

This essay comes to us from one of the founding members of Cornucopia, Donna M. It was originally printed in the October, 2000 newsletter. I think it contains such words of wisdom that it is time to share it again.

I Wonder- Why Art?

Cornucopia's members have been asked, "Why does art help people recover?" As a group we have begun to form an answer to that question.

When you sit down at an empty canvas you bring more order and control to your world by harnessing your ideas and putting them down on paper. Even if you are only drawing a series of circles and filling them in, it is a way to focus and bring your ideas under your control.

Ownership is important. No one else owns that canvas but you. Very often, people make decisions about your life. At Cornucopia, you make the decisions about your own creative process. Recovery is about increasing the places in life where you have control.

When you begin to take pride in what you are doing, the process of recovery deepens. People's self esteem has been so wounded by the assault of mental illness that it is wonderful to take pride in what you are doing. Sometimes people do extraordinary art, but even if you put three lines together in a way that satisfies you, it may be very important. We love everybody's art at Cornucopia. Many people at Cornucopia have periods of grave illness, and our appreciation of art and our support for fellow members springs from that deep place. And no one can provide that but people who have been there.

Several people mentioned that art brings color to a drab world. Depression turns the world into a very colorless place and art can often bring color back into your world. I colored in coloring books when I was recovering from clinical depression, and it helped a great deal.

Art often brings internal peace, and helps empty our minds of obsessive thoughts or worries. One of our members who had obsessive thoughts about cutting herself molded a Goddess of Cutting out of clay and rid herself of that obsessive thought, at least temporarily. In a way, it helps all of us who look at it because it is about letting go of obsessive thoughts. Again, it is about control.

When you are well on the road to recovery, art may involve problem solving and critical judgment. Art requires discipline and the continuing need to practice.

Many people with mental illness have a natural aptitude for art and no place to do it. People who are on SSI are unable to afford supplies (which are very expensive) and often live in small places where there is no room to do art.

We welcome you to our space.

- Donna M