

The Book: *Designing Hearts*

By Robin Strachan

Designing Hearts” is a fictional romance novel written by Robin Strachan, a Johnstown native. Strachan began her writing career as a reporter, specializing in feature stories. This book is her second published novel and she is currently working on a third. Also a published poet and professional artist, Strachan resides in Chicago.

The novel takes place in Stamford, Connecticut, with New York City and the surrounding areas also playing a part in the storyline. *Designing Hearts* focuses on main character, Jill Hennessy, a 49-year-old interior designer and feng shui expert.

The book begins when Jill finds out that her American heartthrob and celebrity talk show host husband, David Hennessy, has had an affair. After 25 years of marriage, Jill learns of David’s infidelity on a tabloid television program. This devastating news leads to Jill kicking David out of their Stamford home, giving her time to think about what her next move will be — divorce or forgiveness.

Jill goes to her family for help after finding out about the infidelity. Her mother and twin sons all have different ideas of what she should do but provide love and support for her throughout the ordeal. Jill’s relationship with Liam and Finn, her sons, becomes stronger. Liam, the gay son that David disapproves of, especially adds drama to the storyline.

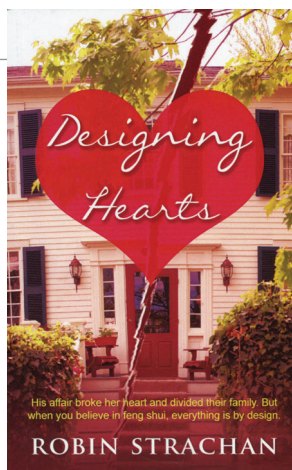
If the affair isn’t enough change in her life, Jill, an individual with a phobia of public speaking, agrees to teach a class on feng shui at the local community college. Feng shui is a Chinese system of design that focuses on the placement of rooms and décor in a home. The goal of feng shui is to allow energy to flow freely throughout the house, maximizing the living space and helping the home owners achieve their desires. The system follows a chart made up of nine blocks that correspond to each area of a home.

Jill learns to enjoy teaching the class, get-

ting over her fear of public speaking. She also creates relationships with each of her students. Each student desires something different, these desires range from fertility and the curing of cancer in a loved one to hoping to travel to Italy or having a house finally sell on the market. Through the help of the

feng shui principles, Jill does her best to assist each individual, even providing a personal home consultation to each student to help them directly. Through the process of teaching the class, Jill learns from her students as much as they learn from her.

The feng shui class helps the book move along, giving it a structure to follow. It seems that as a feng shui concept is explained, focus is put on a particular student and area of Jill’s life to go along with the topic. This creates in-depth character profiles that allow the reader to connect to the



characters.

Jill eventually becomes interested in Denny MacBride, a Scottish artist and interior design painter for her business firm. He and Jill are attached to each other almost immediately and begin seeing each other gradually. MacBride supports Jill and

shows her that new beginnings are possible.

Jill experiences her ups and downs throughout the book, but never forgets who she is as an individual. This makes her stronger and with the help of her feng shui students, Jill realizes that sometimes helping others is just what is needed to help yourself.

This novel is a great representation that change can be sudden and unexpected. However, with the ability to stay true to yourself, anything can be overcome. >>

Katie Lipko

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