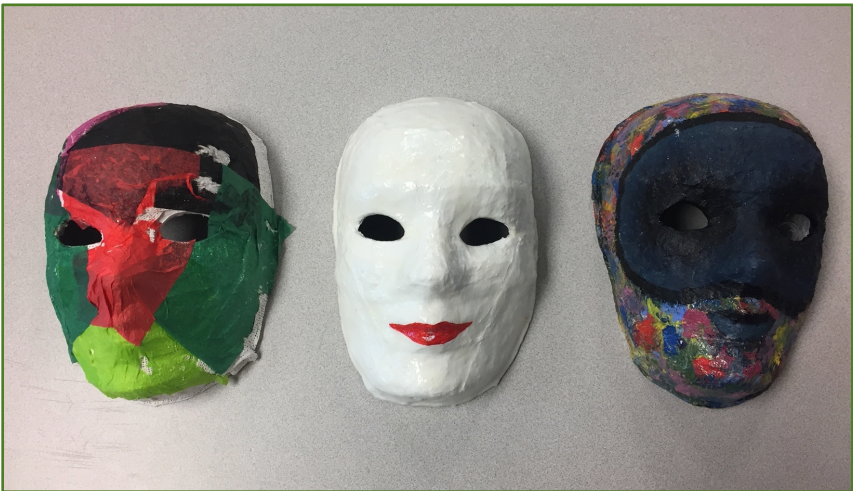




FROM THE HEART

A Collection of Writing and Art



Dartmouth
Health

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Foreword

The Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center Arts and Humanities Program is one of the many ways Dartmouth Health is trying to lessen the devastating symptoms of mental illness. In reflecting on the world of literature, history shows that writing is one of the most effective ways to quiet the mind.

My father found this to be the case. In the most graphic of ways, he wrote about his hallucinations:

“My imagination took on the speed of light.”

“I visualized the migration of a tiger-like creature who flew on silver wings from a distant planet to earth, thousands of years ago.”

He reflected later in his manuscript that putting his thoughts to paper was a big help in handling the stresses of his illness as well as his in-patient status.

And this is exactly what Marv Klassen-Landis is encouraging with patients. This collection of poetry is a remarkable accomplishment.

What I see in these beautiful poems is courage, raw courage. In order to write as vividly and honestly as these patients do, one has to have gained some insight into their own disease. The guidance and encouragement given to them by Marv is what makes this collection an inspiration to others.

And lastly, I was interested in the many references to nature in these poems. When the new hospital was built back in the early 1990s, the architects made a huge effort to preserve the woods around the buildings. This vision paid off. Being able to view trees, bushes, wildlife and sculpture out the windows has a serene feeling, a feeling that is definitely healing.

Congratulations to these talented poets and to Marv and his superb team.

Mimi Baird

Author of *He Wanted the Moon: The Madness and Medical Genius of Dr. Perry Baird, and His Daughter's Quest to Know Him* and a proud supporter of the Dartmouth Health Arts and Humanities Program.



Introduction

When I was approached by Marianne Barthel to see if the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center inpatient psychiatry therapy department would like the opportunity to work with the Creative Arts Team writer Marv Klassen-Landis, my initial response was no, due to my personal discomfort with writing, journaling and expressive arts. Subsequently, I thought the patients deserved an opportunity to explore their issues from a different approach than I offer them and welcomed Marv into the program in 2017.

Marv comes weekly. I give him a theme and he exposes our patients to many different writing techniques, some very serious, some funny, some exploratory and some just plain fun. The work patients have created and the self-reflection of their work has been purely magical.

The following are words they have used to express their time with Marv in the writing group: *appreciate, power, surprise, therapeutic, deep, fun, unsure, movement, in depth.*

One patient was surprised by how his writing flowed out and said, "I proved to myself I can get water out of a rock."

Another said, "Even though we're not living the same thing, we're in the same struggle. This helps me get out of my own head and see other ways of thinking." A patient once asked in reference to our group writing: "How does this work?"

I often reflect on this question, and I am pleasantly surprised to see patients' involvement, excitement and pleasure in what they create together and individually.

Lisa Cudhea, MA

Many of the poems in this anthology were written collaboratively; others were submitted by individuals. Patients created the masks during special art sessions with artist Chris Henderson and Sophie Tell. I encouraged mask makers to also write what the mask might say if it could speak.

Many thanks to Lisa Cudhea. With her presence, participants know that all voices and experiences will be accepted and affirmed in a safe setting.

Thanks to Director of Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center Arts and Humanities Program, Marianne Barthel, and donor Mimi Baird for their support and encouragement. And I have deep gratitude for all the workshop participants who have chosen to take the healthy risk of joining in and expressing themselves from the heart!

Marv Klassen-Landis, MA

Mountain Peaks

We all struggle to get back to the top.
Blue skies and fresh powder.
It's easier to change the scene than the mood.
Although the climb is hard, the view is worth it.

Blue skies and fresh powder.
Clear, cool mountain air above the valleys below.
Although the climb is hard, the view is worth it.
We climb it because it is there.

Clear, cool mountain air above the valleys below.
It's easier to change the scene than the mood.
We climb it because it is there.
We all struggle to get back to the top.



The Mirror Speaks

I see you.

Today's a new day.

Even though you are struggling

You're doing great.

Smile.

Take time for yourself.

Baby steps are still steps.

You don't see any cracks today.

Wipe the steam—

You'll get an entirely new image.

Things change, you change.

Today is a new day.

I see you.

The Mask I Wear

It's cracked

It's falling apart

I'll tape it

The mask I wear

It's shattering

It's broken

I need to fix it

It's useless

No, it's not, I hear

You don't need one, they say

You'll be better

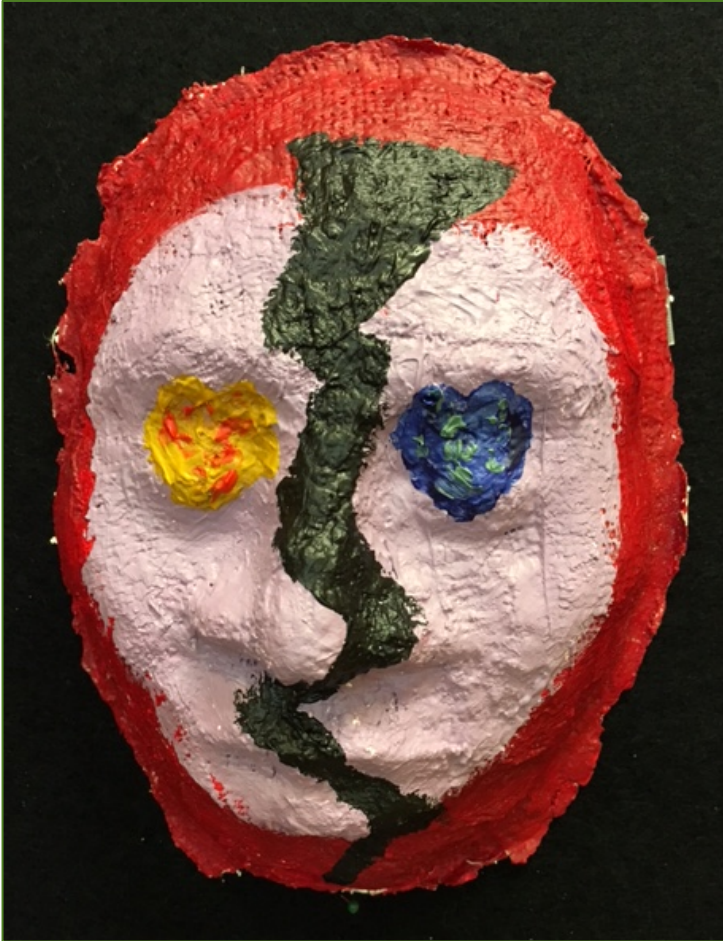
You'll be stronger

The mask I wear

It's broken

It's okay

I don't need it anymore



Affirmations

I am strong

I can do this

I deserve health, wealth,
happiness, friends, security
and peace of mind

I am not a victim

I am taking control of my life

I need to take care of me

I am beautiful inside and out

Being Active

Being active will feed my head, heart and soul.

Soul music is the best music to listen to, like Motown Records. That's when music was music.

Music, dancing, singing, swaying and laughing break down our inhibitions and encourage us to open up.

Open up your heart and you will live a happier life.

If I Were....

If I were a pebble in a crack

I would let the water smooth my edges.

If I were a pencil I would write the unimaginable.

If I were a snake I would slither across the desert.

If I were a mask I would hide the most beautiful smiles.

If I were a table I would bring together families.



To Depression

I'm tired of your company,
Your constant despair.
If you stopped breathing,
I would not care.
This just isn't fair.

I'm tired of the cinder blocks
I drag behind me.
If I cut them away and throw them
in the sea, I could move forward.
You are dragging my ass.
I want to go faster—
To anywhere where
You are not there.

I'll take your knife and turn
it back on you, cut the lines,
cut the baggage, throw you
off my back. I want my life back.
I'm going to show you!
I can make new decisions, choose
new company, think clearly,
never feel ashamed.

The Masked Smile

She may be scared but she is strong.

She is stronger than those who brought her down.

She is stronger than her fears.

She can overcome it all.

She is the voice for those not heard.

Behind her masked smile she holds the truth.

She holds the truth about the pain and suffering
rape victims endure.

She is a fighter.

She is a SURVIVOR.

What Is Love?

Pies fill my life, my favorite—Boston cream.

Cream of wheat on a cold December morn,
a bowl of love.

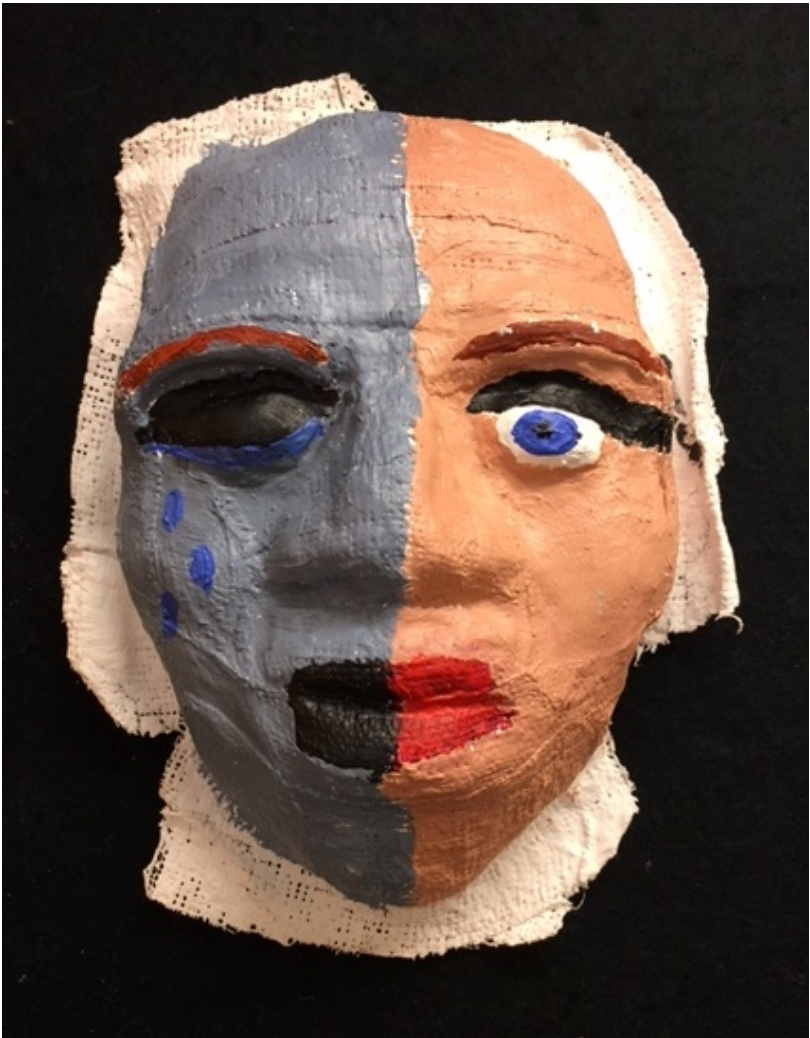
Love is a lighthouse, a galloping horse, a warm bath.

The Wind Howled My Name

On one stormy mid-summer's eve
The skies were coming down gallons at a time
There was electricity in the air, felt in the hair
Lightning split the great tree into vengeful shards

The skies were coming down gallons at a time
As the wind howled my name
Lightning split the great tree into vengeful shards
Great thunder shook the ground with seven booms

As the wind howled my name
There was electricity in the air, felt in the hair
Great thunder shook the ground with seven booms
On one stormy mid-summer's eve



Tornado

I am a big gray tornado

Category 6

but this tornado

isn't one you can see

it is in my head

this tornado is my brain

it's my anger

my sadness

my darkest thoughts

It's my rumination

my second guessing

My inability to cope with change

it comes out of nowhere

And once it's over,

I'm left to pick up the pieces

I Am

I am a floppy-eared, bouncing, hoppy puppy with a pink nose.

I am kind and happy and energetic.

I am a weed that pops up in your lawn.

I am persistent and stubborn.

I am resilient and hard to kill.

My beat goes on.

I am Barney Fife.

I am neurotic and get riled easily.

I am empathetic.

I am totally loveable.

I am a yellow garden spider diligently creating my web,
stitch by stitch to perfection.

I am a wolf taking care of my mate and cubs.

I provide, I share, I protect.

Wolves mate for life; if one dies the other becomes
the lone wolf.

I am an eagle.

I have only one mate and fiercely protect my family,
equally and with love.

I live on the highest peaks and mountain tops.



The Perfect Girl

Smile

Smile

Smile

Empty, a canvas

Obedient, a mirror

Elegant, the lips charm all

Simple, beautiful, loved

A mask for all occasions

Don't look

Don't look

Don't look

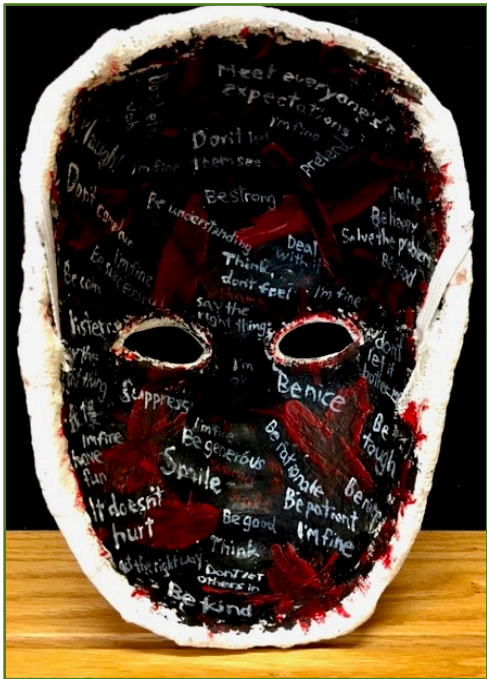
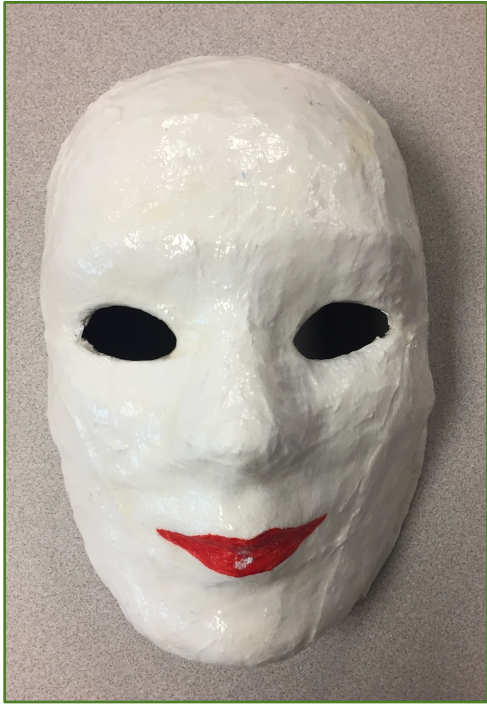
The abyss, deep as blindness

The storm, violent as blood

The lie, heavy as ash

Chaotic, festering, unbearable

What do you see?



Let Go

Let go of your fears

Let the sun come up

Let it be

Let go

Let loose a laugh

Let out the light

Let things come together

Let yourself be happy

Let others see what I see in you

Let your breath calm you

Let your mind wander

Let it come home again

Let it rain

Long Summer Days

Roller blading on the boardwalk

The salty smell of the ocean

Roaring waves, squeaking dolphins

The warmth of the sun on my face

The salty smell of the ocean

The call of the loon

The warmth of the sun on my face

Frisbees riding the breeze

The call of the loon

Roaring waves, squeaking dolphins

Frisbees riding the breeze

Roller blading on the boardwalk

Somewhere, Someplace, Somehow

Somewhere up in the heavens there's a slide down the hillside
perched at the edge of my soul.

Someplace in the distance there's a watery cascade that rains down
on the wet-haired kids afloat.

Somehow by a bedside there's a blanket curled up like a dog, its fur
softer than dough.



Personal Boundaries

Boundaries can be like doors—they can be open or closed.
You can see out through a glass door; others can see in.
A glass door can be fragile and painful when broken.

A solid metal door protects you and gives you security and safety.
But also uncertainty because you can't see through it.
Personal solitary confinement can be dangerous.
Crack the door open, peek out, see what's happening.

Boundaries can be like a road median.
You can see over it, but you shouldn't cross it,
or you could have a serious accident.
Trust yourself and others to do the right thing.
A median gives you a reminder when you are distracted.

Boundaries can be like a stone wall with holes
where the snakes and baby woodchucks hang out.
Don't stick your hand in there just because you can.
You might get bit. Stone walls can fall apart if not taken care of.

Stone walls tell a story. This is my property and that is yours.
Keep your animals on your side, and I'll keep mine on my side.
But we can still connect. Good fences make good neighbors.
We can communicate and work together to keep them repaired.
Why have two fences side by side?

Every personal boundary, like every stone wall, looks different.
No two are exactly the same, even if built by the same person.

Big Change

I'm divorcing my husband and marrying a wife.

I'm thinking about making a big change in my life.

Because this life I'm living is causing me strife.

I'll pour me some wine.

It won't be much time

Until I divorce my husband and marry a wife!

Wooden Box

I am a wooden box
about to be smashed
by the stone sculpture.
With tools in my core,
I rattle like a bass drum
with each chilly blow.

Brain Pain

What is brain pain?

Brain pain is migraines

Setting bombs off in my head

it's ice pick headaches

Stabbing at my skull.

But brain pain isn't just physical...

Brain pain is depression

weighing me down to the ocean floor

and holding me there

with cement blocks shackled to my hands and feet

Brain pain is anxiety

telling me not to forget to ruminate,

fighting me, daring me to try and have peace of mind.

Brain pain is being autistic in an allistic world,

trying to figure out when someone is joking,

convincing them I hear with my ears

and am still listening when I don't make eye contact.

Brain pain is trying to get correctly diagnosed,

having every doctor give a different label,

Not being able to organize my symptoms in my head.

Brain pain is a brain that wants to die

but is programmed to avoid death.

My brain pain is constant;

It's physical and mental.

It's something I have to accept

if I'm going to survive.

Sweet Pea

Last time I was in the hospital it was your letter that changed my mindset and made me trust—even this time.

I hear your words in the back of my head saying that you miss the mom I used to be. I don't think I can go back to her again.

There is a saying that you never touch the same river twice, and I think that's relevant here.

I will never be who I was sixty-five years ago or ten years ago.

I miss those days, too, when all I had to be was your mom.

But time has changed things, and I'm forced to be more than that now.

All the wishing in the world won't change these last three years, but I can start to shape the future. I can take steps to make my life better and hope in turn something positive comes from that.

It won't always be easy for me or those around me, but I hope at the end of it all, you'll still be there and that you'll love me the way you used to when you thought I was a good mom.

If there is one thing I can tell you it's that I never have and never will stop loving you.

Where Have You Been??

When I leave the hospital and people say,

“Where have you been?” I will feel like saying,

“Mind your own business!”

I will feel embarrassed with people my age because of stigma.

I’ll feel shame.

Maybe I will say, “I’ve been working on myself.

The most important thing you can work on is yourself.”

Maybe I will say, “I needed a mental health break.”

Filling the Reservoir

Songs about the rain

Ping, ping, ping... the rain on the roof

Making more than you'll see,

More than you'll know

Soaking, nourishing

Ping, ping, ping... the rain on the roof

The smell of the rain

Soaking, nourishing

The land, the grass, everything

The smell of the rain

Making more than you'll see,

More than you'll know

The land, the grass, everything

Songs about the rain

Peace Is Within

Peace is within.

Within the mind, the soul will be complete.

Complete peace of mind would be a dream come true.

True to oneself is honesty.

Honesty—difficult but critical to speak.

Speak to me like the stars of the heavens on a clear night.

Day by Day

Day by day, step by step.

Step up to the plate and take a swing at life.

Life is the most precious gift we possess and cherish.

Cherish all that is in your life, as you never know when it is gone with the wind.

Wind moves up the valley, like my thoughts of you inside my head.

Family is what you have at the end of the day.

Recovery

Grow like a tree to the person
I'm supposed to be
Move forward and find hope
Because deep down I know
It's time for a change

Move forward and find hope
Taking little steps to be free
It's time for a change
For the future I will try to see

Taking little steps to be free
Because deep down I know
The future I will try to see
Grow like a tree to the person
I'm supposed to be

Woman with Listening Heart

Last fall I was gifted my Native American name, Woman with Listening Heart.
“But Grandmother,” I said. “I don’t live up to that name.”
She replied that we strive to live up to our names.

I do listen to others with genuine love and caring.
I also listen to the Universe—hearing the Wind in the trees,
feeling the snow or rain on my face
or staring at the stars above—always thanking Creator for the World
that surrounds me.

But I had stopped listening to my own heart
and forgot that it must be fed by the connections with beloved friends and family
and by connection with the Universe.

My heart, mind and soul cracked from the isolation and neglect.
This [mask and writing] project helped me understand that I must
listen to—and honor—all three realms in order to maintain my wholeness.





Afterword

The evolution of this anthology is long and winding. It started with asking our writer, Marv Klassen-Landis to help our patients write about the meaning of the masks they created. The mask project was inspired by a program for veterans at Walter Reed Medical Center.

The success of the written component of the mask project showed how valuable writing can be for our patients. Writing can be an incredible tool on any health or life journey. Marv began offering writing sessions weekly. Each week the work that came out of class never failed to inspire awe.

Both the mask project and the writing sessions, as well as therapeutic harp, are part of our expressive arts offerings for patients, visitors and staff. The Arts and Humanities Program at Dartmouth-Hitchcock enhances health, promotes individual well-being and deepens interpersonal connections through the arts and humanities.

One of the reasons this book was put together was to shine a light on the incredible talent of our patients whose voices often get ignored and whose insight is invaluable. We hope that light can serve as a beacon for others on this journey we call life.

Marianne Barthel
Director, Arts & Humanities Program
Dartmouth Health



Please use these pages for your own writing. What is in *your* heart?

