REFLECTION: An Art Workbook for People with Cancer and Those Who Love Them

Written & Illustrated by Holly Garces
ABOUT

Reflection: An Art Workbook for People with Cancer and Those Who Love Them was created by Art Therapist, Holly Garces. Garces facilitates Art Angels, a Krasl Art Center (KAC) program funded by Spectrum Health Lakeland. Art Angels provides individual hands-on art activities for patients and family members experiencing medical stress.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Garces has not been able to work directly with individuals, as she typically would at the Marie Yeager Cancer Center and Spectrum Health Lakeland Pediatrics Unit. This workbook was developed to provide art experiences during such times when a facilitator cannot be present. Garces & Krasl Art Center are excited to share this new addition to the Art Angels program.

INTRODUCTION

Holly Garces grew up in the beautiful northern town of Petoskey, Michigan. Some of her earliest memories are of painting with watercolors on the side porch of her home. She has always found artmaking to be a best friend, always there in good times and bad. She received her Masters of Science in Art Therapy in 2007 from Mount Mary University, Milwaukee, WI. Garces started working with Krasl Art Center in 2016. She also works in private practice, providing art therapy counseling in the community. Garces brings to her work a lifelong love of art and a desire to help people access new parts of themselves and see new possibilities in the world around them.

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this book to my mother, and all of the loved ones who who leave this earth too soon from cancer. My mother’s love lives on in me, and I strive each day to share her love with others.

I hope each person, whether patient, caregiver or loved one, will allow their own images and words to come out onto these pages. I hope that by allowing yourself the space to create, you will find small glimpses of beauty and truth, in spite of all the heartache and pain of cancer. We cannot yet wave a magic wand to erase cancer, but we can choose to pick up all the colors and play anyway.
HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is intended to be used by anyone impacted by cancer (patients, caregivers, family, and friends). While the language is geared towards the patient with cancer, the art exercises can easily be done by non-patients as well. You can use this book as a personal journey or as a way to share and process through the exercises with others. By sharing your work with others, you can help them better understand your own feelings, struggles and experiences. Sharing our art can build stronger connections.

I have included images alongside each art exercise to provide examples of how you might get started. If doing the art exercise feels like too much to process or take on, these images - along with full pages of illustrations - are there for you to color. Sometimes “just coloring” is enough.

The art exercises are just that: exercises. You may not have made art in a very long time, and that’s ok. They do not need to be great works of art. Your aim is expression, not perfection. Just getting something, anything, on the paper is enough. Allow yourself to be playful and curious. Allow yourself to be bold and brave. Take a risk. Make mistakes. Because there is nothing to lose and so much to gain. This is your open invitation to go wild, no rules, make art!
CHANGES
Cancer suddenly steals your attention, time and energy. At first you might just feel numb to the whole thing. Cancer can impact and create changes and losses in almost every aspect of life: physical, psychological, social, spiritual, financial, and vocational. Cancer changes plans for the future and throws our normal routine out the window. It unfairly impacts those we love and changes our roles in relationships. Cancer can change your body, appearance, appetite, energy loss, and possible cognitive and memory changes. The commonly used phrase “Cancer Sucks” is true through and through.
**Art Exercise:** Make a small image of cancer in the center of the page. Take a few moments to acknowledge all the ways you see change happening as a result of cancer. Make a larger circle around the cancer and write all these down in that space. If you want, add images and colors to help convey the emotional impact of these changes. By naming these changes and acknowledging they are real, you are bringing a deeper awareness to them. It is an act of power and courage to face and name these changes.
REFLECTIONS
Cancer draws a line in the sand. It creates a distinct before and after diagnosis. Try to stay connected to the person you were the day before you knew. Let that help guide you and be an inner voice of support for yourself. Like a best friend, the person you were before diagnosis is still there and can be a kind and compassionate presence.
Art Exercise: Create a reflection of yourself before and after cancer diagnosis. The reflection could be in a mirror or on still water. You can represent yourself in human form or as anything you wish (a tree, animal, cloud, structure, machine, or abstract shape). You will make two versions of yourself: the real/true self and the reflected self. The idea is to acknowledge the challenges you are currently facing due to cancer and at the same time stay connected to your true self and all you are without cancer.
Feel all the uncomfortable feelings: shocked, afraid, anxious, stressed, scared, frustrated, empty, betrayed, angry, sad, helpless, annoyed, guilty, awful, lonely, powerless, pressured, overwhelmed, uncertain, confused, vulnerable, and withdrawn.

You are entitled to experience all of these difficult feelings and more. But you are more than the feelings.

Giving your feelings a texture, color, and shape can help give you some distance from them. Having them on the paper is a way to see that you are more than your feelings.
Art Exercise:
We feel and experience emotions physically in addition to what is in our minds.

First, list the emotions that challenge you the most.

Next, take a few moments to let yourself feel each emotion you listed and consider how it shows up for you in your body.

Now select a color to represent that emotion and draw how it feels in your body when you have that emotion. Use patterns, line quality, texture, and shading to express each feeling. For example, fear could be gray fog over your eyes, or betrayal could be big purple rocks around your feet.
CALMING NATURE
Like ever moving water, your feelings can and will change. You cannot laugh forever. You cannot cry forever. While it is vital to feel challenging emotions, it is possible to become stuck in them. And knowing how to shift out of them is just as vital to our mental health and wellbeing.
Art Exercise: The stress of cancer can be overwhelming and exhausting. In this exercise take a moment to use cool and calming colors (all shades of blues and greens) to create nature-inspired images. Connecting to the natural world is a powerful tool. Nature will not judge or expect anything of you, and you can hand over all your stress and worry. Nature can help hold it and wash it away.
GROUNDING & REACHING
A tree can grow and stand strong because of its deep and far reaching roots. An aspect of feeling grounded is feeling secure in ourselves. Connecting to these things can help us to feel more confident and sure about who we are and our strength to hold strong against challenges. Feeling grounded can also allow us to reach out and help others around us. When we can find small ways to share our kindness with others, it allows our tree to grow. Helping others affirm our worth.
Art Exercise: Think about what keeps you grounded. Connect to a favorite tree and draw an image of it in the space provided. Be sure to add the tree’s deep reaching roots. On each root write something that makes you feel grounded. On the branches and leaves add ways you can help and show kindness to others in need. It could be as simple as sharing a smile with a nurse or fellow patient in the waiting room. Color the image with bright and joyful colors.
HOLD ON, HAND OVER
Explore your level of control in this circumstance. You did not choose this. In many ways life will feel out of your control. You may feel shock, disbelief, and/or anger upon diagnosis. As you enter treatment you might become overwhelmed, anxious, and fearful of the uncertainty of it all. Understanding what you can and cannot control helps you to know where to focus your thoughts, time, and energy.
Art Exercise:
What is in my hands to hold and control? What can I hand over to others and allow them to help me carry? On the page you see two baskets. In one basket think of those things that you have the strength and power to carry. Write out each thing. Now fill the basket with visual representations for each thing you have the power to carry. In the other basket repeat the process but this time thinking of those things you can allow others to help carry for you. Again fill this with images of the things others will help to carry for you.
CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

Surround yourself with support. The power of connection with others can help carry you through. For example, who has your back? Who is in front of you guiding your way? Who is walking beside you holding you hand? Who is looking down on you with love from above? You can carry this love from others with you, always. Know you are not alone.
Art Exercise: Create a small image of yourself in the center circle. In the second circle think of those you want to keep closest to you, those you may interact with daily. Now make either a symbol or image that represents each person closest to you. In the next circle think of those individuals that you want to keep in contact with on a weekly or biweekly basis. Again, create visual representation for each person. For the last circle think of those you might not be able to see or talk to, but they pop up in your thoughts often. Again make visual symbols for each person that lives in your heart and thoughts.
GROWING GRATITUDE
Cancer shifts our lives in so many unexpected ways. It can open us up to see and hold tight to the people and experiences that bring meaning to our lives, in a way we might have not before cancer. We can see how suddenly it all can change and that time is truly one of our greatest gifts. We can see that even in our weakest moments we are truly powerful beyond measure.
Art Exercise: Plant and harvest your field of gratitude. Start by naming your gratitude - notice the small moments, tiny gifts of each day, and cherished memories. In this field, plant all the things you are grateful for: big blooming red roses, tiny blue forget-me-nots, towering sunflowers, rows of ripe summer tomatoes, vines of plump grapes, trees of sun warmed peaches, and crisp fall apples. Let your field of gratitude overflow with the growth of all the big and little moments you are grateful for, yesterday, today and tomorrow.
PROUD WARRIOR
Arm yourself. You have been called into battle and need to arm yourself with weapons and tools to fight this cancer: doctors, nurses, treatments, tests, meds, rest, nutrition, social support, spiritual support, meaningful activities, connection to nature, music, play, pets, reading, laughter, smiles, hugs, holding hands, and warm sunshine on your face. Arm yourself for battle and feed your body, mind and soul to fight with fierce grace.

This is an image of my mother, the Warrior of Love.
Art Exercise:
You are the warrior/superhero. In the space provided, create an image of yourself, armed with all the tools, super powers, weapons, and armor you will need to fight. You are already more powerful than you can imagine. And while you might not believe it, know that someone is seeing your fight and is in pure awe and amazement at how truly beautiful and powerful you are at this very moment.

Thank you for creating with us.