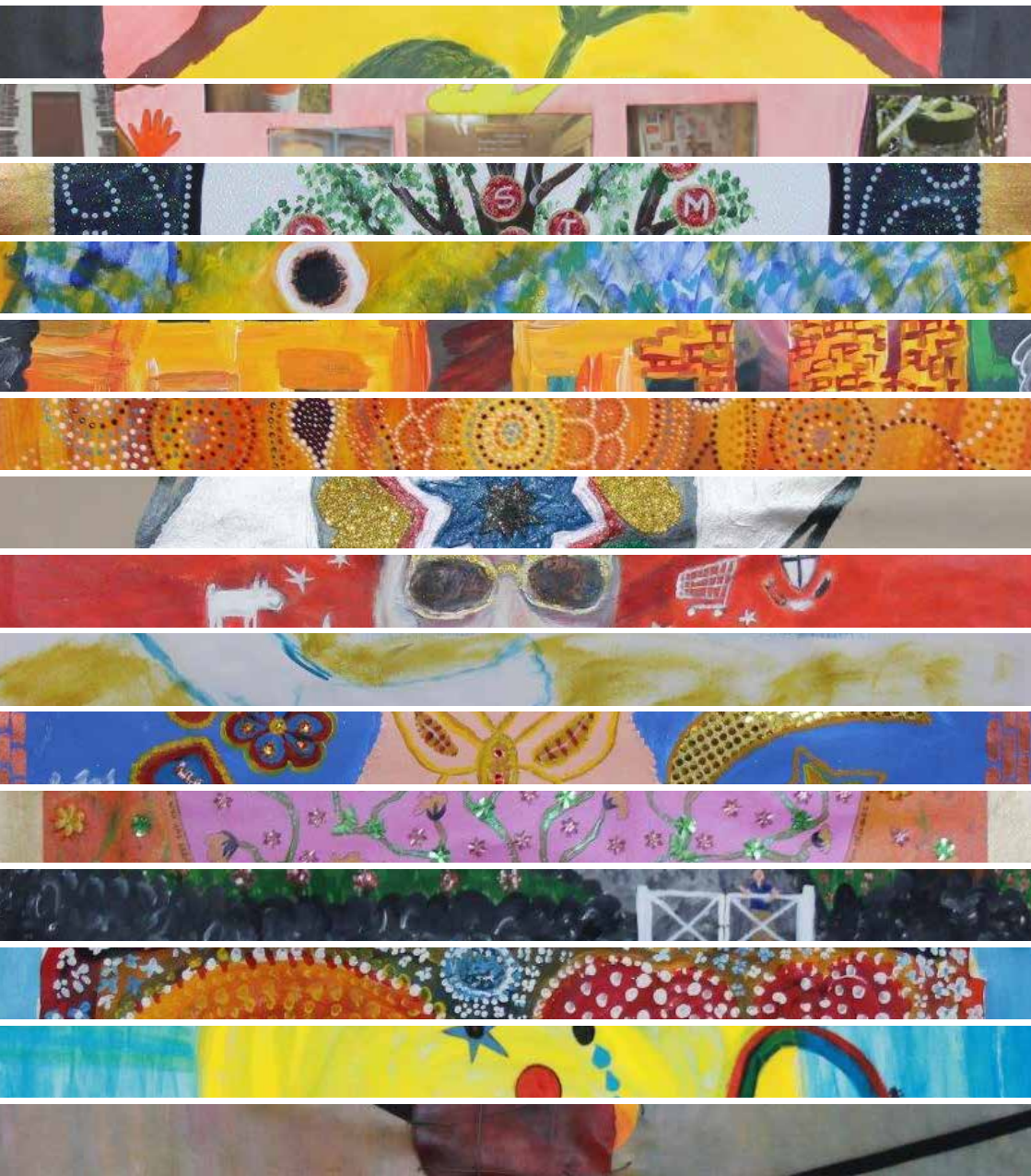


Reflections

Exploring our identities

mind®
Supporting mental health recovery



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“I really enjoyed every single session, I felt things deeply and was supported to give voice to all my experiences. Each session had a profound influence on my sense of myself as a carer and as a person... (Participant)



Gillian Scaduto, Mind Carer Peer Support Worker

Welcome to Mind Australia's Carer Art Therapy and Creative Writing Exhibition 2015. It has been a great privilege to be part of two hands-on therapeutic groups. Our theme of 'Identity' came from a respite outing to the immigration museum. We spent a lot of time reflecting on what happens to the family unit around mental ill-health and the impacts of our loved ones and our own identity. Through the gentle guidance of Judy Bird and Vicky Nickolls and using the tools of colour, symbols and words, carers were able to express who they are and how they feel through their artwork and writing. We laughed, cried and supported one another through the process of exploring images and our written imagination. The artwork on display, for some, was their first piece of art since school. Their courage to publicly display their personal journey and identity through their caring role, demonstrates the joint collaboration of support from their peers and creative process in dealing with emotions that come with the caring role. Together we shared our journey through paint and pen - a path to recovery through a search for understanding and acceptance, learning that it's not about getting rid of our problems, but finding out how to accept and cope with them.

"A lovely opportunity to stop, to reflect, and a space to just be myself.....something that's very precious in today's world. I felt completely welcomed and looked after and appreciated being a participant...thank you."



Judy Bird, Creative Writing Tutor

Gillian Scaduto from Mind has that most wonderful of forces to be reckoned with - a velvet voice that purrs enthusiasm. In 2013 she suggested running creative writing sessions for carers and with each call, or email, or catch-up, persisted that it would be such a worthwhile thing to try, that really, it would be a shame not to give it a go.

As sessions began, new carers arrived each week. They found this wasn't about writing as they'd learned at school - all spelling, grammar and punctuation. It was writing for themselves. Using paper as a carrying space for all the stuff going on inside their minds, putting it where they could see it to sort it. Playing with words and seeing their own minds offer ideas, fun and hope.

As sessions progressed, some felt worries shrink as they developed strengths through seeing their own true opinions and ideas on paper. Some began to write their own way to a sense of balance, to sort out what they really wanted to do, to start looking at new studies or employment. Through sharing their writing they made connections with other carers and found the support that comes from knowing others dealing with similar challenges. Sharing the writing allowed sharing of dark and light, heart and hope, fears and friendship.

As sessions continued, participants found that the one rule, 'what you hear in the room stays in the room', allowed them to be themselves on paper; to feel acknowledged for who they are, apart from their role as a carer.

Gillian is to be congratulated for giving voice and life, to the therapeutic use of writing for carers. Their journeys have been made easier and enriched, by developing their own creativity and strengths through art and writing.



Vicky Nickolls, Art Therapist

In February this year we commenced meeting each Monday as a group. I have been an art therapist for almost 20 years now and have seen what a magical world art making can be for expressing the sometimes inexpressible. It is not something to tell people but rather better that they can experience it first hand to

understand. However so many of us give up art making while we are still young children and develop a belief that “we can’t draw” and never use this medium to express ourselves again. Most people don’t know that art therapy can reduce stress, anxiety and increase positive emotions.

Although there were some members of the group who had done art therapy before, others hadn’t and were nervous about what art therapy was. We started with exploratory exercises that I hoped set the scene for being experimental and playful whilst still providing an opportunity to give expression to their personal experiences.

The group members have always been incredibly supportive of each other, allowing differences, respecting every member’s experience and acknowledging how hard life as a carer can be. Despite the enormity of the challenges carers face, there was always laughter and lightness present in our sessions together. Sometimes members would feel quite challenged by our explorations and other times they found it thought provoking, calming and relaxing.

I developed great respect for this group of people who were willing to look at themselves honestly, express the rawness of their feelings about their struggles, show their vulnerability, share the sense of despair they experience at times, consistently show courage to face the difficulties that arise while valuing life, enjoying and savouring the people and things they love.

This installation is a culmination of our explorations this year on what it means to be a carer. For each person the experience is so personal and unique whilst also being universal and shared. The rich diversity and complexity of experience is present here.

The art journey – our stories

Angelika

The green apple reflects happiness and hope

I came to Australia in 1958 then met and married my husband in 1959. The green apple in my painting reflects the happiness and hope in my heart for my future when I came to Australia.

We built a new home, everything was beautiful. We were blessed with three children and had a happy family life for 27 years.

When my son was 23 years old he became ill with schizophrenia, over the years he has gone up and down with his illness.

After I lost my husband I have been looking after my son at home.



In my painting, I did the apple first as it was the beginning of my journey. I then completed the background using colours that represent my emotions. The yellow and pink are my happy family life. The black border is grief, sadness and at times despair...moments that we have gone through.

Anna *Proud as a carer*

The carer cloak descended on me with a flurry about 15 years ago. In a peacock's life expectancy, it may continue to shroud me for a few years yet!

Although I don't consider myself "proud as a peacock", pride in caring for my family brood is hatching within.

Legend teaches that the peacock's multiplicity of feather eyes was bestowed to ensure protection. My multifaceted eyes are ever alert, and need to be gathered up and taken as I fly short distances from one house nest to another, or to obtain food, or to earn a living.

11 distinctive calls are attributed to the peahen to communicate and express sheer joy. At times I've needed to make 11 calls and express sheer joy or cry when I discover the support I seek!

Similar to peacocks, who may lead a solitary life, but gather in a "muster", carers coming together with support can muster the strength to for(a)ge ahead.



Each summer the peacock sheds its eye-catching tail to regenerate more brilliant feathers, seen as a symbol of letting go of negativity. Carers need to be mindful (*thank you Mind!*) to reanimate themselves also.

The iridescently valuable opportunity to participate in Art Therapy and Creative Writing has enabled me, along with other carers, to spread our wings and show our true colours, some tinged with the peacock's traits of protection, love, compassion and, hopefully pride! We are also able to rest from flight by descending on the aptly named "*Peacock Inn*"!!

Connie *Gold and copper family tree*

Framed in gold and copper is my family tree. Nourishment is given by the rich soil. At the roots of the family tree are the grandparents who began the journey of growth. That seed was cared for and stayed alive. The tree represents the love that frames the family I have grown up with and the family that has cared and supported me throughout good times and bad.

The copper blends into the gold. Gold and copper mould my life as a carer and as a patient. There have been golden moments and tarnished copper times. The sun has shined in my life and the waves of the sea have swirled and washed over. The tides have changed in time. The tree continues to grow.

The earth feeds the grass that surrounds the family tree, swaying in the wind moment by moment. The tree has endured winter, autumn, spring and summer. Its seed has produced a strong tree with branches representing my siblings and our fruit in the form of red shiny apples. My shiny apples are Elise and Isabelle. Each apple bears the initial that has grown from the architecture of the family tree. The branches are well balanced. As the tree grows, it is designed to have a place for everyone.



We are all linked to the roots. The strong trunk represents my mother Giovanna and father Giuseppe. After years of palliative care, he is no longer here. My mother keeps the tree alive. Each of us nurtures each other. I aspire to be as strong as my mother and her mother who taught me to care. We were all touched and aware of mental health.

My place as a single mum is the single branch supported by my amazing mother and siblings. Most of all my shiny apple of my eye is my daughter Elise. She keeps me alive and my leaves green with awareness when I'm feeling like my branch has lost strength. When my ocean has lost its waves and when my sun loses its shine, she reminds me that the tree is set in a bright white circle of life. My branch will never break, because we all care for each other.

Dennis

The hope of the carer

There is, I believe an eternal hope in all carers that the family member that has mental ill-health can be healed and lead a happy, productive life and be able to develop their talents and integrate into society. Our youngest son was diagnosed at 21 with schizophrenia. He is now 42 and the journey so far has been a roller coaster ride of emotions, challenges and moments of joy for all parties. Our son is always on our mind. We take great hope in utilising the professional services available to carers and those cared for in this journey of life. Our son will always be our son and we love him.

The artwork that I completed is supposed to primarily give hope to the carer and the mentally ill person that over time there can be movement to a better place..... good improvements and changes can and do occur in both our lives and we should all rejoice when they occur.



Knowing that sometimes words cannot express what we want to say, the art medium can be used to great effect to do this. So the background to the painting is of yellow and orange colours, which for me, signify light, hope and peace. I have also attempted to show some of the chaos (refer blue wavy lines) we all travel through on this journey. The imbedded circles identify that the son and carer are together in this journey in life. At the end of the journey there is a breaking away from the family circle of the son's circle which represents the possibility of more independent living for the carers and the person with mental ill-health. The great hope is that both parties will be able to better handle whatever storms may occur.

Elise

The Wizard Of Oz board game

I feel like I'm in the cyclone: the powerful cyclone that swept Dorothy away from Kansas. I'm overwhelmed, anxious and unsure of what the future holds.

I'm far from the yellow brick road; the maze-like, complex path that leads towards health and success. If I were travelling along this illuminated path, I would feel my identity. I would feel that everything I do is some form of progress. I would use compassion and patience to keep the peace. Peace is required for any forward momentum.

But the path is far from me. My identity has been taken away. I'm stuck in a storm while others can see or travel upon the glowing yellow brick road. My true identity has been sacrificed. Home isn't a settled place. I didn't have the power to hold it down and, now,



my house and I are in the cyclone.

Somewhere over the rainbow, Glinda, the good witch, waits. No one will harm me while Glinda watches over, travelling in her pink floating bubble.

With intellect, heart and courage, perhaps I will one day arrive at the Emerald City. But how will I feel once I arrive? I do wonder whether health and prosperity are illusory, abstract goals. If so, my ruby slippers will provide me with a thoughtful, grounding perspective; there's no place like home.

Gillian *The ripple effect*

The background

This was completed in a free and spontaneous method using bright and colourful colours that represent the rising morning sun, a new beginning, a new chance for hope.

The foreground

Using both ends of a wooden skewer, mixing time and patience, I created the dots over the background. I read that the aborigines commenced this method to layer their stories, or hide the underneath story. Mental ill-health is often misunderstood and hidden. Using this method, and within the process, it created a meditative, relaxing space to reflect, quite the opposite to the creation of the background, which was completed quickly.

The centre foreground

The inner circle represents the ripple-effect of mental ill-health. When you drop a stone into a pond it creates a ripple to your surroundings. Our identities as we know them change, to ourselves and to others. The waves of ripples extend in different directions, demonstrating the effects. The wave-lines are the ups and downs of the illness, followed by other lines close behind, which are the carers that often follow their loved one's highs and lows.

The tear drops



Loss, grief, trauma, isolation, confusion, fear, worry and sadness are mixed into these tears, but they are covered in white dots to support and protect them. One tear drop remains - always open, vulnerable and exposed.

The out ripple

In-between the smaller circle ripples are various symbols. The darker feet represent the person with mental ill-health. At times they trip up (feet crossed) or fade under the dots of hope, as it has faded. The arrows are the supports and guidance which are vital for recovery. The top right and bottom left have rays of light through the ripples in the circles, these provide guidance through the journey.

The white feet are that of the carer, shadowing the person with mental ill-health, walking silently behind. They are walking in a circle over the ripples created.

Inge *The weeping eye of a carer*

I started with an image of a mandala, which had lots of hearts around the circle. In each heart was an eye. I wanted each of the eight eyes to show different emotions, as the eyes are the windows to the soul and often show forth what a person is feeling. However trying it out in *Photoshop* made it look a bit weird having these eight eyes so in the end I decided on just one large eye with the Mandala in the middle as the iris/pupil of the eye. This took away that weird look of multiple eyes.

So now I used just eight smaller hearts to represent the various emotions of a carer. In the design image, I wrote the name of the emotion above each heart but in the actual drawing, I decided to leave out the words and let each person looking at the image decide on which emotions would be dominant in maybe their own role as carer.

The theme was to represent myself on canvas as a carer. I am hoping this represents all of us who are carers.

As a carer of a son with a mental ill-health, I feel a gamut of emotions.



There is **grief** at the loss of the person. Somehow the illness initially robbed us of the person our son was or the potential of what he could become. Especially in the early stages when there was a lot of psychosis involved.

There is **love** of course because nothing changes the love you feel for your child.

There is **anger** with governments, with society, with God, even to have allowed this to happen. Anger sometimes with the behavior of the person even though you know it's the illness causing the behavior and then this turns to terrible **sadness** at having allowed myself to become angry in the first place.

There is **weariness** because the stress of it all sometimes gets too much.

*The weeping eye of a carer
...continued*

There is **fear** as to what will become of our son when we are no longer there to care for him.

There is **faith**, which rescues us from despair and gives us incredible **hope** that all will be well regardless.

And of course there is **caring** and compassion which comes because of your incredible love.

Then there is also **joy** as things improve and your loved one matures and starts to become independent.

“Learning the ‘power’ of expression through art and how it releases negative energy to create something magical. The unseen to the seen.....regarding changes, I am beginning to grow!”...(Participant)

There are other emotions and these emotions seem to run into each other and there is never one that is felt on its own. Hence, I added the coloured stars in the middle to show the fracturing that occurs with the emotions. We are no longer whole ourselves. Somehow the illness has taken its toll on all of us and fractured even our personality. We find ourselves sometimes behaving in ways that doesn't seem like ourselves in ways that are less than mature trying to cope with it all.

Heather
The chaos of caring

Green hat
Red hat
Silver hat too...
Glasses to match
Green, red and blue...
Shaped like a guitar
Wanting to go far
Here is a cool dude
This is how we are!!!
Thinking about the brothers
My role as a mother
The perception, the resilience,
We all look out for the other.

Nothing is the same
But who is to blame
Be elative, creative
But no one gets the fame!
Trying not to hurt
Always on alert
With a webster pack at hand
And kicking the bloody dirt!

1 bag, 2 bag, 3 bag, 4...
Before too long I was yelling at the door!
Anxious plastic bags.....all tied together
The hoard/the bored/the systems
Even the frustrating weather!
All too much, all the clutter
Then I cracked it once more
And cried in the gutter!

Once there was 1 trolley



Then there was 2
It multiplied to 7.....and my mind just blew!

Walk the dog in the park,
She attacks the world and makes her mark!

Cups of tea
See the sea
Fight the fight
And try and find ME!!!

Jane

Jane has not been able to provide her story due to her work and caring role commitments. As a group, we felt it was important to show that at times the caring role and life do not allow us to complete tasks. We would still like to acknowledge Jane's participation and her artwork.



Joan

The vase of joy

I have painted a great vase with blooming flowers that represents love and joy.

The large butterfly represents me being strong, able to cope for the future and caring for my children. The small butterfly on the bottom of the vase represents my grandchildren. They are my joy.

The love hearts on the right, with the blue initials, represent my four grandsons. Their names are Anthony, Jesse, Connor and Lachlan. The four red hearts with the sun shining through are my youngest granddaughters, Emilia, Sofia, Madelyn and Isabelle. The single hearts are my eldest granddaughters, Elise and Vanessa; they are holding the others up. The heart flower represents the six of them holding together.

The hand represents a lot of work and caring. I was never allowed to wear nail polish. But now I have taken time to look pretty.

The flowers remind me of the daffodils I saw when I rode my bike to school. The first sign of daffodils told me that the cold and frosty mornings were leaving and the warmth of spring was near. I would pick them and now I show them in my vase.



If you take time and look closer, things can have beauty that you haven't noticed before. I never took time to observe the light of the moon and the stars. I didn't realise how beautiful they are. When you're relaxed, calm and have good thoughts for everything, you can see the good parts of life.

The full moon reminds me it's time to plant vegetables in the garden. As I took time to have a look at the moon, I noticed it is smiling.

The clouds are nice and white. They represent a beautiful day.

As I did the painting, I realised that I had built a brick wall to block out my past. I don't want to get into details and I don't want to influence the future. I must concentrate and enjoy looking at the good and not at the past.

Karen
Heart of treasured memories

My art therapy artwork was inspired by words I had spoken some years ago during an interview with TAC about my use of art as therapy in dealing with grief and despair which I had been experiencing since the loss of my son Ben, in a single vehicle car crash on 5 November 2009. These words that I had said were “I need to hold the best of Ben in my heart”. So it was these words that inspired me to firstly create a large pink heart that heart would not just hold the memories of my son Ben, but it should also hold the best of memories of those dearest to me being my husband, my daughter and my sister as well. I surrounded my heart of memories in a beautiful warm tangerine colour. At the top of the canvas are small blackish shadows which are representative of dark clouds and the tiny blue heart sequins are tears of love which have fallen from the clouds. I placed a bright blue line above the heart which is



like a catchment of these tears, but still there are some that fall upon the heart of memories. On the base of the canvas, I placed a dark green line being a place of growth, a pretty flower garden of joy and peace featuring delightful green butterflies of hope, floating up in and around my heart of memories. Within my heart of treasured memories are beautiful flowers and sparkling green glittered stems. Surrounding my heart I have written words about my loved ones and I wrote them especially small so that the viewer of my artwork would need to come up close to read my precious words.

Maria
Life is a journey

We enter the world and as we grow we try to build a loving home and family. Sometimes along the way there may be lots of ups and downs and we may feel that we are stuck down in the bottom of the dark ocean, with no way out.

I remember my parents would always say, “Open your home and heart to family and friends”. By letting them in, helping them, loving and caring for each other, we can help to build a healthier life.

I have painted a path that will take us anywhere even to the top of the highest mountain. Life can be better by just looking around and trying to see the beauty in people and nature. What we have all around us, the sky, the sun, beautiful blossom on the trees, the birds and even the ocean may not seem so dark. By loving and caring or even carrying our loved ones we can all get to the top of the highest mountain. We can come and go anywhere and achieve anything, just like our parents and grandparents did. The world is round and it will just keep going round and round, regenerating all the time.



My house is my heart. It looks a bit like my real house, but my heart-house is more important because my children and their loving families are all inside my heart-house, the house that they can all call home. I love having them all when they come to visit.

When I first painted this picture I realised that there was only one path to the sea and no way in or out, so I painted a boat in the ocean, but the boat kept on sinking, so I painted over it. Now the boat is gone. The gates are there now, to keep us safe from the ocean. I painted a path to the top of the mountain so we can all come and go anywhere. We can still see the lovely ducks and even the ocean does not look so dark any more. We can stop and smell the roses, be happy, and enjoy life as it is.

Marim

Love and family every day in a life, caring and sharing

The sun shines on the world. The moon shows the night. I came to Australia by sea, that was when my life began, and I love the ocean. I travel a lot by the sea.

I have six children in my family tree. The love hearts are myself and my daughter, who I care for. The birds are peaceful, caring for the family. They are also a sign of the spirit of God over us.

Sometimes I am angry. I have my hands on my hips. The past flashes in front of you and upsets you, again. A dark person from my past appeared in my painting, I didn't even know I'd put him in!



The dark person, I put white spots on him to bring him peace. I didn't want to be angry anymore.

My hands are there to help to heal and care for my family. The blossom is the days of my life... that's how I love my life. Love has grown more and more every day around the family tree.

Margaret

Not just for fun

This visual expression of what I believe is my present identity as a carer is represented by three aspects of this painting; these aspects depict stages of my personal experience of caring for someone with mental ill-health.

The surreal clown figure expresses the shock and sadness of finding that my child had been diagnosed with this complex illness and the disturbingly surreal nature of having to communicate with someone whose sense of reality has become confused.

The roller coaster is my metaphor for the extreme highs and lows I have experienced as a carer since the diagnosis—high hopes suddenly dashed by some new setback— and the anxiety and fatigue that comes from having to ride what sometimes seems like an endless 'big dipper'.



The sunbeams are, however, precious rays of hope that I hold for the future and they have been made so much brighter through being able to express what has shaped my identity as a carer through art.

Tricia *Bruised*

I struggled for some time deciding how best to convey my experience as a carer. In the end I realised no one image was ever going to be completely representative.

My depiction of caring is harrowing and conveys hurt. The background is bleak. It's a vast landscape of bruising because mental ill-health bruises and no part of me is left untouched.

Placed atop the bruising is the carer's heart, strong and centred. I wanted it to be prominent. Sitting slightly above the canvas, it almost appears suspended and alive. Love as defiant. Elastic attached to the heart at different points, symbolises a pulling, and being black, it represents the dark force that mental ill-health is. Elastic also symbolises my resilience and a yielding heart. The yellow arc is hope, bright and undiminished.

The wire cage surrounding the heart represents how mental ill-health entraps. The heart is restricted. Freedom sacrificed. Mental ill-health creates boundaries and constraints. Yet love beats strong within the harsh and ugly wire.



The nail piercing the heart suggests pain and torture. The nail is the experience of mental ill-health – puncturing my deepest and most vulnerable centre. The use of wire, a nail and the exposed heart has a religious allusion, reminiscent of suffering, although this was unintentional. Despite the steely nail, the heart remains undamaged, and despite wounding and entrapment, it remains intact. Love unaltered. My heart is my most authentic and gentle place, however it also bears struggle and intense grief.

My greatest hope is that the experience of suffering is ultimately transformative. That love and strength prevail and hope is never lost.

Creative writing

Over the course of the year carers come and go to the creative writing sessions, this is due to life commitments but often appropriate to their caring role. Judy runs these as stand-alone sessions so that they do not feel they have missed out but will set homework, if a carer cannot attend, they always email to find out the homework. I am amazed at the enthusiasm and growth that these sessions produce in the carers. I would like to thank the carers who contributed the following pieces to this booklet.



The program has exceeded my expectations. I have found it truly rewarding and satisfying. Also wonderful to meet other carers...
(Participant)

Inge

Essential bee poem

Busy busy busy bee
Roaming flying free
Round a blossom tree..
Pollen is the key,
More than just debris.
Life! For you and me!
Honey honey funny,
Buy it with your money.
All await with glee,
Ambrosia is gooey,
All the food so chewy.
Busy busy busy bee,
How DARE we poison thee.

© Inge, 2015

“When you doodle and how you doodle and what you doodle”

I doodle (scribble) at meetings and when I am on the phone. I draw shapes or the alphabet over and over again. It ends up a mess.

It is as if the doodling enhances my listening skills, stops my mind from wandering. Sometimes I catch myself in the middle of listening, a bit like reading a book, realising that the speaker is five pages ahead of me and I skimmed over them all and never took in the details. A bit embarrassing to ask people, hang on, can you put that past me again? I think I have lost the plot.

Whilst reading, its easy ... page back to what you remember and start again. But when it's someone talking then you can't turn back the page but just have to imagine the blank bits in the middle, from where your mind took off on its own journey.

© Inge, 2015

Inge

Acrostic poetry

What fun we had
In our Writing class
So much to learn and share.
How lucky we were
In Judy our teacher,
Nobody could compare.
Gillian also did her best for

You and me,
On every morning we met
Understanding our special needs,

As carers of loved ones depressed

My gratitude goes out to all of you,

Each did your part.
Regardless how you felt,
Regardless how hard.
You made a difference.

Compassionately sharing.
Helping with your caring.
Recognising needs.
Inspirationally guiding.
Such kindness was displayed.
Thanks also to
Mind
Australia for
So great an opportunity.

© Inge, 2015

Dan
Dream

The release of dreams
When I dream I feel
Released
When I don't dream
I feel cheated
Sometimes I think that
If it were possible
I would spend
My entire life dreaming

© Dan, 2015

Touch

What touches us all?
What makes us touchy?
Who is in touch?
And
Who or what is
Out of touch?
Do you find it
Touching?

© Dan, 2015

Heather
The pool

It is 6:15 in the morning and the few dedicated swimmers rhythmically lap the dark pool.

You can hear their concentration and meditation as their arms and legs hit the water.

The dull hum of the traffic noise outside creates a constant background 'tone'.

Sometimes you get a vague smell of chlorine, perfume, car fumes - all the richness of inner suburban life. You can vaguely taste the salt and chlorine as you glide through the water and it envelopes your whole being.

I love doing backstroke and studying the different stages of the moon and the first star or planet in an indigo sky. I observe the various cloud formations and am moved by the magical hot air balloons that silently drift by. Vague steam often rises from the water. The coldness means you can't stop moving and have your arms out as it freezes you. You have to 'keep going' in the cold water.

It's to me very much like life..... You just have to just KEEP GOING!!!

© Heather, 2015

Carolyn
Frog dreaming

Croak, Croak. Where am I?
How did I get Here?
Why am I croaking?
Where is my bed?

I'm in a pond on top of a lily pad.
I'm in this slimy water, YUK.
How did I get here.
I'm a green frog, HOW?

I better get moving, it,s not going to be easy.
I can't, move my legs one after the other, guess I have to try and jump
my way out.
Here goes
SPLASH
Great, now I'm wet. I should have stayed on that lily pad.

LOOK.
There's Callie, my dog. She's a giant.
She's looking at me strange.
I wonder if she knows it's me.
Croak, croak.
She jumped back in fright, I didn't mean to scare her.

OH NO
There's Aero, our cat, I'm in trouble now. If he sees me he will eat me.
I better get jumping through this long grass.

BANG
That was loud, it's Callie's soccer ball and it's coming after me.
Phew, That was close, it just missed me.
Here comes Aero, he found me. I'm in trouble, Callie's running after him.
WOAH.

SUDDENLY
I woke with Callie laying next to me and Aero meowing for food.

© Carolyn, 2015

Karen
The happy box!

My greatest life-long challenge has been to become an expert at being a fully-functional human being. I have learned to treasure the smallest of delights and recall them in my melancholy moments; to use them to uplift my spirits, when day-to-day life has failed to do so. To help me gain this sense of expertise in being a fully-functional human being, I just recently developed a system for myself, and I called it the 'happy box'! I ask myself each day, is what I am going to be doing this day, going to tick the 'happy box'? And if the answer is yes, then it is included within my daily doings, and if the answer is no, I take the time out to ask myself, why do it at all in that case? My mental wellbeing has greatly benefited from this approach – this fully-functional human being challenge – feeling good about life. Thank you 'happy box'...

© Karen, 2015

"How precious time is..."

"Just sit here while I walk across here to get your script."

My husband dutifully sat, looking pale, weak and sickly. I was afraid he would not live through those terrible chemotherapy treatments. This experience that I shared with him has left me understanding how precious our time together has been, and is still today!

© Karen, 2015

Support

Support me please! I need your support, don't turn away and leave me standing here alone and destitute, I need you. I know, I know, I am a pain and I know I ask for too much, but don't leave me – I will not make it without you – come back – don't go. It's OK, I can be strong, I will be strong, I will support me, I can do it – yes I have done it – thank self...

© Karen, 2015

Margaret

The gum

It is such a peaceful place with steps down to the river, a big bluestone bbq and an inviting banana lounge to daydream on. Only the serene sounds of birds to break the silence but, today, something is wrong. It is only 8 o'clock and I can hear a terrible buzzing sound coming from the front of the block. I open the door to have a look and my neighbour is also peering out of his window. We wave, and shrug our shoulders in dismay. It's the sound of chainsaws and workers are here to cut down two beautiful old gum trees.

I knew this day would come. There had been discussions and disputes about these trees for many years and the cards were finally stacked against them. Outnumbered, outsmarted, outdone, out in the cold - the tree haters had won! These anti-greens were about 'neat and tidy' sweeping away leaves, putting up new fences, hedge loving and trimming, everything in its place, controlling anything that might grow and 'take over'. Yes, they had finally succeeded and we were now saying goodbye to those beautiful gums that had kept us cool in summer, oozed with the evocative aroma of eucalyptus, and where countless birds had played, sung and courted, while shiny-eyed pussy cats eyed them longingly from below.

© Margaret, 2015

The feather

The feather looks like waves of sound
The sound of wind, a gentle breeze
Sound of the sea, flying on high
Monotones
Soft tones
A lullaby
The sky song
Sound of the wings flapping by
The ripples of water
Grey and white clouds
High tones, then low tones
Of black and white and grey
The duck feather singing on the wing of the clouds

©Margaret, 2015

Lainie

The awakening of spring

Letting, the gentle, golden sunbeams
kiss my face over and over again.

Allowing, the warm, enticing breezes
to caress and play with my hair.

Delighting, in the petite pink and white blossoms
as they delicately alight on me.

Pausing, to feel the sun-shower
rain drops, tingle on my skin.

Listening intently, as bird songs
return, to bring pleasure to my days.

Enjoying, immersing myself in Boronia
Perfume, as it wafts and lingers
in the backyard garden.

Spring is awakening my senses
with exquisite joy as it tenderly
awakens nature all around me.

© Lainie 2015

Gillian

What Australia means to me

Thank you for the long sandy beaches that warm my toes filled with children's laughter free to explore its beauty.

Thank you for the birds that laugh with me whilst strolling by the creek on my daily walk.

Thank you for embracing my ancestors who fled from war torn countries to build a new life.

Thank you for giving us space to roam with your bright blue skies and vibrant dessert colours.

Thank you for the dreamtime that resonates throughout me.

Thank you for vegemite that comforts me when I am not with you.

Thank you for being young at heart inspiring creativity within me but wise in beyond the depths of our aboriginal cultural.

Thank you for the Southern Cross that twinkles above me, captured by the milky way.

There are times when I miss you travelling around the globe as you hold my family and my heart. Solo you stand, fighting drought, fires and floods. The winds carry your stories and dreamtimes. The skies reflect your mood, bright and fun or raging with thunder. The beaches and reefs hold another world and garden beneath that I have been privileged to witness. The mountains, rivers and streams meander slowly through the country that captures native birds and animals that symbolise you – Australia. You are unique and I'm glad that I met you.

© Gillian 2015

Tricia

Humour/my friend

She was flaxen haired, wily. A surfie chick from a farm. No-one I'd ever met was or is quite like her. She was wicked, impish. Pure brilliance. But she was a bully of sorts and we brought out the best and worst in each other.

She found or if necessary, invented humour in everything, everybody. Nothing was spared, nothing was sacred. Fodder lay in every corner. There was always a prank waiting, a situation about to be twisted or inverted.

We lived on the precipice of fun and trouble, my friend and me. Living like this was all that mattered. It was addictive and the antidote to boarding school boredom and predictability. Schoolwork and adults who tried to discipline us were irrelevant – mostly in our way. They had to be negotiated, suffered or dodged. To think we were so fearless, so dismissive. So uninterested in maturity.

We grew up and not everything was laughable anymore, but I thank my friend who brought me to life, lightened my heavy soul and offered me the headiness of fun.

© Tricia 2015

Tricia Hands

The box that said, 'Memories' sat in front of Nance. She noticed other people too had boxes with the same name. The lady whose badge read, 'Lifestyle' talked to her like she was a child, coercing her into opening the lid on 'Memories'. Nance didn't want to do this, but that didn't seem to matter. The other young girl who often worked here, snatched around at the trinkets in the Memories box, choosing items and seemed impatient with Nance.

Nance looked beyond the girl, to the tree in the garden and its gnarled bunched roots – they reminded her of her hands. Hands she hardly recognised now – deformed, strange growths, like knobs of ginger.

She remembered how these hands were once strong and obedient when they deftly tossed and tied bales of hay, stretched dough, pinched the flesh of raspberries til the juice bled, cupped the jaw of her young son and deliberately worked their way over a lover's skin. Her hands enabled her to be a skilled knitter. She could orchestrate the rhythmic dance of wool and needles without bothering to look at her work. Her hands knew what to do.

Now the 'Lifestyle' lady with the sing-song condescending voice punctured Nance's thought chain. Apparently the memory session was finished and the hands of the young girl snapped shut the lid on Nance's box of memories.

© Tricia, 2015

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