

Pages of hope

Ojai artist/author unveils her series of inspirational books

From staff reports

When words fail, Susan Squellati Florence switches to her watercolors.

In special cases — like telling a friend how much she is valued or offering words of condolence — Florence uses both.

The results can be seen in *Journeys*, a new series of inspirational gift books that pair the Ojai artist's introspective writings and soft-focus paintings of flowers, trees and rolling landscapes.

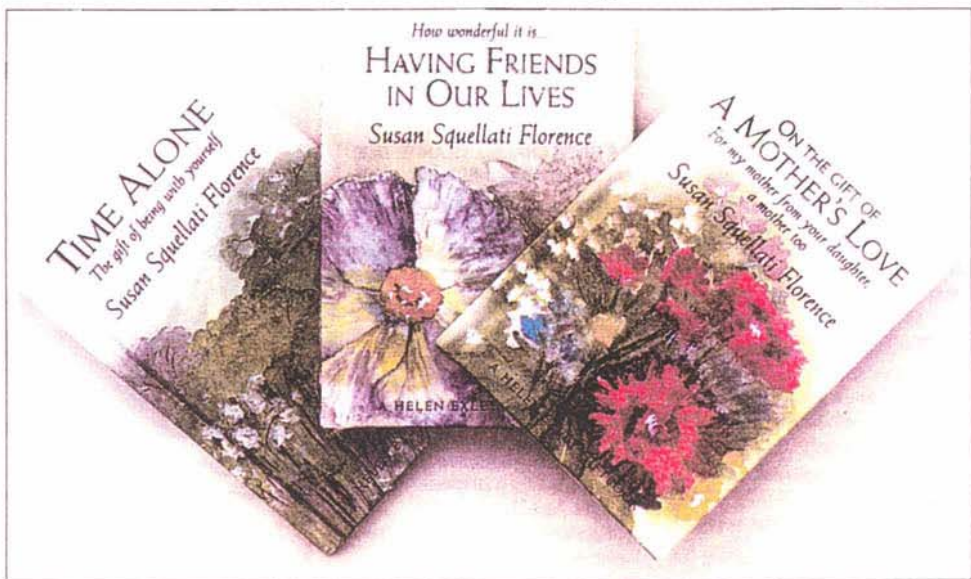
Printed by Exley Publications Ltd., in Great Britain, the small books (they measure about 6¼ by 4⅜ inches) were introduced at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October and in the United States in January. Florence will read from their pages during appearances on April 12 at the Barnes & Noble in Ventura and again on April 24 at Tottenham Court Tea Room in Ojai.

Among the titles is "Your Journey ... A Passage Through a Difficult Time," which explores the issue of grief through paintings of rain-soaked mountains and of a sun-dappled arrangement of flowers on a kitchen table. "Peace may come with the early morning sunlight streaming in your window," reads the accompanying text.

Also in the series is "On the Gift of a Mother's Love," inspired by Florence's own experiences as mom to Brent and Emily.

"How Wonderful it is ... Having Friends in Our Lives" features a painting of a Matilija poppy on the cover.

Other visual clues to the artist's home in Ventura County can be seen throughout the slender, full-color books, which sell for \$9 each. "When You Lose



James Glover II / Star staff

"Peace may come with the early morning sunlight streaming in your window," reads a passage, on grief, accompanying the soft-focus paintings in Susan Squellati Florence's *Journeys* books.

Getting There

SUSAN SQUELLATI FLORENCE

The Ojai-based artist/author unveils her series of inspirational Helen Exley Giftbooks during an appearance at 2 p.m. April 12 at Barnes & Noble, 4820 Telephone Road, Ventura (339-0990), and during a wine, cheese and poetry gathering 7 p.m. April 24 at Tottenham Court Tea Room, 242 E. Ojai Ave., Ojai (646-2339).

"Someone You Love" includes a seascape that looks very like one of the Channel Islands. Several books feature studies of hillsides that could pass for Ventura's Two Trees landmark.

Inspiration for the words, meanwhile, came from reader response to previous books and from personal experience,

Florence said.

"Writing these books ... has helped me understand more fully the value of love and acceptance in helping us through the difficult times," she said. "We all need more time to rediscover and reflect on what is meaningful and important in our own lives."

Florence is no newcomer to publishing her artwork. After moving to Ojai in the early 1970s, she and husband Jim Florence started a card company called People Productions. They sold the business to the scrapbooking and memory-keeping company CR Gibson in 1985, but Susan

stayed on to create cards, stationery, photo albums and other items; Gibson in turn was sold in 1998.

Since then, Florence has kept busy with her watercolor paintings and the inspirational books she writes and illustrates for publication in

Buenos Aires; copies of one of her Spanish-language books is presented to bilingual hospice volunteers at the Livingston Memorial Visiting Nurse Association, she said.

"These are books to help us through deep times," Florence said. "They aren't just about pretty pictures."

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Susan Squellati Florence, artist/author, regarding her inspirational *Journeys* book series, which she unveils locally this month