



Acts of Discovery with Paper and Pencil

As told by Carolyn Corbett BS, BFA, MFA

Poetry is the individual imagination made actual, touchable and real. Poetry and the imagination have the power to re-invent, re-imagine and re-conceive what it means to be alive.

My name is Carolyn Corbett and every day I get to work with our Resident-Neighbors here at Northeast Center for Special Care including persons with traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury as they create original works of writing and poetry.

I believe that all of us are constantly in our own therapeutic process of seeking to be whole. How much more so people who have been injured. I think people who have experienced an injury and loss are seeking a rapture of life. To me why Northeast Center for Special Care is so brilliant is that we offer people tools for people to reach out for life and give our Resident-Neighbors a hope to rebuild their lives.

Carolyn Corbett BS, BFA, MFA, Director of the Writing and Poetry Program.



To me, it's almost mythological how I came to work at Northeast Center. I had relocated to upstate New York a couple of years ago and I was looking for work. I visited my undergraduate college which is in the area to attend an art exhibition. While there I saw an employment notice from Northeast Center that said they were looking for someone with my experience to work with individuals with traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury in the Fine Arts Program. I literally almost jumped through the ceiling of the building. I said "That's my job!" I knew at that

moment that I just had to do that job. I couldn't get to a phone fast enough. I had several interviews and then I came on board.

Originally I started experimenting by doing theatre with Resident-Neighbors. I soon discovered that during the groups I facilitated that people were saying some profound things and what they were saying was so full of depth, soul and wisdom that I realized that we had tapped into a very therapeutic process. One day I gave the group-members paper and pencils and it just burgeoned from there. Our Resident-Neighbors began creating some extraordinary works of poetry. With the support of my supervisors at Northeast Center we created the writing program.

I've learned that no matter what a persons cognitive or physical circumstances are people have a desire to share things that are uniquely their own. I see that in much of the writing that our Resident-Neighbors do. People want to see their creations and they want others to see it as well. It's like acorns that become tall oaks. I think people who have been injured eventually want to grow again and that my role is feeding and nurturing the tree to help it grow; in this case the trees are individuals with brain and spinal cord injury. I approach the work I do with the questions: how can I assist them? How can I support them and help them realize their own unique potential and sharing it with the world? I try to empathize with Resident-Neighbors. I try to see myself as having the same injury and I treat everyone as if it were me.



Carolyn Corbett working with a Resident-Neighbor to select a “descriptive” word for a new poem.

I was always interested in the arts. During high school I had been studying during the summers at Oberlin College, they had a wonderful theatre program where I studied Shakespeare with Patrick Stewart when I was fifteen and sixteen. I took a year off after high school and then entered Methodist College in Southern Indiana and was accepted to their BFA program in theatre. I attended Methodist for two years and decided that I wanted to expand to the visual arts so I transferred to SUNY New Paltz, in upstate New York. Later I attended New York University as a graduate student and studied acting.

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I also worked with the Metropolitan Opera Guild in New York City; they have a program called "Creating Original Opera," where they train artists in the community to go into the New York City school system and develop original operas with a designated class of thirty-five-forty students. I am also a writer, film-maker and actor.

Resident-Neighbors who go through the specialized rehabilitation program at Northeast Center for Special Care are truly some of the most interesting and unique individuals I've ever met. I work with one Resident-Neighbor who because of a brain injury tends to repeat things she says and has a difficult time focusing when being verbal. However, when writing, she is one of the most eloquent people I've ever read. Because of her writing I've discovered that she is a passionate person which has impressed me a great deal.

On a different occasion a Resident-Neighbor came into the group for the first time and I gave him paper and a pencil. That day I had given the group a one word theme to write on. I watched him as he spent two hours intently focused on writing a paragraph. He never looked away from the paper and appeared immersed in thought. What he wrote was a very simple story about an event that had happened in his life; but what was inside that simple story was something bigger - the human story. These little pieces of writing contain the whole human tale in all of its wonder.

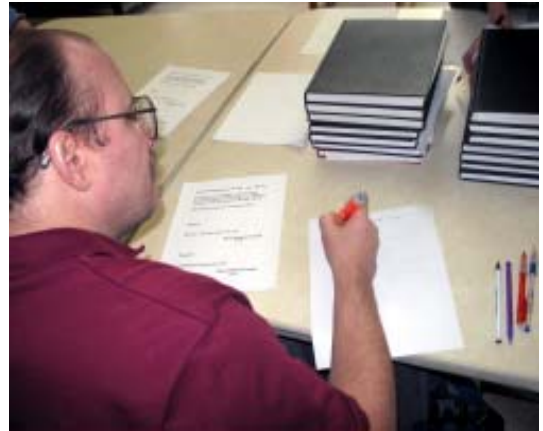


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I believe that poetry engages the brain, body and heart of a person. Poems are an act of discovery that is why it is so therapeutic. I see our Resident-Neighbors as alchemists - through their writings they make gold. I feel privileged to be able to witness this - I am thankful to be around them.

To be apart of the specialized rehabilitation programs at Northeast Center for Special Care and to have an affect on the people we assist to recover and reenter the community feels to me like the most important thing I will ever do.

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Carolyn is another talented member of our unique Team. Our mission drives our philosophy and treatment programs. Our successful outcomes of assisting people to return to the community are recognized worldwide.

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