



PEOPLE IN PROGRESS

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**Summer
2004**

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Welcome to the second edition of People In Progress. This Newsletter is written for Consumer/Survivors by Consumer/Survivors. This year's edition focuses on CREATIVITY. It was compiled from a variety of people who allowed us the honor of sharing in their creative processes and work.

Many people throughout history have suffered from mental illness and yet were able to find self expression amidst the darkness. French Composer Hector Berlioz who dealt with depression wrote, "it is difficult to put into words what I suffered." Many people today are rediscovering the arts as a way of self-expression within the context of mental illness.

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide an opportunity for information exchange, a venue for Consumer creativity, and to help identify available resources to those living in the area. This issue has passed through many hands along the way towards its final copy. I would like to thank all those involved with the Project, the contributors, participants, and in particular you the reader. You make it all worthwhile. Although not all submissions could be included in this issue, a file has been retained for future consideration. Future publications may appear in a different format depending on reader participation, contributions and available resources.

Jim Lonie, CSDP, Project Coordinator

Consumer Survivors

Find strength through self expression

If each of the birds in the forest waited until the bird with the most beautiful song could sing, the forest would be silent.

Anonymous

The seeds of creativity live in everyone. People can invent, imagine, problem-solve, express and communicate in fresh, new ways. Writing is a form of communication with benefits ranging from improving self-expression and memory, reinforcing learning, expanding vocabulary, clarifying thought processes and encouraging curiosity. Several individuals participating in the Writing Workshops series offered in Grey Bruce by the Consumer/Survivor Development Project helped to compile a list of the ways that writing exists in our lives. These include journaling, song lyrics, list writing, storytelling, poetry, personal ranting, letter writing and doodling. As feelings and ideas are expressed, identi-

fied and explored writing encourages creative thinking, safe risk taking as well as help with developing a sense of self and individual uniqueness.

The list of great literary artists who suffered from some sort of mental illness is almost endless: Edgar Allan Poe, William Blake, Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Hans Christian Anderson and Charlotte Bronte to name only a few. Christine Robson, a qualified art therapist says that "being outwardly creative instead of inwardly negative" makes art valuable. But creativity is not limited to the written word, we can crayon or paint with colour, collage with a collection of magazine pictures, knit some yarn, whittle wood or use whatever supplies we need to practice self-expression. Why not draw from your own artistic reservoir and metaphorically help fill the forests with song? **Cont'd on pg. 2**



Mental Health
Resource Library

Suggested books to muse over

The Artist's Way
&
The Vein of Gold
Julia Cameron

Life, Paint and
Passion,
*Michelle Tasson
& Stewart Culbey*

Creating
Optimism,
*Bob Murray & Alice
Fortinberry*

Find strength cont'd

For starters, take a look at some of the submissions in this newsletter that people have generously shared for publication, or read a book that promotes creativity (see the list of resources available through the CNST Mental Health Library), or take a walk in nature to reconnect with the Earth's own exquisite and inspiring beauty.

Allow me now to close with a wonderful quote from Michelle Tasson and Stewart Culbey, authors of Life,

Paint and Passion (also available through the CNST library): "[Artistic] creation is a response ... wherever you are is the entry point ... a line, a scribble, a rough image. Instead of struggling and forcing something special to happen, you do what you can do ... And that already is enormous."

*Louise Chase, CSDP
Project Assistant*

Poetry is a creative outlet

Laughter Is A House of Prayer

Laughter is a house of prayer
A shelter from the rain of cares
Transcending mortar, brick and wood
Embracing all that's real and good
It pulls the widow from her grief
It feeds the poor a true relief
It heals the sick with joyous song
It judges not 'twixt right and wrong.
Samantha F.

"2 B as 1"

I've decided to go inside my inside
Leaving my outside to the other side
Grasping places of slick dimension
Released of the pain fueled extension
So let's go backward sideways
So I can see straight side rays
Of you and I beside us now.
Troy N.

My Brother Joe

The other day
Joe passed away
So I'd like to know
Where did you go, my brother Joe?

Did you go up above
And are you still watching over us
I'd like to know
Where did you go, my brother Joe?

Don't you know
How much we love you so
I'd like to know
Where did you go, my brother Joe?

Cause when you died
You didn't even say goodbye
So I'd like to know
Where did you go, my brother Joe?
Mary G.

Word Play

Word play can be defined as any activity using words in a creative way including as a mnemonic device, organized rhyme, puzzle, or nonsensical poem. Participants at the recent workshops were invited to take a handful of random words on small individualized squares of paper and try to arrange a written composition that flowed and could capture the imagination.

Using this approach to writing, Leslie C. agreed to share the following poem called Word Play:
Astroturf light grows like
eyelashes
round the lavender envelope
which shimmering twilight
hands the bumpy stumpy
elephant

Interview

Artist states that creativity helps her process strong feelings

Leslie C. is a consumer/survivor who has lived throughout North America and is now a resident of GreyBruce and has written most of her life in genres which include, poetry, essays, journaling, wordplay and the text in an illustrated Abecedary. Recently Leslie agreed to an interview with Louise Chase to explore the role and value of creativity in her life.

When and how did you first become interested in the creative arts?

Leslie: *I have been writing since I was six or seven years old, but I started using colours much earlier with drawing. I also like photography and knitting, too. I am probably most familiar with writing though and use a variety of different forms such as word play, poetry, poetic prose.*

After my daughter died I was in a terrible state, I could hardly express myself but I started to draw, doodle really. I began to draw palm trees and other representational images. My daughter was buried in Florida and I had yet to visit her burial site, but then these images and colours began to emerge. After a time, the poetry followed; first a really angry poem and then later a calmer poem evolved. But there was quite a contrast between the two, which clearly marked the different stages of grief I was going through.

What have been your influences in writing and creative expression?

Leslie: *Books! One of the first books I read was Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll. I would read and re-read this kind of book even at an early age. After a while I realized that such flights of imagination or ideas don't have to remain ephemeral and simply vanish into thin air, but can be documented and put down on paper. I also read books like The Diary of Anne Frank as a child. More recently I like the work of Margaret Atwood, Joyce Carol Oates and Elizabeth Smart. But I have also read The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron and practiced what is known as the morning pages for about two years. From there, I have*

read even more directive literature containing various writing prompts like those written in Writing Down the Bones – Freeing the Writer Within by Natalie Goldman and Writing the Mind Alive by Linda Trichter Metcalf & Simon Tobin.

During what times and places have you felt most creative in your life?

Leslie: *Often when I am not in the best place, mood wise. The things that come out during such times of challenge and difficulty are often more creative and honest. I like to stay away from ever sounding too “Pollyanna”. Although I may be temporarily immobilized when I am processing really strong and intense feelings like those surrounding grief, interpersonal conflict, disputes, anger and sorrow, writing or some form of creative self-expression is typically the first place I move into. Even if I don't get dressed all day, I will still pick up a pencil and notebook or some crayons and drawing pad.*

Tell me about the benefits you experience in making art and writing.

Leslie: *Creativity is an avenue of expression that prevents me from feeling so bottled up inside. When I pick up my colours or begin to write I no longer feel locked in. Things move.*

How do you address temporary blocks in your creativity?

Leslie: *I don't really experience what a person might call “a block”. Either I am writing or I'm not writing. I don't think of it in terms of blocks. But I do nurture my internal artist. I will jot down a phrase that catches my fancy and maybe write about it later, or I'll look through my art books and listen to different music, collect stones when I am out walking in different places. Actually, just seeing a landscape, in real life or photography, on television or in film is inspiring. A beautiful landscape can really grab me – it's like a spiritual home.*

Louise Chase, CS DP

Writing Alone and With Others,
Pat Schneider

How To Grow A Novel,
Sol Stein

The Practical Writer,
Therese Eiben & Mary Gannon

Witness to the Fire – Creativity & The Veil of Addiction,
Linda Schierse Leonard

Writing the Mind Alive,
Linda Trichter Metcalf & Simon Tobin

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**People in
Progress**

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Aspiration and Ability We can learn valuable lessons from our life journeys

Hope

Hope is a word I use quite a lot.
It helps me when I'm feeling down.
I use it when I see others are in need.
Hope encourages me to look on the
brighter side.
It's a word I use in good times or in bad.
Hope is a word I use quite a lot.

Jean A.

Roses Can't Swim

Roses can't swim
They lay on the surface
Even in their beauty
A beauty that in days
Gone by brought admiration,
"The Garden Goddess"
plucked, taken to a place of helplessness.
I reach, reach, reach
Thorns bring blood.
Finally I give up
This is not over
I will reach you.

Anne C.

A Lifetime of Living (To Do)

I haven't written my magnum opus yet
I'm not ready to write my masterpiece
I believe I have more learning experiences
to go through
No one has yet seen the best of me.

I have a lifetime of living to do
I haven't gone too far for a start
The world hasn't unfolded in front of my
eyes
Someday I'll catch myself a rising star.
Very little has been unraveling
And so my search has no choice but to
continue
The pages of my diary have to be filled
I have a vocation I'm set out to pursue.

Taking it day by day is paramount
Moving with the delicate wind of change
Each of us has daily schooling
The lessons stay with us for always
I still need on occasion a little help
I look to the sky for salvation
I have miles to go on this emotional
journey
Embracing change makes all the
difference.

I have not lived my finest hour
The years thus far have been good to me
I'm not done, not by a long shot
I move steadily along everyday closer to
my peak
I still need to receive the touch of love
To know I can look into a pair of loving
eyes
I have to believe in miracles
Otherwise I have no faith.
Randy B.

Closing Words You have something to contribute

There is something you know that an-
other is seeking. There is a feeling you
understand, an experience you have had
that can be of use to someone else. Shar-
ing that is creative activism. It is the al-
chemy of transforming the events of our
lives into stories and images that have a
force of their own, that keeps us mindful,

joyful, that remind us there are other
ways, gentler ways to create a world. You
came here to create something. You have
purpose and something to contribute.
There is no greater joy than being true to
that.

Jan Phillips, from *Marry Your Muse*