

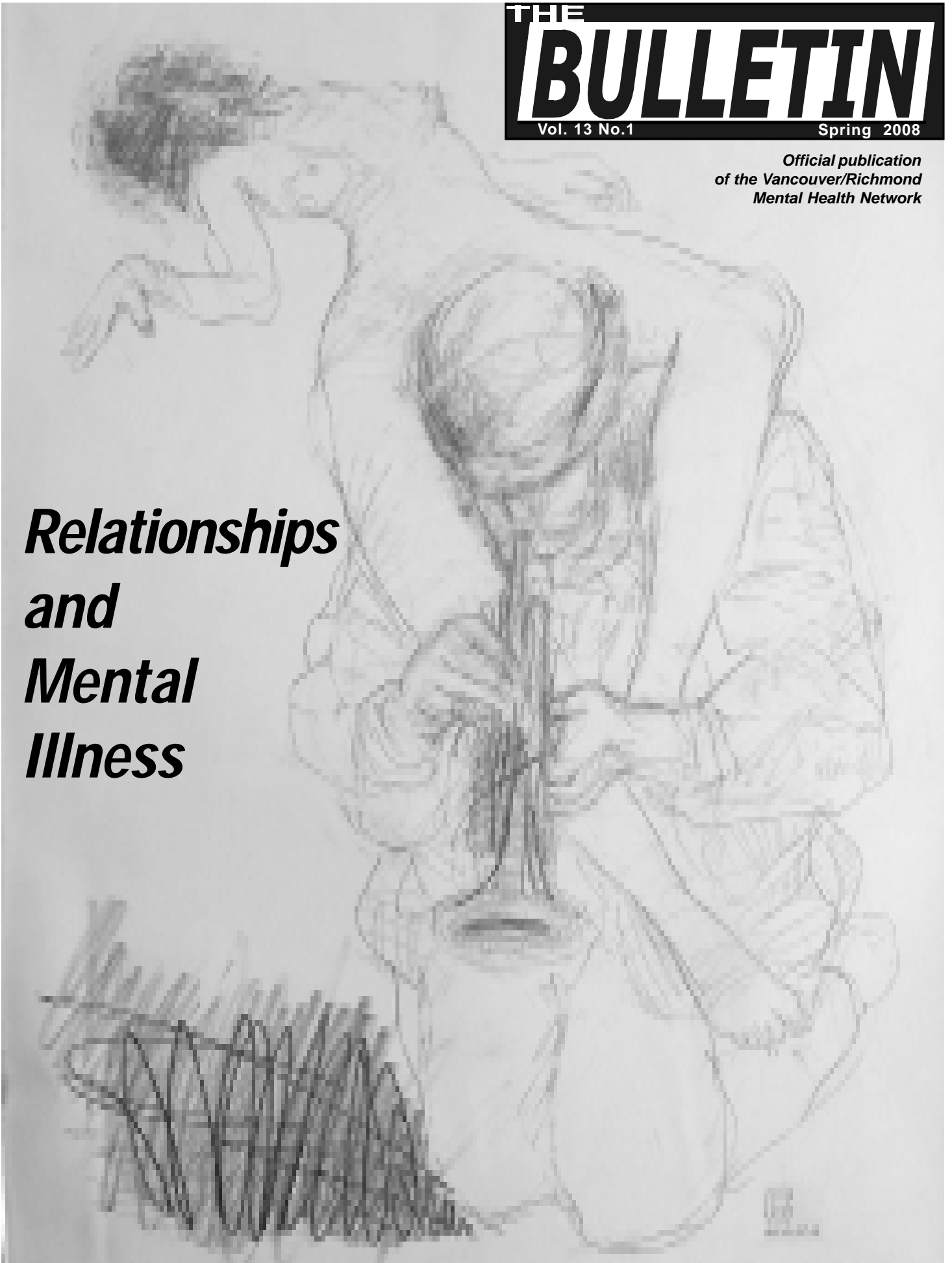
**THE**  
**BULLETIN**

Vol. 13 No.1

Spring 2008

*Official publication  
of the Vancouver/Richmond  
Mental Health Network*

***Relationships  
and  
Mental  
Illness***



# Out of housing and back on the job



**Ron Carten**  
Co-ordinator

Over most of 2007 I was working in social housing and shelters with the Lookout Emergency Aid Society, but have somehow found my way back to the Network where I hope the future will promise strong programs and innovative developments. I am happy to be working for you again in 2008.

In March the Network should be firing on all cylinders with 10 groups and our Community Education program in full swing. The Sacred Circle which was not operating in January and February will be back in action when you read this. A new group, the revived Conversation Café, now called the Conversation Club will be holding meetings above the MPA drop-in. Just call our office to join or find out details.

On our board of directors we have been joined by Helene Browne, who brings years of experience as executive director of ARA Mental Health Action Research & Advocacy. Welcome aboard, Helene!

On a sad note, Susan Friday, a stalwart of the Network who has produced position papers, policy documents and has been our liaison with the National Network for Mental Health and the Ca-

nadian Coalition of Alternative Mental Health Resources as well as holding down the positions of treasurer and vice-president and former board president, has left the board. We will sorely miss all her hard work.

Currently, the Network has opened itself up to Philippe Roy, a student in the Masters program of Social Work at UBC. Philippe is conducting a study entitled "Listen to Me: A Look at Experiences of Mental Health Consumers/Survivors." Our members with email addresses on our database have been sent his proposal for interviews and I trust Philippe will provide the Network with a copy of his completed study when it is finished.

On the topic of email addresses, the Network is planning to use email more frequently to update members on events and opportunities in the community. If you do not have your email on our database, I will be contacting you in the near future so that you will be able to receive email notices from the Network. If you like you can email us at [vanrmd@telus.net](mailto:vanrmd@telus.net) or phone in to provide us with your email

address at your convenience.

In addition to using emails more often, the Network has updated its website. We will be regularly posting monthly Community Education program events on the site as well as any other events of interest to consumer/survivors. Also, our position paper on the Representation Agreement Act can now be found on our website. I encourage you to visit the site at [www.vcn.bc.ca/vrmhn](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/vrmhn) or just google the Vancouver/Richmond Mental Health Network to experience our online presence.

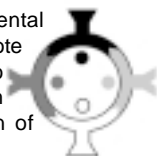
Finally, you should receive a flyer announcing our Spring Party in this mailing and we encourage you to attend this event designed specifically for Network members. We hope to have live music, a speaker of note and lots of food and beverages at the event. As well, you will have the opportunity to meet and discuss your concerns with board members and myself who will be present at this late March event. I look forward to seeing you there!

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## Mission Statement

The Vancouver Richmond Mental Health Network serves to promote growth and healing of people who go through the mental health system through the provision of mutual aid opportunities.



The Bulletin is the official newsletter of the Vancouver Richmond Mental Health Network; its contents are the opinions of the individual writers and not necessarily those of the Network. This edition was produced by mental health consumer/survivors. It is a vehicle for the expression of concerns and opinions for all who are interested in mental health issues.

The Bulletin does not necessarily endorse any advertisements appearing in this issue.

We welcome readers' letters, including those from outside the Lower Mainland. We also welcome inquiries about the Network's self-help groups and other programs. Contact us at:  
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 Visit our web site at: [www.vcn.bc.ca/vrmhn](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/vrmhn)

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**Advertising:** 604-733-5570

### The Network offers the following services:

- Co-Ed Badminton/Volleyball Group
  - Community Education Program
  - Cultural Arts Group
  - Expressive Art Group
  - Latin American Peer Support Group
  - Men's Peer Support Group
  - Pan Asian Peer Support Group
  - Sacred Circle
  - Shakti Peer Support Group
  - The Conversation Club
  - Women's Peer Support Group
  - Yoga Group
  - Information and Referrals
  - Mental Health Resource Library
- Events are held throughout the year. For more information, contact the Network.

# Those closest to us all that matters



**Josanna Savoie**  
Editor

Welcome to our spring issue on Relationships. We all have relationships in some form or other, whether romantic, with family members or with friends. The relationships we share with others may very well be the most important experiences of our lives. Through relationships we grow and learn and love. When we are on our death beds we will not care much about the things we have accumulated or outward success we have achieved; it's the people with whom we have shared our lives that will be our primary concern.

This issue contains deeply personal stories of mental health survivors and their struggles with building and maintaining relationships. We hope you will find them not only interesting but also helpful in dealing with issues within your own relationships.

Our next topic will be Mental Illness and Emotional Health. We could argue that without emotional health there cannot be mental health and vice-versa as the two conditions are so closely interrelated. We would appreciate your personal stories, artwork

and poems of how emotional healing has contributed to your mental wellness.

Readers are welcome to send comments about our articles to Letters to the Editor. Deadline for contributions for our summer issue is Monday May 12th.

Send submissions to [vanrmd@telus.net](mailto:vanrmd@telus.net) with *The BULLETIN* in header or drop them off at The Network office, 201 – 1300 Richards Street, Vancouver.

The President's report is unavailable for this issue. It will return with our summer edition



**Dianne Thurston**  
President

## Women's group up and running despite struggles

The group carries on, despite my main challenges as a facilitator keeping in touch with such a large group. I will leave detailed information about the group and events on my home answering machine and I will give my number to group members. I have started a yahoo discussion group for discussion and information sharing. Please email [vrnhnnetties-subscribe@yahoogroups.ca](mailto:vrnhnnetties-subscribe@yahoogroups.ca) to subscribe. You can also send me your email addresses to [vrnhnnetties@gmail.com](mailto:vrnhnnetties@gmail.com). I will still make calls to women who do not have email or computers. I will also be making an address list to mail out the little group bulletin I am creating. You can leave a message for me at the Network office. If you have been involved with the group and have not attended or responded to my phone calls, I will be taking your name off the list. Please call if you want to stay informed. This group is open to all women members of the Network. Upcoming events include a writing workshop, beading workshop and social events.

*Pauline Leah Rankin*

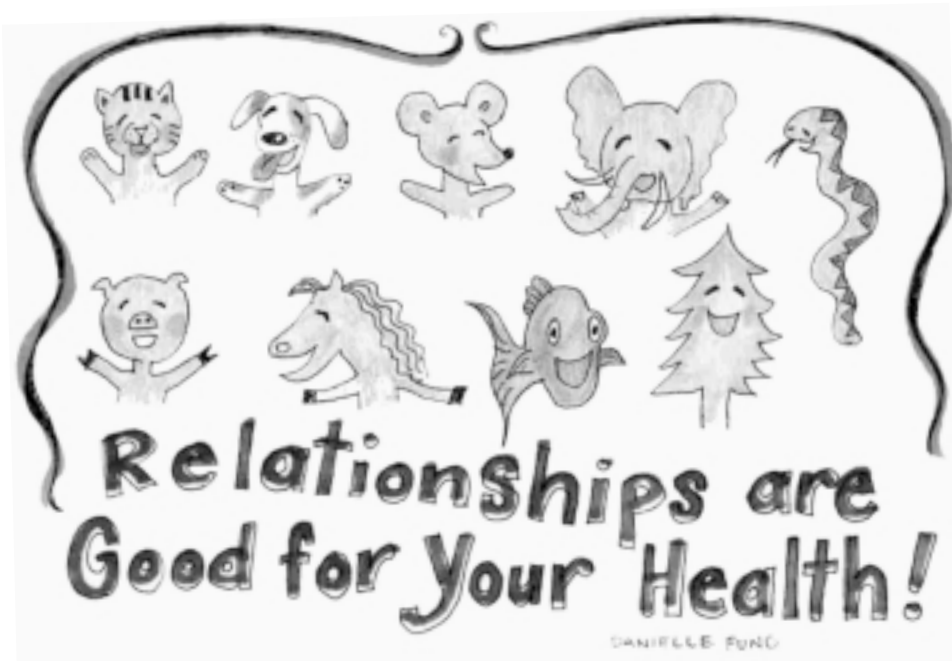


Illustration by Danielle Fung



## Sacred Circle

Sacred Circle is a community support group for anyone interested in Earth Based Spiritual Practice.

Meetings will begin on **Sunday, March 9<sup>th</sup>** from 2-4 p.m. in East Vancouver.

For more information contact Rose at **778 317 6105**.

# Nurturing, support essential for recovery



Story and art by Sandra Yuen MacKay

"Hello," I heard him call.

I ignored the salutation as I kept staring at the television.

"How was your day?"

"How do you think it was?" I responded.

"What did you do today?"

"You know I don't do anything all day. Why do you ask me that question?"

Relationships can be difficult for people with schizophrenia. Voices pound your ears, concentration is weak, and small talk is non-existent. No one really wants to know exactly how you are, even if they politely ask the question. If people really knew how angry or depressed I can be, they'd walk in the other direction.

In the early stages of my illness, I was so withdrawn that my parents and siblings couldn't get through to me. My school friends noticed that I stopped talking long before I had realized my behaviour had changed. My self-esteem was at an all-time low. I walked with my head down, feeling too embarrassed and downtrodden to utter a word. I wasn't athletic enough to make the basketball team. I wasn't popular at dances or school functions. In class, I kept my head down and hoped I wouldn't be called on to answer questions.

It took years of therapy for me to develop the ability to speak up and be more assertive. Sedating medication slurred my



words and I developed mannerisms in the way I walked and behaved. Through a painful process, I learned to face my fears and repressed anger and get past self-pity. Releasing my emotions was a way to let go and heal from my past. Recovery was and still is a long road.

The relationship I had with my family improved after I was declared mentally ill. They took care of me and didn't remark on my slurred speech or odd mannerisms. My former friends tried to include me in lunchtime conversations even though I hardly spoke.

After high school, I started dating a special someone. We had our ups and downs, but he saw past the label of schizophrenia.

He knew me when I was ill but he also knew me when I was well. By the time we got married, there were no surprises because we knew each other so well. He is forgiving, insightful and patient and also grounds me. I often ask him for a reality check.

"People are talking about me," I'd say.

"No one's talking about you. What's on your mind?" he'd say.

I'd insist I heard something in my head in the form of a telepathic notion.

"You are worried about tomorrow because you have a doctor's appointment. Relax, read a book or put on a movie."

He could see early warning signs before

*continued on Page 11*



## Relationship to Nature

*There are many kinds of relationships that we experience during the course of a lifetime; perhaps none as profound as with nature. Many consumers/survivors can find solace only when surrounded by its glory, which has been splendidly captured by Marilyn Blandford.*

# I'll have that coffee without judgment, please

**By Jayne Gale**

I frequent a local Starbucks in Richmond and have for many years. Along with the usual batch of retirees, homemakers, persons with disabilities, business and young people are those with a mental illness who also like to enjoy a cup of coffee and the company of others.

Although I too suffer with a mental illness I do not stand out as one that does as I am quite high functioning and am therefore taken as one of the crowd. However, some of my fellow members of the club meaning those with a mental illness do stand out as they have odd habits. One lady repeats herself over and over again. Another one says things which are extremely bizarre, her eyes are glassy, she can't stand still and she will leave her personal belongings on a table outside forgetting that they are there. Due to my experience with my sister and time with her in psychiatric wards, I can see that this lady is in need of medication or hospital

care but is falling through the cracks.

I talk to my fellow club members with respect and would do so whether I was ill myself or not as I feel one is not spiritually awakened if they judge people based on their illnesses or other afflictions.

Unfortunately this is not the case, however, for a number of regulars who indiscriminately degrade my fellow members. As soon as the lady who repeats herself leaves, one fellow whom I can only describe as a true redneck speak out for all to hear; "well at least the cockroach is gone." It never ceases to amaze me that from childhood to adulthood there are still those frozen in time. They have never left the school yard or gotten past their ability to throw cruel barbs at people who suffer.

There is no doubt in my mind that people with mental illnesses can develop good relationships. Yet there is a segment in society who are not enlightened and who feel that the members of my club do not have the right to enjoy coffee without

being judged and smudged. I say a segment because there are others who feel as I do, that this kind of ignorant name calling is uncalled for and insensitive. It does show however that it is still difficult for people with mental illnesses when they are straight forward about their illness to build relationships like so-called normal people.

I want my fellow members to know that people making judgements, especially about something they know little about is not uncommon, and that includes many subjects besides mental illness. It is more important to focus on the people who do show you your due respect and know that you have as much right as anyone to enjoy a cuppa at Starbucks. Your money is green too!

In conclusion, it is important to create positive relationships in your life and to let go of the comments of the less informed or outright ignorance of those who may be commenting out of their own fears rather than a real need to harm you.

# Adversity spurs spiritual growth

By Paul Strashok

I remember visiting a Christian outreach center near the Coast Foundation Clubhouse, years ago, when I was a part of the Transitional Employment Program at Coast. I mentioned the term 'mental health' and one of the ministering ladies there immediately said "I don't believe in mental health." Okay, I, as a long time critic of the mental health system knew where she was coming from, but inwardly my only thought was "So, what do you believe in – mental illness?" But this encounter just goes to show that there are many gray, unknown areas in the general public's mind concerning mental health, not to mention those God-seeking souls who believe that Jesus heals everything.

As one who has had a long-standing diagnosis of schizophrenia, and who believed, for the longest time, that the answer to my problem was Divine Healing, I understand why someone would say, "I don't believe in mental health." What this lady was probably trying to say is "I don't believe in systemized treatment for a mental disorder, but rather I am trusting God for my mental well-being," which is probably her right and is even quite scripturally sound (2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind). Yet, through all the gray and muddy waters of the mental health system, some vital, life-changing lessons can be learned.

One of the most basic lessons I have learned and one, I believe that most fundamentalist, orthodox believers in Christianity miss, is the basic error of what I call the 'Christian Superman Syndrome'; the belief that if one has faith in Christ, one should be this immaculate, powerful being with no flaw or shortcoming. Yet, even the Apostle Paul spoke of his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7) and he said it was given to him to keep him from becoming puffed up with pride. When Paul said "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, it was prefaced by the statement "I know both how to be abased and how to abound" (Php 4:12, 13), and not, as many preachers use it, a blanket promise to push through anything and everything that stands in your way.

Let's face it, without adversity probably none of us would grow spiritually, but it is false to assume that our suffering is so much greater than others who have suffered before us and suffer around us. It is the peculiar nature of the mental health system, however, that the 'cure' can be more devastating than the original disease, especially when one is prone to bouts of intense mania that resemble a drug-user's 'high'. Coming down from lofty heights of mania and intense spiritual/mental activity into a forced hospitalization can sometimes feel like the crash dive of a jet airplane.

It is also significant that the 'power, love

and sound mind' in the above scripture passage are contrasted with a 'spirit of fear'. From my own experience, I have found there is nothing really 'insane' about being manic, but when mania spills over into a megalomaniac delusion, spurred on by irrational fear, then the inevitable conflict, misunderstanding, anger, and a host of other evils come into play and the result is a hospitalization by force, something which I hope, by the grace of God, I will never need to go through again.

Dr. Peter S. Breggin in his book "Toxic Psychiatry" has termed schizophrenia "psycho-spiritual overwhelm". My own experience heartily concurs with this terminology for I found that it was through intense spiritual seeking and excessive spiritual practices that I became open to an alternate reality, a whole separate spiritual universe that most people do not encounter in their daily activities. It seemed very real at the time, but now, as I look back, I realize that I was living an untenable life and that, if I was not willing to take responsibility for my own physical and emotional well-being then it would be given into the hands of others (whom I considered my persecutors) to do so. Since the time of my hospitalizations, it seems the basic lesson that I have been learning is the authentic expression of spirituality that is not 'zany' or 'insane', but is a working cooperation with the Divine in a genuine humanity, conscious of spiritual truths while still keeping my 'feet on the ground'.

A mental health worker once told me that as far as she was concerned, everything was okay up to the point at which people started losing their life-skills. Perhaps this is the real acid-test of true spirituality and God-consciousness – it is not 'flaky' and irresponsible, but rather it is a life that is supernatural within a natural and human context and vessel.

Finally, I would say to all spiritual seekers and God-believers within the mental health system, I agree with the viewpoint of making God the center and core of your life and experience. However, let us find ways of expressing that faith and experience in a way that is an authentic expression with all we contact, both in the mental health system and in other parts of our daily walk of life.



## A Human Rights Conference

*with distinguished guest Frederick Wiseman, Filmmaker and Director*

Simon Fraser University's Madness, Citizenship and Social Justice conference on the rights of psychiatrized people will focus on historical legacies of human rights and abuses, media representation, criminalizing madness and more. Among the many presenters at the conference the Network's Ron Carten will be discussing discrimination against the psychiatrized in BC health legislation and the social status of the psychiatric patient. For more information or to register on line contact [www.sfu.ca/madcitizenship-conference](http://www.sfu.ca/madcitizenship-conference).

**SFU downtown campus, 515 West Hastings Street**

# Schizophrenia stigma offers challenge

By Ruby Diamond

In order to attract like minded people in my life, I must rid myself of criticism, fear, guilt and self-hatred. These spiritual ills act as barriers to healthy relationships.

Today I accept my illness and I know that it does not mean I will be lonely and alone. I welcome age and love the idea of strengthening my present relationships.

When I was first diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, many of my relationships came to a crashing end. Most of the people who were in my life prior to my diagnoses abandoned me and I was left with a gaping hole in my social life.

Although hurt, I'm glad for my illness because the people I have met along my journey have been understanding and gifted, compassionate and talented. The one thing about us mental health survivors is that we are extremely interesting. People like myself, who have been misunderstood and who suffer from mental illness can be a great pleasure to know.

Relationships take work and nobody is perfect. In fact I have learned that blaming others for my misfortune is useless and a form of perfectionism; by blaming others I put conditions on my relationships and expect others to be perfect.

Having a mental illness does not mean that we cannot enjoy life; in fact we can enjoy life abundantly and have strong relationships whether they are with friends or lovers. The public in its ignorance may think a mentally ill person has no chance of having any kind of intimate relationship, but they are wrong.

I am tired of criminals using the label of schizophrenia to get out of jams. We suffer from a biochemical imbalance and I am tired of the stigma attached to our health. I am angry with the way we are labelled by the media on a constant basis, which the public

*Illustration by Jorge Aranda*

picks up and continues the prejudice against us. I have had relationships, I am not violent nor a child molester. Relationships are important to us too and we are just as capable of having meaningful relationships as anyone else.

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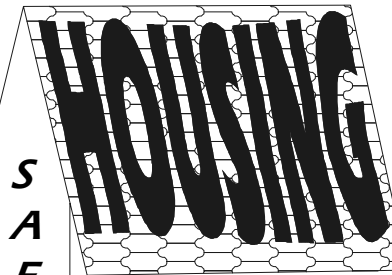
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If you are a mental health consumer (or know of one) seeking safe, secure, affordable housing, wishing to improve your social skills and become part of a supportive community Unity Housing may be the place for you.

We provide non-staffed, safe secure housing at affordable rent( 375/ month) with your own bedroom and shared communal areas. We are a consumer/ survivor directed organization. Perks of membership include free cable, phone, access to a computer and the internet, monthly communal meals and an opportunity to make extra money via one of our volunteer/ honorarium positions. If you are interested or wish further information; please call us at 604 801 5334.

# Elegant relationships need than love and dev

By Rose Ananda Heart

Creating wonderful, loving relationships means living consciously and seeking to be authentic with others. For two people to design a healthy collaboration, it is required that both parties clean up any unfinished business from the past. I learned this lesson the hard way. My last romantic involvement required heaping portions of emotional release before I was able to realize that this relationship could never work. My partner was addicted to running from his pain and there was nothing I could do to get him to face his inner demons. I kept thinking that if only I were more loving, patient or kind, everything would be all right. Reading a book called, *Co-dependence, Healing the Human Condition*, by Charles L. Whitefield cured me of my erroneous thinking. By the time I finally broke up with my partner, I

was able to love myself enough to let go of something that was bound to sap every ounce of lifeblood that flowed through my veins.

Although there seemed to be a deep psychological connection between us, I could no longer stay with someone who chose to go numb by actively abusing chemicals and alcohol. There was nothing I could do to stop him, and mostly I ended up enabling his patterns just by being available. I have come to understand that I attracted this man because he had characteristics that brought up old wounds that originated with the relationship I experi-

enced with my father. These circumstances provided me an opportunity for further recovery. Within this partnership, I needed to fight for my boundaries, recognizing that the violations suffered in my childhood made this my primary challenge. I eventually learned that healthy limits are essential to protect my well-being and integrity.

When we create a partnership with another, chances are that there are two wounded people getting together. Because love brings up unhealed emotional baggage, relationships are the perfect place to discover where we still need to mend. This is why it is important to create support groups for the purpose of recovery. Having co-counsellors and/or other supportive people to work with, frees us from dumping our stuff onto our friends and lovers. We have someone to call up and process with, so that we can do the emotional release and let go of the hurts associated with the distress. This frees us to be our best self within our relationships. Well functioning relationships require two people who choose to be real with one another, noticing when self-defeating behaviours take over. Harmful patterns, by their very nature, are rigid and harsh, virtually making it impossible to create a reliable emotional connection in the here and now. Breaking free from the illusions created by our fallacious masks, allows us to get close to others and love with open heartedness.

For a union between two people to remain elegant, there needs to be a connection to the inner self that becomes central. From a place of self-love, we begin to see the presence of love in everyone, and know that there is an abundance of love to go around. In an emotionally rewarding collaboration, each person takes responsibility for his/her own suffering by looking within. Each person addresses



Illustration by Rose Ananda Heart



# more otion

*Two women in a night club, left, by Sandra Yuen MacKay; Couple, below, by Rose Ananda Heart*



and releases the shame, guilt, hurt, anger and resentment through the process of self expression and emotional release. In loving connections the participants are open, communicating, trusting, gentle, peaceful, joyful and celebrating.

Healthy dependence in our alliances means that we can appropriately ask for and accept help when needed. We are aware of caring for the self and the other on all levels, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. This includes equal sharing, so there is a sense of mutual sup-

port and acceptance. Fulfilling our own needs makes us available to be open to supporting others. Boundaries are clear, mostly flexible, and yet firm when they need to be. Healthy relationships are intimate on all levels with much shared spontaneous contact with the other. Elegant partnerships feel happy and fulfilling.

Challenges may occur in any relationship and the genuine inner self is willing to heal and grow through conflict because it is natural for humans to desire connection. The erroneous self, on the other

hand, wants to be separate, logical, stuck in the head, avoiding any sort of pain while complicating any conflicts that may arise. It is this fabricated self that creates what has been termed co-dependence. Co-dependent relationships are based on self-hate, from shame and guilt. A person who denies their feelings is able to hide their distress in the guise of loving another, placing the answer to internal pain outside of the self. This places unhealthy expectations on the other for happiness. Co-dependent relationships use the other by projecting shame and guilt, rather than taking responsibility for personal recovery.

My work with re-evaluation counselling teaches me that human beings are naturally loving and co-operative and there are no inherent conflicts between our own

needs and desires and the needs and desires of anyone else. Albeit things may appear to be to the contrary, it is possible for any two people to have a satisfying relationship, full of joy and intimacy.

The only thing that gets in the way of close, warm, loving partnerships is personal distress recordings from old hurts that cause us to do hurtful things in the present. I have come to appreciate the fact that emotional restoration and understanding are essential for an amorous commitment to another that has the potential of lasting a lifetime.



Illustration by Jorge Aranda

## Criticism

Your criticism  
weighs heavy  
on my shoulders.  
Caging my heart  
in snakelike tendrils  
of hardened muscles.  
Causing me to slouch  
to protect  
my tenderness  
in an armor  
of vigilant tension.  
Biting me  
like sharp arrows  
piercing my side  
I'm retching  
violently  
throwing up  
your toxic words.

*Rose Ananda Heart*

## Ophelia Regained

Get thee to a nunnery  
a veiled threat

You won't find me  
wandering  
madly  
stammering

wilted flowers  
clutched in my hands

no  
she does not drown  
not this time

*Pauline Leah Rankin*

## Love

Look up above  
For God is Love  
His light shines through us  
So what's really the fuss  
Allow yourself to be free  
And be filled with glee  
The enemy will drift apart  
Once you open your heart  
The choice is yours  
God will open doors  
Love is God

*Karen Borody*



Illustration by Rose Ananda Heart

## Slimy Slimebag

Slimy Slimebag  
Silently creeps into my mind  
Manipulating my thoughts  
till I'm convinced  
that my ideas are dumb, silly,  
a jumble of bumbling nonsense  
and I feel guilty  
when my anger is aroused  
or my temper flares.  
"Be nice, be grateful, and cheer up,  
You don't know  
how good you've got it"  
soothes Slimy Slimebag  
with a seductive smile  
plastered to his face  
to make me believe  
he's the all around nice guy  
as he frightens me  
into submission  
to please his demands  
until I forget  
that I've ever entertained  
desires of my own.  
He buys me gifts  
with strings attached  
which quietly take  
my heart away  
so that I abandon  
the whispering voices  
from within the deep wells  
of my soulful wild self  
subtly taking away  
my sovereign right to sanity  
and the wisdom of intuition  
until like a frog I'm left  
to die in a boiling trap  
of obsession and shame  
following twisted rules  
and playing irrational games  
so that he will win  
and I will lose.

*Rose Ananda Heart*



Illustration by Danielle Fung

from Page 4

I saw them myself. He knew when I was obsessing by my facial expressions. He has no psychological or psychiatric training but he's an excellent caregiver and knows when I need help. He understands how I can be triggered and become anxious. He understands my behavioral patterns and is compassionate when I am depressed. He never rejected me based on my inability to see things logically.

Some of my friends, who have a mental illness, are able to connect with their families and get together with their friends for coffee or a meal. Others live alone without family support. I'm told I am lucky to have a mate who understands me so well, is a constant support and loves me.

However, when relating with others, I can be overly sensitive to their temperaments. If someone is complaining, I start to react to what he or she is feeling. This trait allows me to empathize with others, but also can work against me because I can't always control my emotions.

At some point in my life, ideally I hope I can develop a thicker skin and not react so strongly. In the meantime, I still struggle sometimes, unable to separate myself and draw a boundary. The more clearly I see myself and others, the more objective I can be.

There are many people who have helped me in my recovery, including friends, family and people in the health field. A support network of people made my life not only livable, but helped me flourish as a daughter, sister, aunt, spouse, student, artist and writer. I have natural creative talents and insights, but I could not have recovered without the nurturing I have received. I know I couldn't have made it this far alone.

I desire to learn to be more responsible and fair in my relationships. Because I became ill in my teens, I feel that big chunks of my life have been taken from me. I feel that I didn't have the chance to mature the same way my peers and siblings did. When I have bouts of illness, I still revert to tantrums, complaining, arguing, blaming others, envy, anger, and worry. I lack the ability to resolve conflicts easily and become dependent on others during times of stress and anxiety.

If I can get past self-doubts and negative thoughts, hopefully in time my confidence will rise and save me from myself. Failing that, I am grateful that my husband is in the trenches with me, aiding me towards better understanding.

## Bob Krzyzewski's Wellness column

# Peek at future shows peril and promise of current paradigm

We continue to have very interesting workshop presentations, which are now posted on our revamped website, complete with artist's colourful paintings to brighten the Home page. The January event had 22 people in attendance and the networking possibilities were being mutually explored with obvious interest. By the time this issue hits the stands, the February workshop will have occurred and March's workshop should be available for your viewing, so please join us to share in our collective learning experience.

There are several significant developments emerging in the news which I would like to raise awareness about. The first rather alarming situation is obviously of immediate concern to the male readers today, but could also have long term ramifications for populations in the future. Author Leonard Sax, in two recent books, *Why Gender Matters* (Random House, 2006) and *Boys Adrift* (Basic Books, 2007), chronicles recent patterns in male development on a large scale. He reports an underlying biological trend of declining fertility rates and hormonal disruption due to several hazardous spin offs of industrialization. These effects were first evident in anomalies of lower species such as fish, frogs and other reptiles and included hermaphroditic genitalia and other mutations. Since water is their common habitat, laboratory analysis has continued to document runaway chemical contamination from synthetic chemicals leaking into the water and leaching from plastic water bottles and other containers.

Locally, we read that Mountain Equipment Co-op was challenged on the integrity of its water bottles constructed of "nalgene", a substance advertised for not leaking polycarbonates into the water. However, laboratory tests couldn't substantiate this claim and their advertising was withdrawn. I recommend to all

consumers of bottled water to consider storing water in glass, ceramic or stainless steel containers, and to store them at refrigerated temperatures.

The other currently emerging news phenomenon which is as promising as the previous issue is threatening, is a locally burgeoning movement of practitioners using the latest digitally de-

signed, highly sophisticated array of vibrational processing healing devices. These are described as based on quantum physics principles. I experienced a "trial run" with the detection capabilities of one of these machines called "Quantum Bio-feedback". In a short time this machine read and displayed numerical readings which indicated my electrical health, my nutritional deficiency profile, my blood cell analysis, followed by my spinal integrity, my acidity-ph range and nutrient assimilation.

One can honestly say I could keep no secrets from the practitioner after that! I am sure to have more to report on these devices in the future. In the meantime hope to see you at our Spring Equinox Workshop-till next read, take care of yourself in all ways possible!



**Bob Krzyzewski**  
Community Education

# Play offers tribute to recovery

**Special to The BULLETIN**

What do a dog walker, a film maker, and a barista all have in common? They're all people in recovery. They all have stories to tell. They're all recipients of this year's Loonie Awards.

The Loonie awards, (Not Just Another Recovery Awards Show), are presented by The Now Who's Talking Recovery Theatre to people in recovery from mental illness and addiction, people who have the courage to show the inner working of the recovery process. Using a humorous awards show format the cast explores a variety of recovery experiences, like learning what it truly means to be handicapped, the challenge of dealing with negative people, and what it's like to be obsessed with the colour yellow.

By using personal experiences to explore the entire recovery process the show breaks down the stigma of mental illness. From the dizzying highs to the crushing lows, and then on to balance and stability, the cast brings to life their

**The Loonie awards, (Not Just Another Recovery Awards Show)**

March 21, 1 p.m., 7 p.m.

March 22, 7 p.m.

St. James Community Square  
3214 W 10th, Vancouver

**Matinee free to those in recovery**

profound epiphanies, life changing experiences, and realizations; a recovery tour de force.

The Loonie Awards takes a light look at a heavy subject. By using humour the cast gains a unique insight into the recovery experience. Audiences get to see what it's like to have a full-blown psychotic episode, to live life under the table, struggle with an eating disorder or what can happen when you bottle things up. They also get to see what happens when you choose recovery, take responsibility for your life, and ultimately move forward to a meaningful, satisfying existence.

ful, satisfying existence.

We've all had bad days at work, family conflicts, needed to lose weight, gain weight, or quit drinking. If you think there's no hope for people with mental illness to live satisfying, meaningful lives, think again. Now Who's Talking Recovery Theatre is walking the talk of what it's like to live with and recover from mental illness and addiction.

The Now Who's Talking Recovery Theatre program was founded by Elly Litvak with fund-

ing from Vancouver Coastal Health's Consumer Initiative Fund. Elly's experience in theatre and mental health give her a unique insight of the recovery process. Her one-woman show 'Now Who's Crazy Now?' was the inspiration for the program.

"Performing my one-woman show chronicling my journey of living with and recovering from a mental illness was the most empowering experience of my life.



**Elly Litvak**

I needed to share the experience; the more stories we share the more we reduce the stigma of mental illness. People need to know that recovery is possible, people get better."

Now Who's Talking Recovery Theatre is an innovative project where people in recovery from mental illness and addiction learn a variety of theatre disciplines including acting, voice, improvisation and playwriting. The ultimate result is a highly educational, entertaining and humorous play where performers portray aspects of their personal recovery journey. Audiences gain insights into what recovery from mental illness is really like for a variety of people and circumstances. Audience members on the recovery path are inspired with hope and concrete examples of how people recover.

The Loonie awards, (Not Just Another Recovery Awards Show), opens at St. James Community Square, 3214 W 10<sup>th</sup> (at Trutch) with performances Friday, March 21 at 1:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m. and Saturday, March 22 at 7 p.m.

Admission is \$12 with advance purchase or \$15 at the door. Friday's matinee performance is free to people in recovery.

For more information, to volunteer or to reserve tickets visit the web site at [www.whoscrazynow.com/loonieawards](http://www.whoscrazynow.com/loonieawards) or email [loonieawardsvancouver@gmail.com](mailto:loonieawardsvancouver@gmail.com)

**THE LOONIE AWARDS**

NOT JUST ANOTHER RECOVERY AWARDS SHOW

**THE BUCK STOPS HERE**

**STOP STIGMA**

FRIDAY MARCH 21ST 1-00 PM & 7-00PM  
SATURDAY MARCH 22ND @ 7-00PM

**MATINEE FREE FOR PEOPLE IN RECOVERY**

ST. JAMES COMMUNITY SQUARE 3214 W 10TH AVE TEL 613 ADVANCE 616 DOOR

# Anthology dispels powerless feelings

By Irit Shimrat

Have you ever felt like a lone voice in the wilderness, crying out against unhelpful treatments and human rights abuses in psychiatry? Or felt, perhaps, that you were part of a group of people trying to make things better for psychiatric patients, but that your group was small, isolated and, in the "big picture," powerless?

Here is a book that will dispel such feelings once and for all. *Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry* brings together a rich and powerful assortment of the individual and collective stories of people from all over the world; people who have not only rejected psychiatry's use of fear, coercion, force and fraud, but who have gone on to develop and actually put in place humane, effective alternatives.

Peter Stastny is a long-time researcher, associate professor of psychiatry at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York and a founding member of INTAR: the International Network Toward Alternatives and Recovery. Peter Lehmann, besides being a prolific editor, author and publisher, was one of the founders of Germany's Association for Protection Against Psychiatric Violence, which operates, in Berlin, the Runaway House, one of the world's most astonishing examples of successful alternatives to psychiatry.

In all, 61 contributors provide an impressive variety of accounts that powerfully describe successful ways of dealing with psychological/emotional/spiritual crisis. Many have themselves been the recipients, mostly unwilling, of psychiatric treatment. The book also gives voice to service providers, researchers and others who truly understand the importance of focusing on the strengths and common humanity, rather




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**Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry**  
 Anthology, 61 authors  
 Edited by Peter Stastny  
 and Peter Lehmann  
 Peter Lehmann Publishing  
**\$35**

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than the weaknesses, "symptoms" and diagnoses, of people who need real help in times of crisis.

The contributors to *Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry*, whether they completely reject the "medical model" (which views emotional difficulties and differences in perception as signs of mental illness) or work, as a few of them do, from within that model, recognize crisis as an opportunity for growth and change rather than a disaster which must be suppressed and forgotten.

The book's scope ranges from individual and small-group self-help efforts and suc-

cesses to national, continental and international collaborations for justice and large-scale change. It is amazing to see how much has already been accomplished, and heartening to know that so many people in so many places are devoting their lives to making alternative practices a reality.

Imagine a place where, when going through a crisis, you could be treated with respect, kindness, gentleness and empathy and the wisdom that comes from real, relevant experience by people who understand and value what you're going through, people who are willing to form real, ongoing relationships with you and help you form such relationships with others, people who can, and do, assist you in figuring out and accomplishing what you need and want. Imagine legal workers/documents who/which can ensure that your wishes and

human rights will be respected in situations where the law declares you mentally incompetent.

Compare these imaginings to what routinely happens to unwilling recipients of psychiatric treatments today: Incarceration, forced drugging, physical restraints, electroshocks, humiliation, stigmatization, debilitation and the removal of all legal rights. The latter is standard practice.

Thanks in part to the efforts of the people you will meet in this book, the possibility of mental health patients being treated with dignity and respect in our health care system is more than just a dream. Read about it in *Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry* and be inspired!

You can order this book through <http://www.peter-lehmann-publishing.com> or by asking your local book store to order it from David Oaks Distributor.

Also by the same author; *Coming Off Psychiatric Drugs*.

Childhood  
friendships,  
indeed all  
relationships,  
faded into  
masking  
depression  
through work  
and days at the  
beach



*Illustration by Rick Sazon*



*Illustration by Rose Ananda Heart*

**Bi-polar disorder  
shoos friends,  
lovers; draws  
family scorn**

By JM

I can't figure out relationships. When I was a child, I had friends and seemed to get along with them fine. Perhaps that's because children are so resilient. As a teen, I became very anxious and shy, so I didn't have many friendships.

Some of them ended because of some odd attitudes my mother taught me because of her own difficulties with relationships. For example, she would disapprove of me associating with a friend if she did not approve of whom he or she was associated with.

I am unsure of the quality of communication within my nuclear family. I recall being rebuffed by my brother when I wanted to play catch, which I really enjoyed. He did not explain his reasons for not wanting to play.

I don't recall a great example of communication being set by my parents. They seemed to argue a great deal, so I resolved not to do the same.

I did not understand the tool of communication. I was a pleaser. Therefore, if something bothered me in my

friendships or within my family, I did not talk about it; I simply ignored and tolerated it. My motto has been: "Some things are better left unsaid".

This was true in my marriage, too. I was very submissive and did not discuss any difficulties that I was experiencing, even though my partner opened the door for me to do so, although rarely. This was one of the many reasons my marriage ended after a very short time.

I did not have children and so I have not had the experience of needing to communicate with my own children. Perhaps that would have been a great experience for my personal growth.

As a young separated woman, I began to realize that I was depressed, but I never communicated

this to anyone. I covered it up instead. I worked a great deal, did things that were enjoyable like spending time at the beach, and had a small circle of friends, but none of my friendships were lasting. I never went back: When I moved to the Coast, I did not keep in touch with friends I left behind; when friends moved away, again I did not keep in touch. Sometimes I was just with my personal inward dramas.

And my relationships with men were totally baffling. Sometimes due to my depression, I wept when I was out on a date, much to the man's mystification. Most times, a long relationship was one that lasted for three months. I never remarried.

Being mentally ill resulted in attitudes of distrust on my part. I changed jobs frequently and learned that making friends with co-workers was detrimental because they could

turn against me and cause trouble for me with my boss. I suppose I became quite lonely, although I often deny this by saying that I am comfortable being alone.

After being diagnosed with bipolar disorder, I

found it very difficult to communicate with my family and extended family.

Most family members think that I am lazy and have no ambition. They have no understanding of my struggles and think that all I need to do is "pull up my socks", or "pull up my boot straps", as they say.

I do communicate with my mother and siblings, and in particular my brother who has been a great support to me, but I avoid my extended family. I truly have no friends.

I communicate mainly with mental health professionals and people I volunteer with.

Sometimes I realize that I create the stigma about my mental illness myself – by not speaking about it to educate my family members.



Illustration by Gale

## Mistakes offer an opportunity to learn

I worry about making mistakes, I make mistakes of all kinds – Freudian slips, social blunders, work errors, and mistakes due to forgetfulness or absent-mindedness. After I make even one mistake, I obsess about it for weeks. Why do I undergo all this angst?

Mistakes can be a positive experience; I can learn from my mistakes. If I make the social blunders of dressing inappropriately or using the wrong cutlery and these are drawn to my attention, I can be shown the proper clothing to wear, and I can be instructed which piece of cutlery is to be used for which course. If I make a mistake in my office filing, I will learn not to do it that way again and will be instructed in the right way to file. Errors caused by forgetfulness make me learn to write lists for remembering.

Mistakes can become opportunities. If I lose my way to the store I might meet someone interesting, maybe even someone delightful who could later become a good friend. Or if I lose my way by taking the wrong bus, I can use the opportunity to become familiar with a community that I hadn't visited before. The mistakes of losing something (a small booklet, for example), may lead to, in my frustrating search for it, finding another book I've been meaning to read for a long time, but had forgotten that I even owned.

Work mistakes can sometimes indicate aptitudes for a different type of work and hence a new and more fulfilling career.

I know that since my disability occurred, I have found that though I don't work, I am exploring my creative talents like writing and crafts. I decorate my home with furniture and smaller items which I paint using the crackle effect. I do some decoupage and stencilling too. I have also discovered a talent for teaching when I tutored a person with a low level of literacy.

There is nothing wrong with making mistakes. They are the way people learn

JM.

# Advocacy for the Lower Mainland Mental Health Community

The Mental Health Empowerment Advocates Program provides:

- Economic Advocacy to low-income persons with psychiatric disorders
- Outreach services at various locations in the Lower Mainland
- Educational sessions and workshops for clients, agencies, professionals, and other consumer and family groups
- Information on other community supports
- Information on issues of concern to the mental health community

Advocates will help you with Applications & Appeals for:

- Welfare, PPMB & PWD
- Other Provincial benefits and supplements
- Canada Pension Disability (CPP)
- Old Age Security (OAS)
- Student Loans Forgiveness
- Income Taxes

How to Reach us:

**Please call if you have questions or to book an appointment**

Phone (for both locations)     **(604) 482-3700**

In Vancouver: **1733 West 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver**

Office Hours: 9:00-4:30 p.m. -Monday to Friday

In Richmond: **CMHA's Pathways Clubhouse, 7351 Elmbridge Way, Richmond**

Thursdays only from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.