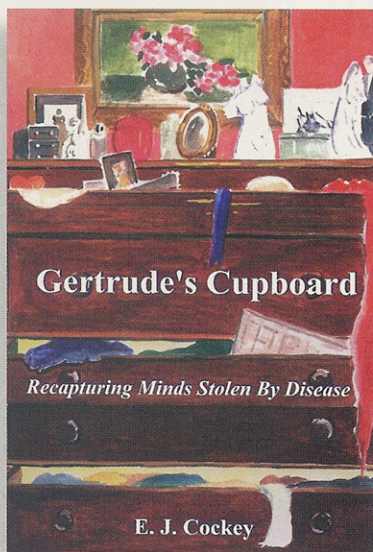


Therapy that Makes You Laugh



"The most remarkable thing is touching the human spirit. When we let that come out in a safe place, everybody gets better."

Elizabeth Cockey uses art to rehabilitate people's minds and limbs.

For more than a decade she has worked with Alzheimer's patients and people living with stroke dementia. She has seen many of these people improve, and even those who don't get better long-term had fun in the group art lesson.

Elizabeth is the author of *Gertrude's Cupboard: Recapturing Minds Stolen by Disease*. It's about using art to treat Alzheimer's patients.

According to the American Art Therapy Association, art therapy is based on the belief that the creative process in making art is both healing and life-enhancing. Through creating and discussing art, and the process of making art with an art therapist, a person can increase awareness of self.

People involved in art therapy can better cope with illness, disabilities, stress and traumatic experiences. They can enhance cognitive abilities as well, and enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of artistic creativity.

Art therapy always involves the making of art, typically painting or drawing, but sometimes working in clay. "I always work with groups in nursing homes and retirement communities," Elizabeth said. "They'll have me for an hour once a week, and I see definite progress after as little as 20 hours. It's a lot more interesting than squeezing a nerf ball. We paint with non-toxic tempera paint. I have large classes, 10-15 people, and besides painting, there's a lot of laughing."

Elizabeth has worked with a number of people with stroke dementia, which can occur after a stroke, and said they often improve the most.

In addition to cognitive recovery, Elizabeth has seen patients recover the use of limbs. "When someone restores the use of an arm, it makes it possible for them to do their activities of daily living, which makes a big difference to their caregiver."

Success in art therapy requires the same motivation that success in other forms of therapy requires. "It doesn't happen overnight. It takes a lot of repetition to create a new neurological pathway," Elizabeth said. One of the therapist's main jobs is to keep people focused, which can be challenging with dementia patients.

"The most remarkable thing is touching the human spirit. When we let that come out in a safe place, everybody gets better. Sometimes on the way home, I'm grateful because I got to spend time with these beautiful souls and help bring them out." **SC**

For more information on art therapy, visit the Web site of the American Art Therapy Association at www.arttherapy.org, or e-mail at info@arttherapy.org. You can find Elizabeth's book online at Amazon.com.