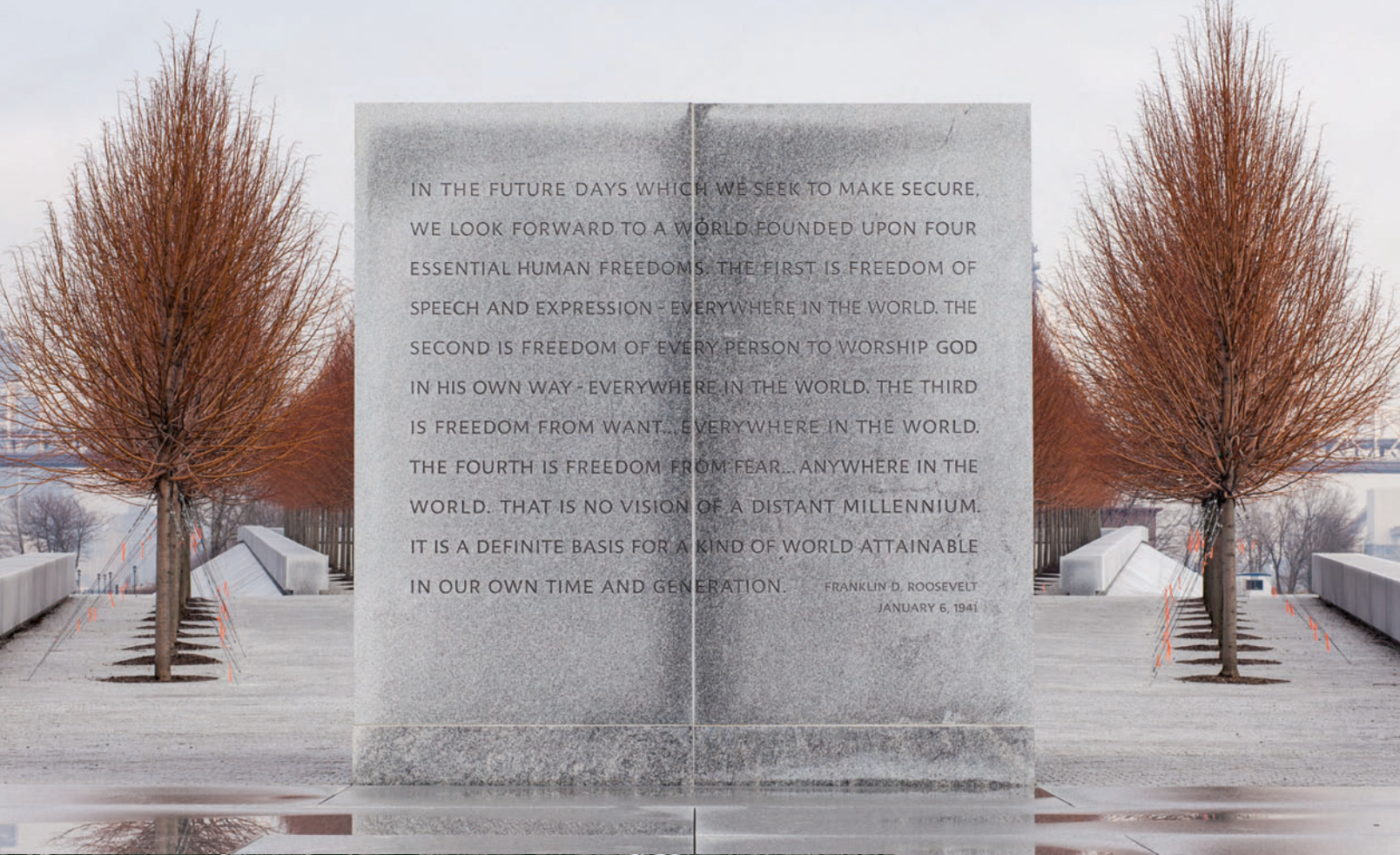
Bill Whitaker: "If you don't use the Kahn Collection for a project like this, why have it in the first place?"

**By the time Four Freedoms Park opened on October 17**—with a ribbon-cutting ceremony presided over by Bill Clinton, Michael Bloomberg, Andrew Cuomo, and Tom Brokaw—few architectural critics were finding flaws. On the contrary; the critical reviews bordered on the ecstatic.

"It gives New York nothing less than a new spiritual heart," wrote Michael Kimmelman in the September 12 *New York Times*. "It creates an exalted, austere public space, at once like the prow of a ship and a retreat for meditation."

"It is the first time a work of posthumous architecture has made me feel elated, not offended, and left me absolutely certain that the right thing had been done," wrote *Vanity Fair* critic Paul Goldberger, after listing some of the sobering challenges that face anyone trying to realize a dead architect's vision. "Kahn designed buildings that were modern and at the same time looked as if they had been there forever," he added. "Build it in 1974, build it in 2012—when it is Louis Kahn it doesn't seem quite to matter as much as it would with some other architect's work."

And yet little things, as well as big, mattered terribly to Kahn—from the precise texture of concrete or stone to the



IN THE FUTURE DAYS WHICH WE SEEK TO MAKE SECURE, WE LOOK FORWARD TO A WORLD FOUNDED UPON FOUR ESSENTIAL HUMAN FREEDOMS - THE FIRST IS FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND EXPRESSION - EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD. THE SECOND IS FREEDOM OF EVERY PERSON TO WORSHIP GOD IN HIS OWN WAY - EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD. THE THIRD IS FREEDOM FROM WANT... EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD. THE FOURTH IS FREEDOM FROM FEAR... ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. THAT IS NO VISION OF A DISTANT MILLENNIUM. IT IS A DEFINITE BASIS FOR A KIND OF WORLD ATTAINABLE IN OUR OWN TIME AND GENERATION.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
JANUARY 6, 1941

(Above) Freedoms amid the lindens.  
(Left) Kahn amid the conifers, 1973.



**I**n a sense, Four Freedoms Park is a memorial to two men. One, of course, is Roosevelt, whose life and political career were still a tremendous source of inspiration for many in the early 1970s.

“Roosevelt was a person who didn’t want monuments,” says former Ambassador William vanden Heuvel, chair of Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park and the driving force behind the project. “He often said that the only monument he wanted was a slab of marble six-foot long and four-foot wide in front of the archives of the United States, with simply his name and dates on it. But I think the

country felt that he was the greatest president in the 20th century. It had always been on my agenda to see if we could build a memorial to him.”

The park is also a memorial of sorts to Kahn, whose reputation as an architect’s architect in his lifetime has since swelled to include many casual but equally ardent admirers.

“For the design team, it was a Kahn project,” says Michael Rubenstein GAR’60 GCP’60 GFA’60, who served as the project architect in 1974-75 following Kahn’s death, and for several

precision of its setting and its relationship to its surroundings. If God is in the details, so, too, is the Devil.

“Kahn’s architecture is hard,” says Gina Pollara, the project’s executive director, who had the formidable challenge of making sure the memorial was built just right and on time while steering it through the shoals of competing interpretations. “I’ve come to appreciate that all these little tiny things add up to a whole. As Beckett says, ‘Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there’s a heap.’”



years as an unofficial consultant when the memorial came back to life. “And for the client it was a Roosevelt project. It’s really fascinating.”

Of course, there was a good deal of overlap between the two. Kahn, a Jewish immigrant from Estonia, had revered Roosevelt for his leadership and his championing of the common man—and for the employment opportunities his New Deal programs had provided. Sue Ann Kahn CW’61 recalls that when she was growing up, she was “continually told how important Roosevelt was for our country, for the world, and for our family.” Most of her father’s early architectural practice was devoted to “uplifting people’s lives through the enlightened design of public housing and community planning,” she adds, and “many of the projects he worked on or spearheaded were funded by Roosevelt’s Public Works Administration, Resettlement Administration, and other arms of the New Deal.”

Though she was only five years old on April 12, 1945, she remembers that evening well. The radio had been brought to the dining room. “Suddenly my mother, my parents, everybody stood up, silent, heads bowed. Dinner was abandoned. I was told that Roosevelt had died.”

Rubenstein was eight that night, and when he heard the news at a restaurant, he said to himself: “We have to build a monument to Roosevelt.”

*I had this thought that a memorial should be a Room and a Garden. That’s all I had ... I just chose it to be the point of departure. The Garden is somehow a personal nature, a personal kind of control of nature, a gathering of nature. And the Room was the beginning of architecture [and] an extension of self.*

—LOUIS KAHN, FROM A LECTURE GIVEN AT THE PRATT INSTITUTE IN 1973.

**N**ew York City is not exactly Big Sky Country, but out in the middle of the East River, the moniker doesn’t seem so far-fetched. When you arrive at Four Freedoms Park and look up from the base of the 100-foot-wide granite stairs, you might find yourself thinking about the proverbial stairway to heaven.

From the top of the stairs, facing south, you look down a long, sweeping, triangular lawn, flanked on either side by allées of little-leaf lindens. Your eye is drawn to a distant ... something. At first, because of the distance and the eye-widening frame of river and sky and skyline (Queens and Brooklyn on one side, lower Manhattan on the other), you might not be able to tell what that something is. But as you approach it, either



across the grass or along the side paths on either side of the allées, and reach the triangular forecourt, you find yourself facing a large granite niche in which sits an oversized, disembodied bronze head of Roosevelt. He looks pensive, even a bit lonely, above the simple inscription: *Franklin Delano Roosevelt 1882 -1945*.

From there you enter the three-sided Room. Open on its south side to a glittering expanse of water and light and a Lower Manhattan skyline that prominently features the United Nations building, its only roof is the sky. There is no railing to block your view—just a ha-ha, a sort of granite trench at the prow of Kahn’s ship that seems to erase the boundary between its granite deck and the river. Behind you now, inscribed on the south-facing side of the statue niche, is an excerpt from Roosevelt’s 1941 “Four Freedoms” speech, whose words give a hint of his ability

**(Above) Monumental stairs, trees, skyline. (Left) The not-so-Brazen Head of FDR greets visitors. (Far left) Mystery and Melancholy of a Room.**

to inspire a nation that was then slogging from Depression to war.

The walls of the 60-foot-square Room are 12 feet tall—yet everything about it is both monumental and somehow ... light. Its massive columnar cubes of granite are each separated by an inch, and the surfaces between them are honed to a reflective sheen, which allows the light to penetrate and dazzle. The faces are wire-sawn, to roughen their texture and capture subtle shades of light (and, in rain and fog, an almost sensuous patina). Clearly, you think, granite was the only medium that Kahn could have chosen for the Room.

Except that it wasn’t. Stone was not his first choice of material. It wasn’t even his second. As with so many things about Four Freedoms Park, there was a remarkable amount of evolution, change, refinement, driven by concerns both budgetary and esthetic. Had he lived longer, who knows what else might have changed?

**S**itting at a long table in the Architectural Archives, Harriet Pattison looks shyly stylish in a brown sweater with a dark, high collar. Beside her are Nathaniel, a portrait of thoughtful intensity as he listens to and occasionally prompts his mother, and Whitaker, who lays out a series of sketches and models and documents before her as we talk. Some of the drawings are Kahn’s, many are hers, and they are kindling memories, most of them warm.

February 20, 1973. She remembers the day well. It was Kahn’s 72nd birthday, and the day he brought the proposal for the memorial into her office.

“I spent five hours on it,” she says, her memory precision-honed by the time cards in the archives. “I remember how Lou came in, pushed aside the stuff that I was working on, and laid out photographs and a site plan, a survey—just laid them out like a stack of cards and told me about it.

“He was very excited,” she adds. “So was I. It was the best possible commission you can have.” Kahn’s proposal for the John F. Kennedy Library in Washington had recently been turned down, she recalls, as had one for another FDR memorial in that city. But this commission “was a great honor,” and the site had tremendous potential—especially for a landscape architect.

“It had to involve landscape,” she says. “It was four acres. So unless you were building the Pentagon or something, you wouldn’t cover it altogether with architecture, although just an architect was hired for the job. So it was, from the beginning, a landscape and architecture thing.”

While the location was “fantastic, both because of exposure and the views,” it also presented some challenges. The long, thin, crocodile snout of land on which it was to be built was basically a “dump,” formed from rock excavated from the subway tunnel beneath the river. In addition to being “featureless and level,” its narrow shape meant that “you couldn’t go anywhere,” she explains. “You could go up, which is the first move that I made, to raise the ground and make a mount and exaggerate it and feather it down to the tip. Which is where Lou located the architecture, at the terminus.”

The first serious design for the Room, which Kahn developed in March and April 1973, was a “monumental fortress,” in Pattison’s words. The walls were 60 feet high, with a “very broad” footprint, roughly 90 feet square. The building material? Brushed stainless steel.

“I called it the Bastion,” she says. “But it was in stainless steel, which is kind of miraculous—and pretty Frank Gehry. And huge—it was a circle inside of a square, which was kind of a typical plan of Lou’s. It was a whole theater of activity, with niches and balconies—just a great gathering place.”

Compared with Kahn’s usual solid austerity, she adds, that design was “gossamer—and very electrifying.”

Pattison describes her early landscape design as “baroque and fantastic,” large in scale and “grandiose.”

**The allées and the lawn help create a meditative sanctuary between Manhattan and Queens.**

“When you arrived, I had a circle of [European] hornbeams and a staircase,” she explains. “I had a sycamore grove, to go with the scale of the Renwick Ruin because that was massive. And for an entrance, I chose cedars of Lebanon, because they’re absolutely monumental and Old World. Ancient world, in fact.”

There was one problem with the Bastion, though. It would have pushed the cost of the project to more than \$6 million. The construction budget was \$2.5 million. So much for stainless steel and 60-foot walls.

Kahn then switched to a scaled-down structure made of concrete, which he had used to brilliant effect at the Kimbell Art Museum in Texas (for which Pattison was the landscape architect) and the Salk Institute in California. He also introduced cantilevers and other new design elements into the Room, which would have been open on two sides.

As with brick and every material he worked with, he had very specific notions about concrete’s personality.

“He was sensitive to the color of concrete—Portland cement from the East Coast versus West Coast,” says Whitaker. “The East Coast stuff was greener. He didn’t like that. It was too cool. He preferred the warmer tone.”

For a visionary dreamer, Kahn was also a “practical architect,” one who wouldn’t compromise but would change, says Nathaniel. “Rather than say, ‘Oh, I can’t build the Bastion for \$6.5 million, so what kind of material could we use to build it for \$2.5 million?’ he’d say, ‘Well, we can’t do my dream. Let me come up with a new dream.’”



“We had to come up with something totally different,” explains Pattison, who wrote a four-page outline around that time describing their vision for what had now become the four sections of the memorial: the Room and the Statue, the Garden, the House of the Garden, and the Grove. All the amenities that had been planned for the Bastion were to be moved to the House—a sort of underground reception space and arcade with an “immense glass façade” and an “intimate, exuberant ‘Rose Garden’” above the arcade. The Grove, which also went through numerous iterations before being scrapped, would have been at the north end of the park, forming an interface with the Renwick Ruin.

The idea “definitely was theater,” she says. “And it was a narrative. I wanted people to come and have a journey through the American continent, through this mystery.” When you arrived at the top of the stairs, you wouldn’t “see *Last Year at Marienbad* or Kaiser Wilhelm on a horse, but you saw a village green that was very American.” And, in the distance, “you just see the head of Roosevelt, the way you’d see him on a coin, the way we knew him—disembodied—on the radio broadcasts.”

William Walton, the chair of the Washington Fine Arts Commission who had originally recommended Kahn for the project, was the one who suggested using the bronze head of FDR created by sculptor Jo Davidson, a contemporary of the president’s, Pattison notes. “But it was Lou’s idea to enlarge it, to play with scale and put it in a niche—welcoming people, welcoming new arrivals. Just an intimate, individual kind of

greeting—but then you wanted to get beyond that to this sort of mystery of what was beyond, which was the Room.”

The realistic sculpture of FDR’s head was not the only idea considered for that space. A model from January 1974 shows an allegorical figure intended to suggest the Four Freedoms in the south side of the sculpture niche.

“Lou originally had an allegorical figure in the Room,” says Pattison. “We both liked [Italian sculptor Giacomo] Manzù’s work, and Lou was going to investigate and see Manzù. But he was definite about keeping any kind of image of Roosevelt outside, so it didn’t become a ritual sanctuary.”

The sense of mystery one feels in the Room is “really confrontation with one’s self,” she suggests. “And you turn back, and you see the inscriptions about freedom and reflect on that and what your role could be, so that there’s a responsibility there that’s given to you. You can’t escape, either. You have to return, which is very different from most memorials. It’s a sense of eternity.”

**By the summer**, the proposal with the concrete Room seemed to be moving full speed ahead. But after Kahn’s presentation on July 31, Edward Logue, head of the New York State Urban Development Corporation, fired a torpedo into the memorial’s concrete prow.

“Basically the [Roosevelt] family, and Logue in particular, made the decision that it had to be stone,” explains Whitaker. “In the end, the client just didn’t believe that concrete was an appropriate material for a memorial.” Kahn tried to persuade them otherwise, suggesting that Logue go to the Salk Institute and see how that





looked. Logue was unswayed. Even though he and the Roosevelt family liked certain aspects of the Room, including the cantilevers and the baldacchinos (a sort of canopy), “they just didn’t want it in concrete,” says Whitaker. “They wanted it in stone.”

Of course, for Kahn it wasn’t a matter of simply scratching out the word *concrete* and substituting *stone*. For one thing, some key design elements, such as the cantilevers, could not be structurally supported using stone. More to the point, Kahn—who according to Whitaker “had really never built in monumental stone before”—had to *know* it, to learn the textures and soul of this medium. He settled on granite, specifically wire-sawn granite from any of three quarries he had selected—one of which, in Mount Airy, North Carolina, would be used.

The new plans went through a number of changes, some of them profound.

In August, for example, Kahn wrote a warm letter to Harriet and 10-year-old Nathaniel (vacationing in Maine) that included a tiny, detailed sketch for the memorial with a stone Room, complete with columns. On the same page is an equally tiny

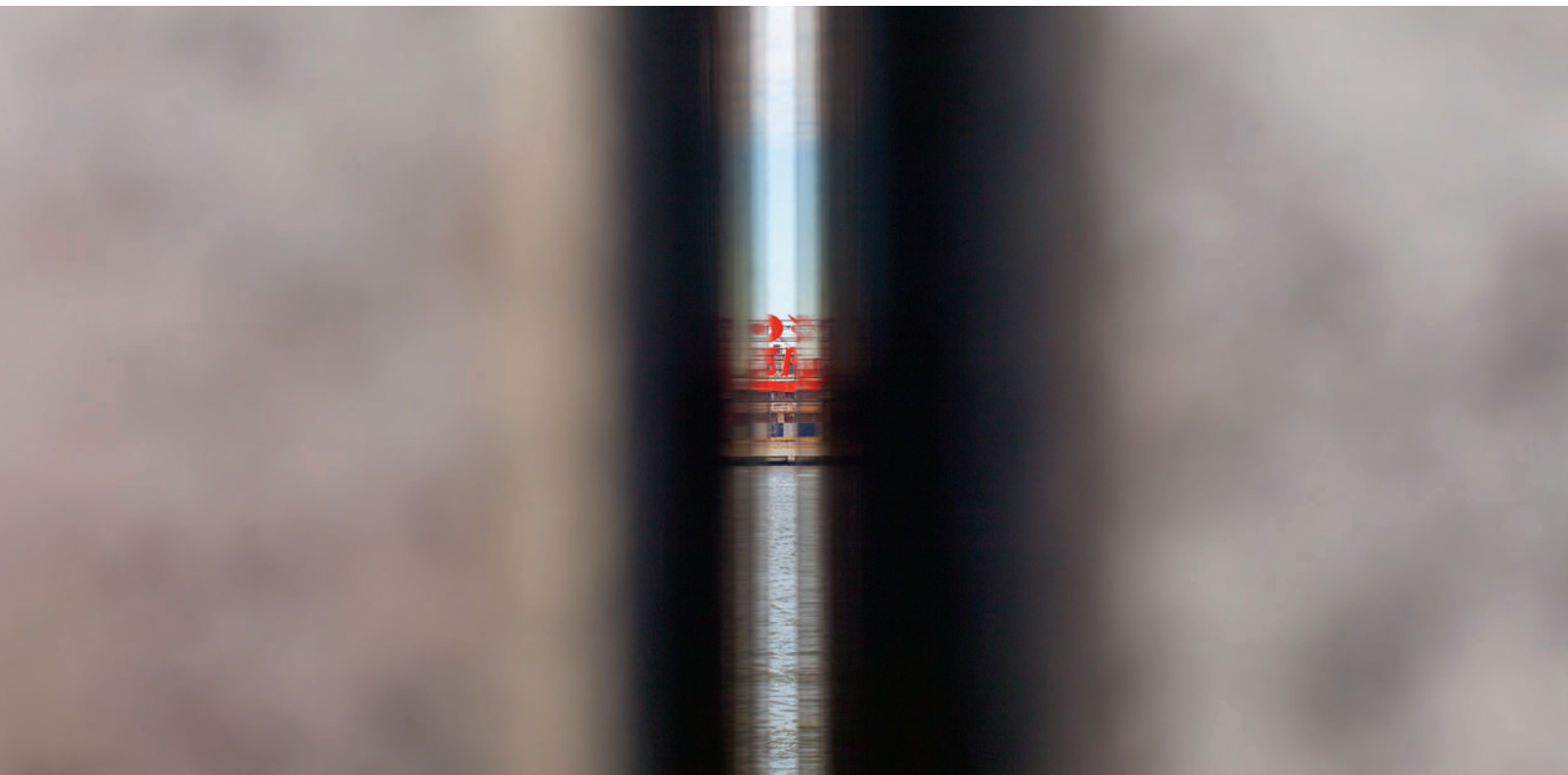
walking under them anymore. It was a devastation, the way he tore away at the Garden.”

It’s fair to say that Pattison was not thrilled with that development.

“I hated it,” she says. “He made a little drawing for me, and when I saw it, I just felt, *Oh, no*. It was like a mausoleum. I described it as *funereal* because [there] was just one slot, one way, one movement. There was no variety. Everything was X’d out. The landscape was gone. You were completely enclosed, right down to the end.”

Given the direction it was heading, she was relieved to get away from Four Freedoms Park and move on to something else—in this case, the Abbasabad project in Tehran that Kahn’s office was developing.

But what the client taketh away, the client also giveth. On November 20, explains Whitaker, “the clients read him the riot act, saying, ‘We don’t like the Garden at all. We think the Room works really well, but we want you to go back to that [previous] scheme for the Garden.’ So Harriet’s the one who goes back and makes the bridge between that early scheme, where they had been, and ultimately where they were going.”



sketch of the Garden, which still included the House underneath it, along with notes about the “green lawn” and the “rising path flanked by trees on either side.”

But he soon became uncomfortable with much of the Garden, and started over—eventually taking a belt sander to a wooden model he had built and scouring away so much of the landscaping that it ended up looking like some kind of minimalist African mask.

“Lou literally cut away the model,” says Nathaniel. “And everybody freaked out about it. Certainly it freaked out my mother, because the Garden really was literally eviscerated. The center was scooped out of it. There were still trees, but you weren’t

“I was really elated,” says Pattison convincingly. “I was called back. Lou had 10 days to come up with something, to restore it. At that point, of course, the House had been eliminated. They also wanted to lower the mount somewhat and had a series of steps over the lawn. I brought back the trees, number one, and really bushed it up.”

She also brought Kahn a photograph of Le Nôtre’s hundred stairs at Versailles. “It goes up to the clouds,” she says. “That of course harkened back to his Beaux Arts [training], so he created a grand staircase, with the excitement of going up the stairs, not knowing what you’re going to see beyond.”

Careful study of multiple drawings by Kahn and Pattison

convinced Whitaker of her key role in the development of this last plan. “I suddenly figured out these are Harriet’s drawings that show the shift in that November/December model,” says Whitaker. “Harriet’s the one who’s throwing down the first ideas and making the shift. So who does Lou turn to when he has to redesign the Garden? Harriet. Is it exactly what Kahn decided? No. Kahn made some differences. But the stairs—the kind of grand set of steps? That’s sketches Harriet made.”

She had another idea that should not be forgotten: a canal, separating the park from the ruins just to the north.

“I thought, ‘Hmm, why not bring in the water, and then have bridges which would control the entrance, and have a series of steps here so that you could go under the bridges?’” she recalls. “You could arrive by boat, which I think would be very exciting, and make these two bridges the entrance. Because we had not resolved the entrance at that point.”

The Room was still evolving as well. Nathaniel Kahn has a vivid memory of being at his father’s office at 1501 Walnut Street one autumn night when both his parents were working intently on the project.

“I remember Lou working on and thinking about the Room,” he says. “There was a [wooden] model, and the wall was divided into

two, and it had a slit. At one point it was at an angle to let sun in at certain times of the year, and other times it was straight. And he was pulling the wall apart and putting it back together. And he asked me, ‘How far apart do you think it should be?’”

Nathaniel, who only turned 11 that November, was thrilled to be asked. “But more than expecting the right answer from me, it’s sort of a window into the way that he thought about things and the way he worked,” he says. “He liked to talk as he worked. And it didn’t matter whether you were young or old or an architect or not. He wasn’t necessarily interested in your solution, but he was interested in what a conversation with you might bring out for him.”

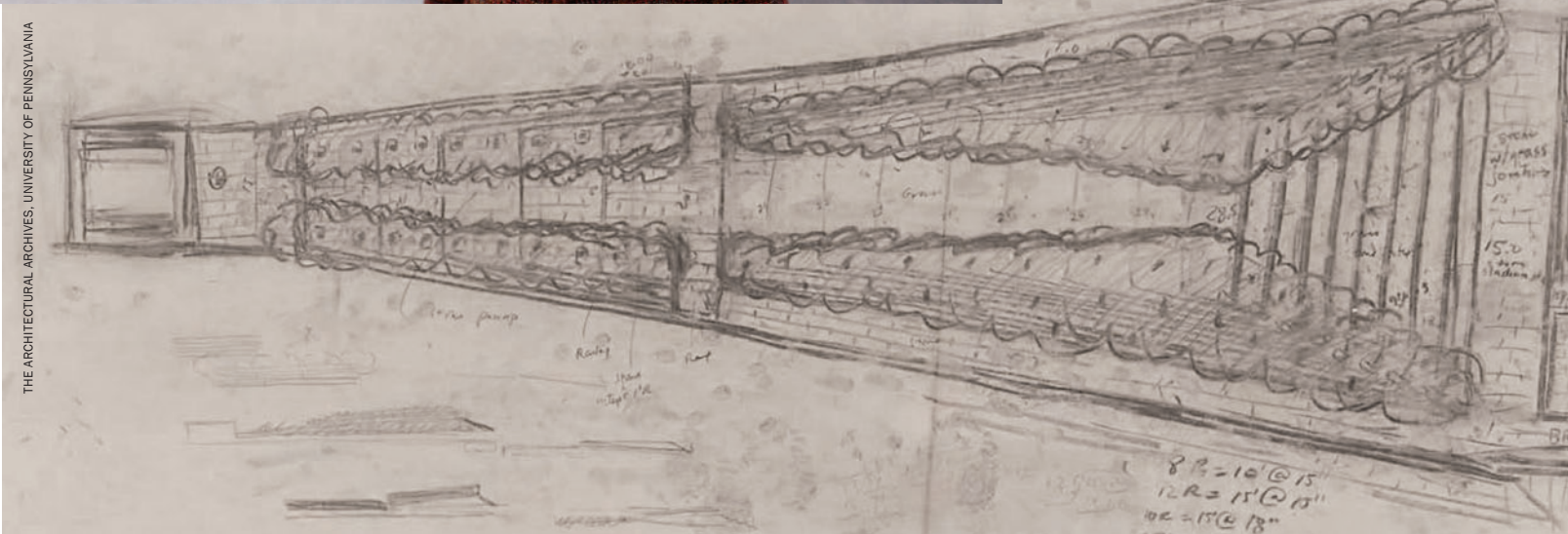
The memory has the quality of a fairy tale, he says: “The wise old philosopher king wants to know what the right move is, and who does he choose but a little boy to ask a question of. Somehow, in engaging the little boy, he comes up with some ideas. And by the time I have that specific memory from working on the Room, it had already become very close to what it is today.”

**S**unday, March 17, 1974. Kahn had just arrived back in New York from Ahmadabad, India, where the Indian Institute of Management he had designed was under construction. He was about to catch a train to Philadelphia in order to teach

his Monday classes at Penn. Then, in a Penn Station men’s room, his entangled heart gave out. It took three days before his family and friends and colleagues found out what had happened to him.

The story of his complicated personal life has been told many times, most movingly in *My Architect*. In addition to Sue Ann (his daughter by his wife, the late Esther Israeli Kahn Ed’27 G’33) and Nathaniel, he also had a daughter, Alexandra Tyng GEd’77, with the late architect Anne Tyng Gr’75 [“Journey to Estonia,” Jan/Feb 2007]. His death was obviously very hard on all of

**(Left) Harriet Pattison in the Room. (Below) One of her many sketches for the memorial. (Far left) “Consider the momentous event in architecture when the wall parted and the column became.”**





them. But on a professional level it had to have been particularly devastating for Harriet Pattison. Not only had she just lost her mentor and soul mate and the father of her son, but she was suddenly out of a job. Of course, so were many others. But still ...

It is not a time or emotional state that Pattison cares to revisit. "It's just the way it is," she says quietly, looking away.

"It's so sad, in retrospect," says Whitaker. "There was no forethought to what was being lost when she was asked to leave and her ties severed with the office. I think she didn't have the protector anymore. She was not welcome anymore, and she couldn't help. And the isolation that came from this, I think, was profound."

**Michael Rubenstein was working** for Mitchell/Giurgola when Kahn died. After Aldo Giurgola agreed to have his New York office take over Four Freedoms Park, Rubenstein became the project architect until the money ran out in 1975.

Giurgola "understood a lot about what Kahn was talking about, and he also understood the way he drew and thought," says Rubenstein, who had greatly admired Kahn since his grad-student days at Penn.

Rubenstein worked with the late John Haaf, a former Kahn associate then working for David Wisdom and Associates in Philadelphia, which partnered with Mitchell/Giurgola. Between them, he adds, "the project went from the design development drawings to a complete set of working documents—in other words, that could go out for bid."

Lois Sherr Dubin LAr'61, who also remembers Kahn as an inspirational figure during her Penn days, became the landscape architect for the project when Mitchell/Giurgola selected her firm, Villa/Sherr.

"We were part of that team starting in '74, and finished the working drawings in '75 when it was stopped," she says. "I worked very closely with John Haaf, who had worked directly with Lou, and John was communicating to my partner and myself what Lou said. So I never felt that there were any hidden layers that we were not understanding. And I never heard the name *Harriet* mentioned. I just worked with John and knew nothing about anything prior to my involvement in it."

The drawings "were done to the best of John Haaf's and my ability to carry forward all of the ideas that Kahn had left, and the only firsthand knowledge that any of us had was through John," says Rubenstein. "No one ever thought, 'Well, we should ask Harriet what [Kahn] was thinking.' It wasn't part of the equation. I know that's a sore spot with Nathaniel—and it should be. I mean, he's their son. But at any rate, the project got to the point that we all felt it could be built and look like something that had been not only designed but thought thoroughly through by Lou Kahn."

Haaf later moved to a remote area of British Columbia, where Whitaker tried, unsuccessfully, to reach him. He died last year, just seven months before Four Freedoms Park was dedicated.

**Several things helped keep the dormant memorial alive in the public consciousness.** One was "Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture," a major exhibition co-curated by Penn professors David Brownlee (art history) and David DeLong GAR'63 (architecture), which opened at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1991 and at the Museum of Modern Art the following summer. Then, in April 1993, Alyce Russo, director of planning and development for the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), convened a workshop that included some of the key players for Four Freedoms Park. In attendance were the two

landscapers, Pattison and Sherr Dubin. Ostensibly the meeting was about the immediate matter of shaping the rough site and preparing it for construction. But other issues soon surfaced.

One concerned recent building-code changes regarding handicapped access, a subject that resonates in light of FDR's own reliance on wheelchairs. That wasn't a problem in the entrance area and the Garden, since one can easily bypass the stone staircase using the pathways on either side of the lawn. When you get to the Room, though, it's trickier, since there are stairs leading down to the ha-ha area. Despite objections by Pattison and others at that workshop, the Mitchell/Giurgola architects added ramps to the drawings.



(Above) Lois Sherr Dubin, framed by little-leaf lindens. (Right) Looking north along the allées toward the Renwick Ruin and the Queensboro Bridge. (Left) Shadows along the allée.

Then there were the trees. During the months that Pattison and Kahn had worked on the Garden, the projected size, configuration, spacing, and species of trees for the allées underwent a number of changes. (Kahn's last known words on the subject were that the trees "should be of a low, overhanging type which would require little or no clipping.") While little-leaf lindens were considered, Pattison and Whitaker say they were not the final choice and would require a lot of pruning to keep them at the appropriate height. The leading candidate by the time of Kahn's death appears to have been the European hornbeam, though the important thing for Pattison was the trees' configuration and suggestion of wildness.

The little-leaf lindens "were the trees that we talked about with John Haaf in '74," says Sherr Dubin. "There had been other suggestions, I guess, during the design period, but by the time the project became a reality and we had a year or two to find 120 matched trees of the right height and size that would withstand the site conditions—which were quite severe—there wasn't a lot of choice. We picked what was available in the right size, and that, most importantly, seemed to reinforce the architectural concept of the plan."

She isn't worried about the height of the little-leaf lindens. "In another year or two, after they settle in, we'll start pruning

the tops," she says. "So we're going to control the height." And when Hurricane Sandy roared through shortly after the opening ceremony, "we didn't lose a tree," she adds with palpable relief. "I think we hardly lost a twig."

During that 1993 meeting, though, Pattison felt that the arboreal aspects of the landscaping had gone down the wrong path, and she let her displeasure be known.

"I was pretty vehement, and I wasn't very nice," she says. "I wasn't asked back." She doesn't want to say anything more about it, and neither does Sherr Dubin.



"I think the outburst reflected the fact that Harriet had some pent-up frustration that the project had been carried forward without any input from her," says Whitaker, who emphasizes that he is not criticizing Sherr Dubin for her more formal interpretation of the allées. "Did she take it out and direct it at Lois? Yeah. Did that perhaps marginalize her needlessly, whether it was her fault or not? Yeah. And frankly, there were no further discussions from the team in New York with Philadelphians."

Whitaker would later make two detailed presentations to the Four Freedoms Park board: one before construction began in March 2009, and another, even more detailed, in August 2011. Joining him were Nathaniel, Sue Ann, and Alex Tyng, all of whom cared deeply about the execution of their father's vision.

The night before the first presentation, he and Pattison were in the archives looking at a 1975 drawing when he realized that in it, the outside row of trees in the forecourt and the inside row of trees in the Garden were not aligned.

"She said, 'They *have* to be aligned because that's what unifies the two. If they're not in alignment, that's not right,'" Whitaker recalls. "So I went back over all the drawings, from the first schemes that were presented to the client to the last scheme that Kahn presented—and they were always in alignment."

"That really helped us establish the geometry of the trees, which was absolutely critical to how the perspectival views in the park are established," says Pollara. "It's something that we relied on to alter what had been set down in the '75 drawings, when the genesis of the geometry of trees had somehow been lost."

**BY** the time Nathaniel's *My Architect* was released in 2003 and sparked new interest in the memorial, a movement was growing to take back the site and build something else on it. In October 2004 a concerned neighbor and philanthropist named Jane Gregory Rubin asked Cooper Union to mount an exhibition with the implicit idea of kick-starting a fundraising drive.

"It was really a last-ditch effort to say, if we don't do this, this [site] is going to be given away for some other purpose," says Pollara, who was then working in Cooper Union's architectural archives. She co-curated the exhibition, "Coming to Light: The Louis I. Kahn Monument to Franklin D. Roosevelt for New York City."

The exhibition did its job. The late Arthur Ross W'31 Hon'92 gave the first \$2.5 million, and an article in *The New York Times* prompted the Alphawood Foundation to give \$600,000 in seed money—then, later, \$10 million. In August 2006, FDR Four Freedoms Park asked Pollara to head the project.

"It was really unclear whether we would be able to actually pull this off—for financial and political reasons, and regulation reasons," says Pollara, noting that Roosevelt Island represents a "very complicated jurisdictional problem" for builders. The remarkable William vanden Heuvel raised roughly two-thirds of the \$53 million budget from private sources, with another \$12 million coming from the city and \$6 million from the state—a "staggering" achievement, Pollara says, especially in a time of economic collapse.

There were still lingering issues related to the park's design, including the ramps and other proposed changes for handicapped accessibility.

"There was a lot of back and forth as to whether this was being completed the way it should have been," says Rubenstein. He had left Mitchell/Giurgola by then and gone out on his own, but when Sue Ann Kahn approached him in 2008 to help out as an unpaid consultant, he agreed.

"There was a sense that things were getting watered down in terms of the detailing—subtly, but significantly," he adds. "And without anyone realizing they were doing things in error, the new set of specifications had an awful lot of things that were not the way that Kahn would have done them. There was no one in that [Mitchell/Giurgola] office who knew anything about Lou Kahn, outside of looking at pictures."

On March 29, 2010, construction began on what is said to be the heaviest stone-setting job ever undertaken in New York City. (The granite blocks were too heavy for the Roosevelt Island Bridge, and had to be ferried to the island from northern New Jersey.) Pollara has praised her "passionate and dedicated construction team" for executing the plans to a tolerance of one-eighth of an inch, but it wasn't exactly a painless process.

"There were so many times at the weekly construction meetings where the guys would say, 'Well, it doesn't matter, because you won't see it,'" recounts Pollara. "Finally I said, 'The next person who says that is fired. I'm done hearing that. You do know the difference.'"

Take the massive granite columns. A granite expert hired by Mitchell/Giurgola recommended making the pieces square and having the same finish on all four sides, so that if there was a problem with one face, it could be turned around while the crane was moving it. "That got written into the spec that was about to go out for bid," says Rubenstein. But the original project plans had called for those faces to be an inch

apart—"honed, rather than sawn or flamed or so forth, because Kahn knew that they would take the light and do something absolutely magical with it. So we said, 'No, you can't do that, and you have to go back on this.' That was the beginning of understanding that there were lots of little bits and pieces of stuff that had not carried through from '74."

One of the most delicate issues concerned inscriptions. Not only had designs been drawn up showing the words from Roosevelt's speech written on the walls of the Room, but at one point the names of major donors were going to be inscribed in sensitive locations as well.

"I queried people [from Kahn's office] who had worked on this," says Whitaker. "One said, 'The whole point was not to have inscriptions. So it's not even worth doing if you're going to do that.'" He also found notes from a meeting in which Kahn himself had said that any inscriptions from the speech would "best be displayed around the sculpture," not the "columnar masses" of the walls.

"If you look at the drawings from 1975, the back side of the sculpture niche is the only place where any text was to be inscribed," says Pollara. "So thankfully Bill and Nathaniel made a very clear case that that was not the right thing to do."

The inscriptions were dropped—but only at the last minute, and not without blowback. Two of the biggest donors, the Alphawood Foundation and the Reed Foundation, sued for breach of contract and at the last minute tried—unsuccessfully—to halt the dedication ceremony. Part of the suit has been settled, and the names of major donors will be near the entrance to the park.

The ramps had been dropped before construction began.

"Thankfully we were able, at the 11th hour, to turn the design back to the original Kahn design and thereby preserve that very important experience of the Room," says Pollara. "I'm just thankful we didn't build the wrong thing. It would have been a complete disaster."

**Of the unresolved issues at Four Freedoms Park**, the most jarring is the entrance scheme. Visitors now have to go past the fenced-off Renwick Ruin and through a "no-man's land" controlled by RIOC to reach Kahn's masterpiece, explains Pollara. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the original 13-acre site was "bifurcated when we started this effort," and there has been virtually no coordination between the two organizations. Though she found that frustrating at first, she now sees it as an opportunity.

"Now that we've got all this information [in the Architectural Archives], we can really go back and evaluate, and say, 'Look, let's try to build out the rest of the Kahn vision,'" she says. "It would be so wonderful to reestablish the grove of trees." (Ultimately, they'll need to coordinate with RIOC and Cornell University, which is putting together a master plan for its Cornell Tech campus to be located just north of the RIOC parcel.)

Pollara is also quite open to the idea of Pattison's canal—which, she points out, would be on what is now a flood plain.

"Right now we're undertaking to do some feasibility studies and some schematic programming and schematic design," she adds. "In my opinion there isn't any idea off the table."

Furthermore, since the original vision provided for a reception hall and facilities—first in the House within the Garden, then more vaguely in the Renwick Ruin area—Pollara adds:



“We still need those facilities. We don’t have certain things that we need out on this site to make it a sustainable destination. So the idea of going back to these original ideas and reintroducing them is a great place to start.”

Which brings us back to the Architectural Archives. If you don’t use the Kahn Collection for a project like this, says Whitaker, “why have this stuff in the first place? A collection like this is our cultural heritage. It’s part of how we understand what it is to be a great architect, to make great architecture—and what Lou Kahn and his collaborators did to make it work.”

“Bill was a bridge of interpreting,” says School of Design Dean Marilyn Taylor. “He deserves incredible praise for his very quiet but learned and persistent application of what he knew to help us move through from what we had, to what should happen. And he’s gotten acknowledgment for it, but maybe not enough.”

**B**ack in the Architectural Archives, I ask Pattison how she felt that rainy day in October when, after all the dread and all the anxiety, she finally had a chance to see the memorial that Kahn had first envisioned, with her help, nearly 40 years before.

“Oh, amazement that this was built,” she says. “Really astonishing. And going to the Room was wonderful.” The sight of the great granite blocks, so artfully placed, suddenly made her

remember Kahn’s famous dictum: *Consider the momentous event in architecture when the wall parted and the column became.*

She was delighted to see that “the big moves are there—the arrival and the steps and then suddenly the perspective and walking through trees down to this wonderful thing,” she adds. “It was marvelous, in the rain. It was beautiful, really. Bill gave a wonderful introduction and description of its making. And it was wonderful to see people from Penn, a couple of whom had participated and worked in Lou’s office.”

At the very end of our long interview, Nathaniel suddenly asks a question of his mother that pulls her up short. “Did you miss Lou, when you went to Roosevelt Island? Did you think about him?”

A pregnant silence follows.

“That’s quite a question,” she says. “I don’t know really what I felt. I was just very anxious and very curious and very worried.”

“Well, you were carrying that with you for him, in a way,” Nathaniel suggests. “You were worried for him, too.”

Harriet Pattison looks up then, and the little cloud of uncertainty that had been hanging over her dissipates.

“Well, when I got to the end, and people had disappeared, and I was right there, alone, I thought about him,” she says finally. “There was nobody there then. And I felt wonderful. *He did it.*” ♦