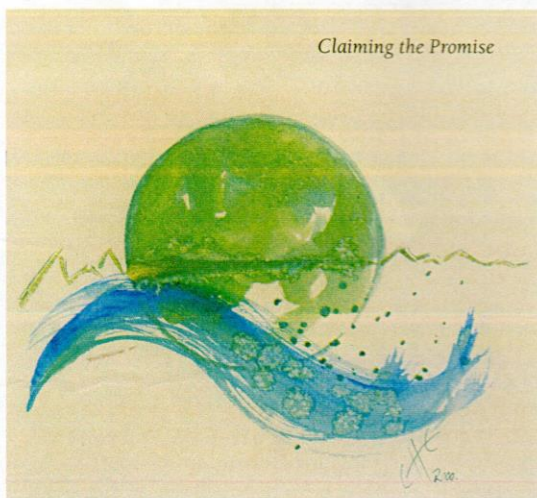


Rising to the challenge of a new life? Moving again? Caught off-guard by an unexpected event? Ecstatic with joy? Overwhelmed by sorrow? You are invited to express yourself artistically, to select the colors of your experience of the moment and begin to work with them in a sketchbook, a journal. To see what is coming to be in your own life and to find comfort is the very act of creativity.

In 1984, I treated myself to a weekend on an island in Lake George, NY, where good friends were camping. One of them had a set of chalk pastels, which were made available to others, just to enjoy. I proclaimed, as did another friend present, "I am not an artist!" Nevertheless, we perched on a rock and together made a chalk pastel rendition of the shoreline upon which we were gazing. On the other side of that experience, I began to experiment artistically. My own journey of that moment was one of letting go, so I decided to explore painting with watercolors. Lo and behold! In the letting go, I discovered adventure and beauty. I continue to find that being an untrained artist permits me to explore and to tap into my own uniqueness, while inviting others to do so as well. Everyone is an artist in their own way, in



their own uniqueness. For some, the art becomes a day-by-day companion along the journey. For others, it is a once-in-a-while activity, entered into consciously after much personal permission to do so in the face of the feeling that one must create something judged acceptable by others.

Mandala, a Sanskrit word meaning to have possession of one's wholeness, is a circular art form appearing across cultures

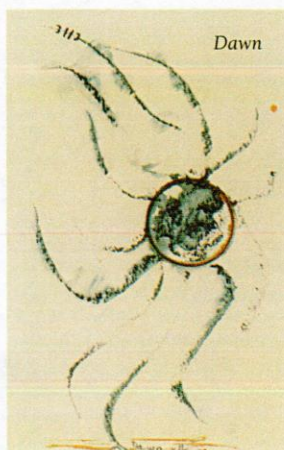
and time. Mandalas have shown up as creative outward images of internal journeys. As a very late blooming folk artist, I first became fascinated with the personal use of creating a daily mandala after reading Carl G. Jung's spiritual autobiography titled *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. The simplicity of drawing a circle, then spontaneously painting within the circle with watercolors, began to reveal my Self to me. I began to quickly write a haiku (Japanese poetry form using 17 syllables) to accompany each mandala. Eventually, as I led retreats and workshops, I began to invite others to experiment with this art form that had helped me to get in touch with my own spirituality.

Now you are invited to reflect upon your own journey through expressing your experiences artistically. To begin: purchase a small set of watercolor pencils and a small paint brush

The Art of Everyday Life

Ellen Howie

Hope Beyond Hope



and sit quietly with your art supplies before you. Close your eyes for several moments, relaxing, and when you are ready, select several colors and begin to add color to the mandalas in this article. As you add to these mandalas, coloring them, creating your own unique design, you will be experiencing art as meditation. You will come to know yourself at a level deeper than words and to see in your artwork what is coming to be in your own consciousness.

In my professional

work as a registered nurse, I am continually discovering the ways the arts lead to healing, which has a different dimension from cure. Taking time to tell and hear stories, to meditate and to take solitary walks are other simple activities people of all ages and abilities can enjoy and find restorative. The sacred begins to enter into each moment; one begins to discover the gifts of being present in the moment, of being delighted in the moment. When creating your own mandala, perhaps in a small sketchbook, it is possible to be amazed and awed by your own creativity! The mandalas in this article come from a booklet entitled *A Journey of Care*, which I created to be used in training hospice volunteers. I named the mandalas: Pilgrimage, Beginnings, Amazing Journey, Loneliness, Hospitality, Listening, Speaking, Gratitude, Endings and Beauty, and dedicated the journal to my Mom, who for many years was a hospice volunteer extraordinaire. As a registered nurse, spiritual director and folk artist, I am concerned with the healing of individuals and communities through the artistic expression of their day-to-day experiences of death and new life.

After the events of September 11, 2001, I experienced a period of time in which there was a suspension of engaging in the art work which was part of my daily expressions—painting a mandala, creating an accompanying haiku, journaling. In the shock and incredulity of that day and the days to follow, there was a desire to be with others, to participate in the prayer services in our village, to donate time and money in helping others. Eventually, I created a chalk pastel in my sketchbook of New York as seen across the harbor from Staten Island, with the Statue of Liberty still in full view, torch still blazing. Eventually I was able to create a haiku.

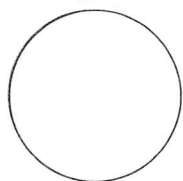
It is a delight to see people of all ages and in varying settings discover the artist within—persons in recovery from addictions, grandchildren painting with me at the kitchen table-

studio, religious on sabbatical, students in a college setting taking a bereavement certification program of studies, people on retreat, fourth graders in an inner-city school taking a year-long course on drug resistance education. One and all, people are amazed at their own creativity. As a formally untrained artist, there is an advantage to sharing my own experiences and extending the invitation to others: "Let yourself go, have fun, be nonjudgmental of your art work, and see what emerges!" Over and over again, there is delight and a building of community among the group. Sacred moments occur as the group reflects upon the experience. New insights are revealed and there is a wonder among all, gratefulness for life given, newness uncovered; the Self within the self emerges.

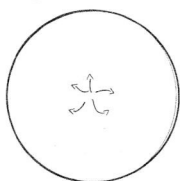
Art seeps into the kitchen as well, in the creating of a mandala on top of a salad with the tomato wedges surrounding a circle of grated carrots! Again, the beauty of the vegetables forming a symmetrical circle becomes art as meditation in the kitchen. Many times this leads to a contemplative stance of gratitude for the crops of the earth and the people who nurtured those crops, who harvested them, who were involved in delivering them, for the kitchen garden planted by some families. In sitting down to the meal, with sacred space in the center of the table one can light a candle, place an object and connect with a sense of wonder that there is in this moment, while aware that for so many of the world's people there is no food and no table—only empty stomachs. Thus does the journey inward also lead to the journey outward; caring for self/Self leads to caring for community.

Ellen Howie is a retreat leader, spiritual director, R.N., folk artist and a member of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. The ICA has trained her in many of her methods over many decades of service.

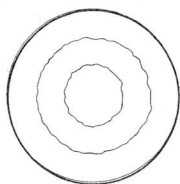
Mandala Exercise



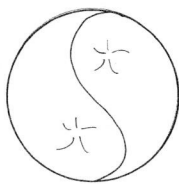
LISTENING



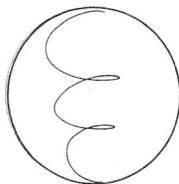
SPEAKING



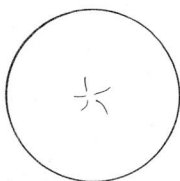
GRATITUDE



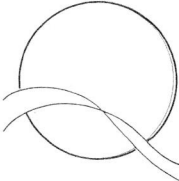
HOSPITALITY



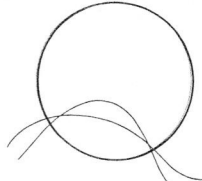
LOVE



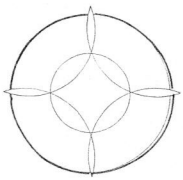
LONELINESS



ENDINGS



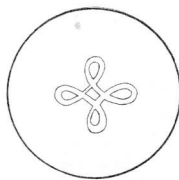
AMAZING JOURNEY



BEGINNINGS



BEAUTY



PILGRIMAGE

Mandala Reflections

What colors did you choose?

What feelings/thoughts/sounds did you notice?

What old memories/new insights were aroused?

Who are your companions on this journey?

What thoughts and prayers were in your mind and heart while you were coloring . . . journal writing . . . listening to God, to others?

Is there anything you would find helpful and healing to share with another person . . . to include in your prayers?

What name will you give to your journal?