

HEARING VOICES

Chatter from The Willow



WILLOW
ARTS
COMMUNITY

Vol 1



Reedman Hall & Walker Botanical Gardens

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Untitled Watercolour On Paper Art By Sarah Carter

An artist's mood is highly reflected by the artist's environment. Rodman Hall is an inspiring place where creativity, self confidence and freedom of expression are restored. The architecture, the history, the beauty, the natural and uplifting spaces that Rodman Hall and Walker Botanical Gardens have to offer the creative mind are extremely appreciated.

Thank-You Willow Arts Community & Rodman Hall Art Centre / Brock University.

The opportunities and experiences offered in this very special place is an integral part of recovery for Willow Arts Community Members.

Cover Illustration By *Andrea Eby*

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Welcome to Hearing Voices: *Chatter from The Willow.*

This publication is created, edited, printed, and assembled by the Zine Club member artists. Our goal is to provide content created by people with lived experience of mental health and addictions, capturing the cadence and candor of our artists' community.

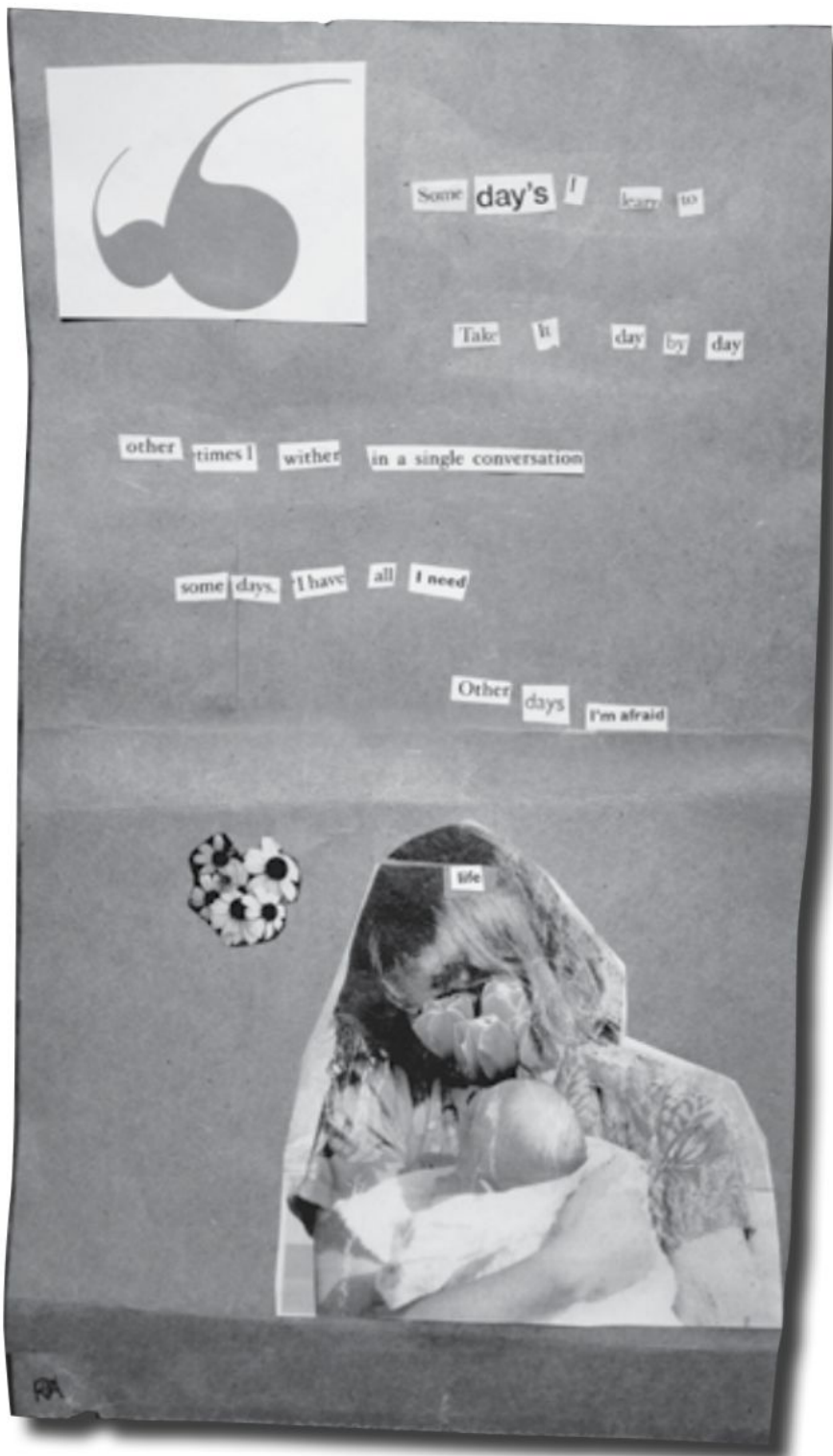
This zine, like many works produced by Willow member artists, is a labour of love. It took dedication, resilience, adaptability, patience, community, problem solving, decision making, all of those life skills we obtained through our lived experience. In the following pages, you will find poems, interviews, visual art, inspiration, resources, tough truths, and good laughs, we hope.

Special thanks to our contributors, editors, and audience. Extra special thanks to those who purchased this zine. All proceeds directly fund our next edition.

For more information, visit us at www.thewillowcommunity.com.



Pictured above are the editors: Shauna, John, Andrea, Danielle, and David.



WORDS HAVE GRAVITY

(reference G. Yamazawa)

Rita Lianga

Words have gravity.
They can bind you to a
certain time and place
like crazy glue.

They cast a hue
that will follow you
throughout your life.

Sometimes you
will always come back to
those words that were thrown to you.
Can't undo, residue of the venue.

Words that pin you down
like a squirming insect
on a crisp sheet of paper.
Dissecting, inflecting, perplexing
under a magnifying glass
you cast your past
struggling to be free
of the words gravity.

Punching Through the Darkness

The following is an interview between two Willow member artists John and Ryan. It captures one person's experiences growing up with substance abuse in the home and their resiliency through finding safety and support in the community. Please read with care as it touches on difficult themes.

John: What was it like being a kid and growing up surrounded by addiction?

Ryan: Well in my experience, I grew up in a drug stash house with people abusing drugs and alcohol all the time when I was at home. It was difficult growing up in that environment not to get involved in using

and even dealing. At home I could always smell things from upstairs or hear people and it would just eat away at my sanity. It was very difficult to do my schoolwork at home because there were always people doing drugs. Hard also to bring people from school home to work together. I'd be in the kitchen trying to do my homework—I liked doing my work at the kitchen table—but, OH! There's my mom and my dad and they're totally wasted! It was very difficult to even have friends at all, or they come to your house at a time when your parents are putting on this front and they're not showing who they really are. Sometimes I actually



looked for friends that had parents like my folks so that it wasn't as weird I mean, if I had friends that had parents who were users, it was easier for them to come and hang out with me. That way, at least, I had somebody who knew and who understood the situation.

John: What advice would you give to young people who might be in a similar situation? What did you do?

Ryan: I needed to find a place other than my home to be. I chose to play a lot of street hockey and sports at school. Sports are real! They encourage you to be healthy, so you're less likely to get involved with substances or end up abusing others. One thing that I would really encourage people to do is get into boxing. It really builds discipline. Builds self-respect. Where you want to be strong.

John: Did you find that changed the way you felt about your own confidence?

Ryan: A lot of kids that get into sports are already confident, and I was on a team with them growing up. Every year I was on baseball teams, volleyball teams, and so I was with kids who were a lot more confident.

I saw what it did for them. It was having a group of friends who kept an eye out. Family doesn't have to be your ancestral relatives. I don't believe I had a family growing up with my relatives, and I still don't. To me, "family" is where you are accepted, where you are encouraged. Not just bits and pieces of you but encouraged as you are. Where the people that you surround yourself with are excited for you to be you, and who want to give and take. They want to share; they want to be shared with; they want to listen.

John: What was it about boxing that helped you overcome so many negative influences?

Ryan: Boxing is good because everybody's kind of doing the same thing and there's a respect there too, if you go to the right club. To allow someone to punch you in the face takes trust. There are a lot of different ways you can train, but everyone at a club is going to be respected. You don't necessarily have to fight; you can train for the skills. You feel like you can do anything once you get that trust, knowing that they're not going to hurt you and vice versa. That's why I really encourage it. There's so much you can learn from other people.

is it possible to be taken seriously again after you feel you've lost some of your credibility?

It may be difficult but...

...yes you sure can. 😊

John: Are there other specific things that you felt boxing helped you with in struggling with mental health issues?

Ryan: There is a big misconception about boxing, that is actually the complete opposite of what the sport is. People think that with boxing you need to get in the ring and BE ANGRY! and that kind of thing. The fact is, being angry while boxing is the absolute worst! It needs a mindful mindset to do properly. I find that I use that skill a lot outside of the ring to stay cool and avoid the anger thing. You learn through boxing how to be relaxed. Relaxed while somebody's punching you, right? Well sometimes people punch you with words. Boxing teaches you how to be relaxed when somebody is being aggressive with you. I didn't become a fighter until I stopped wanting to fight on the streets if that makes sense. Mental health for me is very physical.

John: Besides sports, was anything else influential to your wellbeing?

Ryan: As a functioning autistic, I have the privilege that one of my special interests is being reading obsessed. So, anything that I work on, I would track down in the library and read every book about it. I've probably read over 10,000 books. I'm interested in everything. There's a whole universe out there. All types of books: non-fiction, graphic novels, comic books, anything. When I first went to libraries the internet wasn't even a thing. As an adult, I've learned how to do a lot of things through reading. I have read whole sections of "How-to Books", a lot of craft and art sections, watercolour, books on illustration and painting. It's a bottomless

pit! Nowadays there's all kinds of new things. For example, Fort Erie is a town of 30,000 and we have a 3D printer that you can use for free! The libraries in Niagara Falls have a great genealogy department and I'm doing family tree stuff. Such a cool thing to get into. There are all different events happening at your local library.

John: Was there a time when going to the gym and going to the library just wasn't enough? When you just couldn't function any longer in your home?

Ryan: I was eighteen. It was at the end of grade twelve. I had to just flat-out go to an extended family member, my aunt, and say, "hey, this is what's happening at home. I need help. The day that I write my last final exam I need you to come get me." They lived in a city, hours away, but they came with the truck the next day and got me. My family and I have mended our relationship through forgiveness, but it shouldn't be difficult for a child to go to school, to have friends, or to come home to do homework. All children have a right to be safe. And if the people that provide you with a home are taking away from your safety, that's an awful thing: because, those are the people that you're supposed to be able to trust to keep you safe.

John: I want to thank you for sharing some of your story with me and our readers. It leaves me feeling optimistic to know that you have found strength and hope within yourself and community organizations around you. You are thriving with your lived experience, and in turn are helping others.

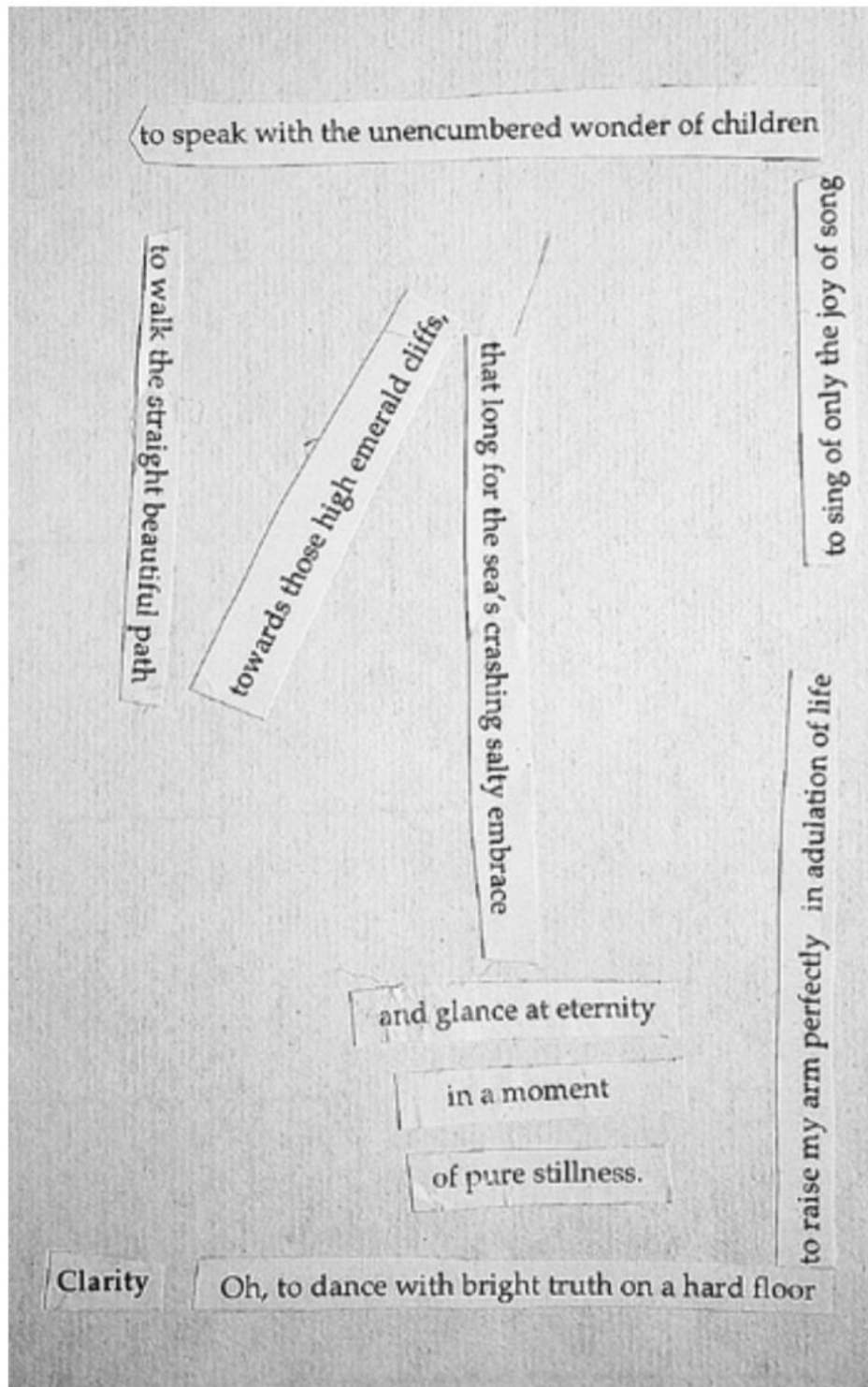
Trauma doesn't make you "damaged goods". In fact, that label is myth. You are a complete person, always, and not an item to be bought, sold, or compared. - Ryan Rumsey



I DREAM IN COLOUR

21'x23" Acrylic On Canvas

By Sarah Carter



It is extremely difficult to share your 'lived experience' even with those closest to you. You know they won't be able to completely understand unless it is lived by them as well. Even then, their experience would be unique and therefore impossible for everything they've experienced to be understood by you.

Most people have little experience dealing with mental health issues because people hide it as much as they can. Although it is all around us and even within us, the subject usually gets swept under the carpet.

We all fear stigma. I also fear making stigma worse by telling my story without having any formal education behind it. I am very grateful for the brave people who have stepped out on a limb and started having open discussions about mental health.



What I can tell you is that I was diagnosed in 2013 with a mood disorder. It was a rare diagnosis for someone of my age. It happened after the death of three of my closest family members in less than one year but that can't be confirmed as the cause. I am no expert, but if it can be stemmed from tragedy, I believe it may have possibly started with my father's car accident which left him with quadriplegia when I was four years old and the death of my grandfather when I was nine.

I'm thankful for my Dad who taught me to be more than just a survivor and my Grandpa who taught me that laughter is one of the best things you can share with other people.

Those who have known me since I was a child say I have always been happy, smiley, giggling with no worries and have a good attitude.

Although I now struggle with keeping a healthy balance between feeling good and experiencing mania I am determined, like my dad, to do more than simply survive.

Written & Illustrated by:
Anonymous But Becoming Braver

Healing Together

Hot & cold, off & on
stop & start
ambivalently
come here, go away
many, many shades of grey
mixed emotions
missteps, missed signals.
miscommunication

fear & pain; risk & hope

eye contact

and contact

heartfelt connection

healing together

Soothing My Amygdala

Soothing my amygdala
wee tim'rous beastie
craving safer ground
trying to reregulate
my ravenous inner critic
like a baying hound

Fight, flight, freeze or fawn
reasons to be cheerful
I'm no longer Satan's spawn
as I heal, feel, risk & breathe
soothing my amygdala
all my feelings on my sleeve

David Carmichael

PUTTING IMPROV INTO SELF-IMPROVEMENT

BY DANIELLE ROMANUK

I have been experiencing physical and mental health deficiencies since childhood, which culminated in 2017, causing a full-on breakdown. Through group therapy, I began learning coping skills that helped me to steer my life in a positive and intentional direction. I had always dreamed of getting on stage and doing stand-up, and I knew that I needed to find an improv class to give me the courage to go for it. Jobless and collecting OW while I wait for ODSP approval, I didn't feel worthy or capable of taking such a leap.

All of that changed when, Shauna MacLeod, founder of Willow Arts Community, came into a group therapy session I had been attending. She talked about this exactly: how people with mental health issues find it hard to label themselves as artists, to give themselves permission to be creative, get involved in the greater arts community, as well as overcome any financial barriers. She passed out the course calendar, and, as soon as I saw the Acting Out improv class, I knew it was destiny.

This happened on a Monday, with the class starting that Thursday. I called Shauna the next morning and was told that someone had just dropped out of the class, and that I could take their spot. For the first time in what seemed like forever, I was excited for my life. Over the next eight weeks, I found myself becoming more and more myself, feeling more and more alive. I was laughing and being silly. I felt free to express myself and trust what I was about to do even if I didn't know what that was. I was learning to trust my foot, my gut, my sense of humour, and most importantly my instincts. It was a life-changing experience that has opened doors for me in the world and, most of all, within my own mind.

At the centre of all this was Matt Beard, a twenty-year-old, full-time Brock student who teaches improv through the Willow. I sat down with Matt before class one evening to learn more about him and how he connects with people through improv. At fourteen, Matt got involved with improv in high school. It was such a positive experience for him and his friends that they decided to form their own troupe as well as branch out and offer classes. Being full-time university students, the troupe has parted ways for the time being, but Matt continues to work with local businesses, bringing the joy and benefits of improv to their work environment.

I asked Matt about his future plans for improv. "I'm pretty content to do it as a community thing. I just started volunteering with a local homeless shelter that wants to implement this, and we've tried it twice now and seen pretty good results with people laughing and sharing together." For Matt, "improv is about acceptance, gratitude, and mindfulness." He believes that "to be a good

improviser, you have to cultivate those skills." He explained that improv "is so social, so in the moment it can really capture that."

He went on to tell me how he used journaling to cultivate those skills and even formulated a book of journaling prompts for improvisors called *The Yes And Journal* (available through amazon.ca). While journaling is an activity typically done alone, Matt stressed the importance of community when it comes to experiencing healing through art. "That's what's so great about the Willow. Whatever your thing is, you can find what's really positive [that] pushes you to the edge of your comfort zone." When I asked about his involvement with the



Willow Arts Community, Matt explained "improv has been huge for [his] mental health, and [teaching improv through the Willow] has worked out."

He further explained what he gets from teaching: "lots of laughs, that's the main thing. It's very fun; the classes have all been a blast. It's very satisfying to see that it can be helpful for other people. I wasn't sure if it would be in the same way it was for me, but I've gotten a lot of great feedback from people saying it was a genuinely helpful experience. It's really rewarding to hear that, and that makes it worth it for sure."

So why does improv have such a positive impact on mental health? Matt's philosophy is "when you get someone to the edge of their comfort zone and then make it a positive experience [where] they can smile, laugh, feel supported, feel accepted doing that, [their comfort zone or window of tolerance] grows a little bit ... and laughter is such a great medicine. Really, in these classes you just laugh for two hours and then go home, right? My goals are to make people laugh, make people get to the edge of their comfort zone, and then do some improv." Improvising means saying yes to the present moment, which essentially is saying yes to life. I feel more resourceful, more creative, more adaptable, more willing to change, to let go, and to try. I even started writing again.



SHINE ON YOU CRAZY DIAMOND

21'x21" Acrylic On Canvas

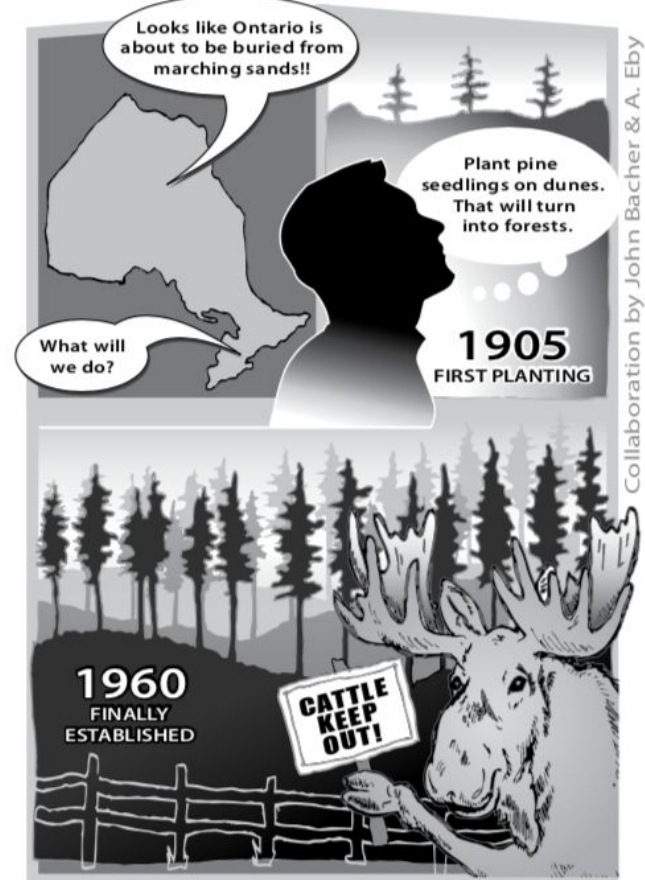
By Sarah Carter

- Zawitz -

Father Of Reforestation

A modest home at 477 Ridge Road in Fort Erie is where Edmund Zawitz lived between 1877 until becoming a high school drop out. He returned to high school by attending the St. Catharines Collegiate Institute now the Folk Arts Center on Church Street in St. Catharines on the advice of his step father. In 1899 Zawitz began university studies by attending McMaster then located in Toronto. One of his student friends there later recalled, "We considered him a bit odd in those days. He really didn't want to go to lectures or study

for exams. He was always looking at trees." In his last year at McMaster, he discovered the profession of forestry, and his career path was set. He discovered through tours of the province that some areas had become deserts from deforestation caused by farmers burning woodlands and cattle grazing on seedlings. From 1903 to his death in 1968 Zawitz dedicated his life to protecting and restoring Ontario's forests. Personal and political set backs took place in 1933 but his dramatic photographs taken during that period of graves being ripped out of the earth by winds from an encroaching desert help make the measures he advocated more powerful than before.



Collaboration by John Bacher & A. Eby

Betrayal In the Gods

The matinee this afternoon has ended,
The crowds gone forth, into the rainy streets;
Ticket stubs, programmes, and a phone,
Deserted all, beneath now empty seats.

But high above this sacred wooden stage,
Where actors voice sweet sounds with tender sighs,
The bold director thrusts, and then a grope -
A shattered trust, torn skirt, a muffled cry.

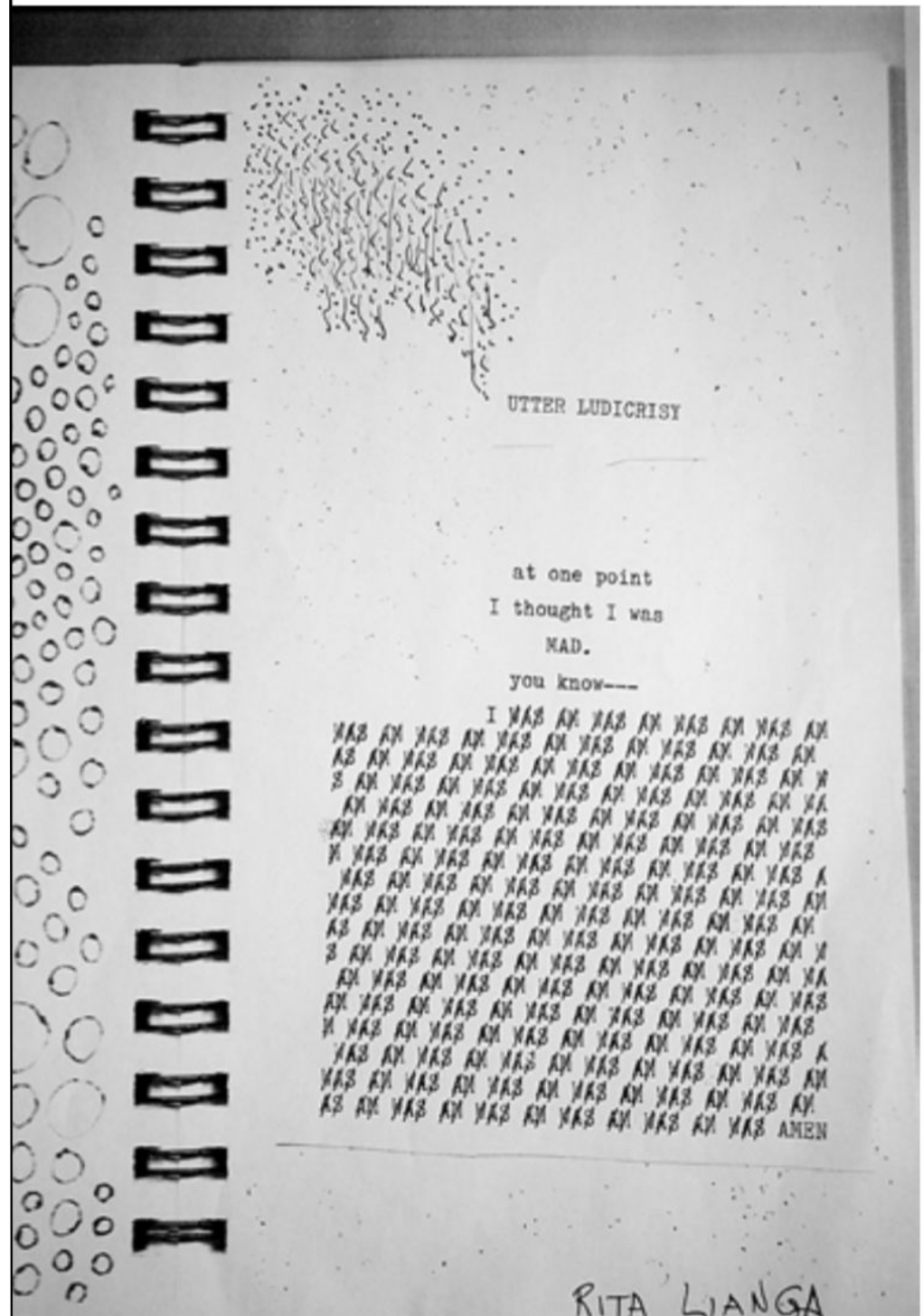
Where once sweet Juliet's star-crossed tender words,
Upon the ears of angels gently fell,
Walls echo now, with sounds more harsh and cruel,
Through lips that plead an exit from this hell.

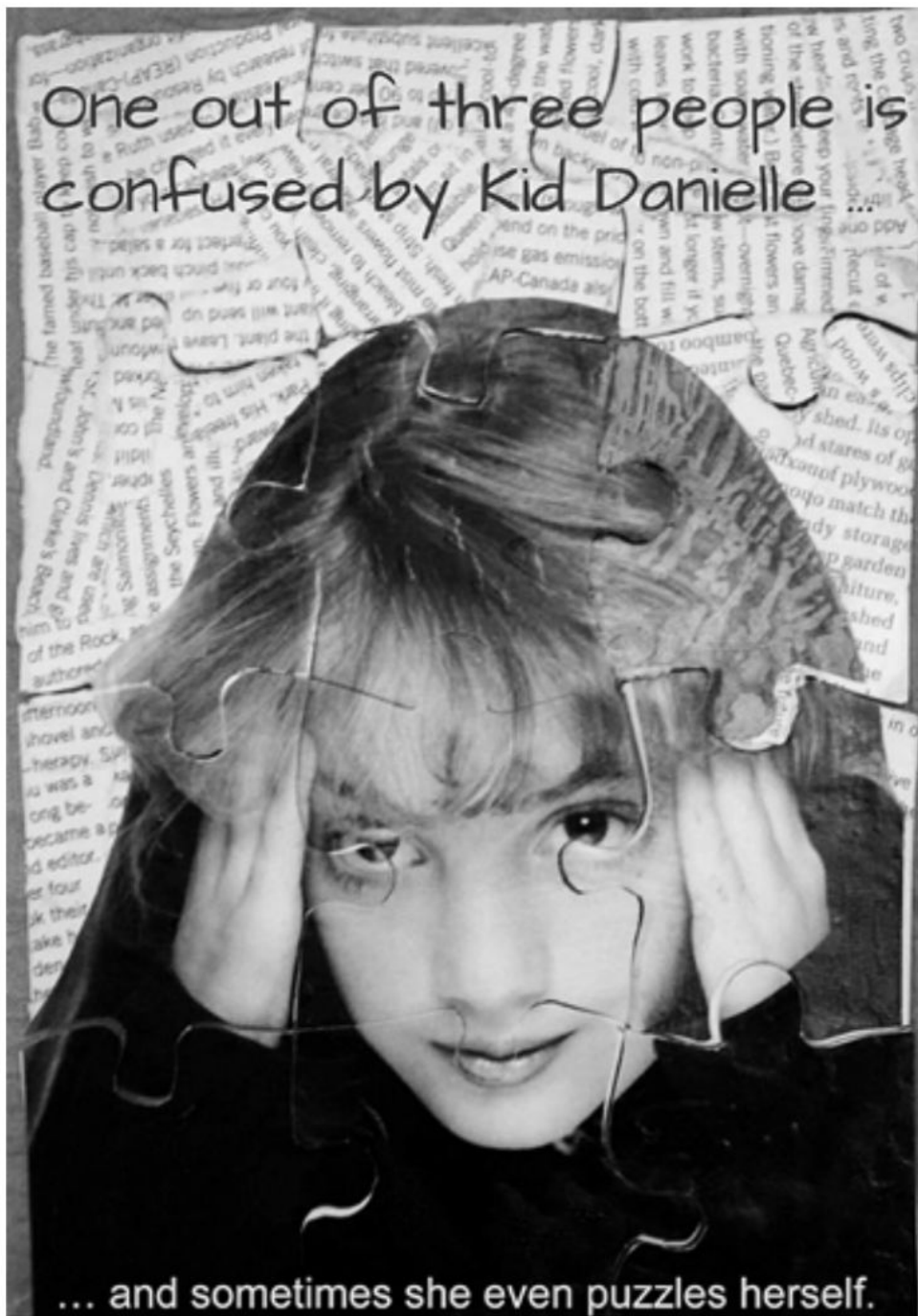
Well placed, nicely directed, is this crime,
From under and behind she is engaged,
Alone and high above the silent boards,
This sad, profane performance darkly staged.

For decades then, for fear, she mutes this act,
Buried in her silent heart so deep,
That only in a world of restless dreams,
Returns to haunt our actor's troubled sleep.

'Til bravely stirring as the lark one day,
She rises from her nest to wake the sky,
To shout her truth with words of blazing fire,
For all the world to hear the righteous cry!

John Sweeney



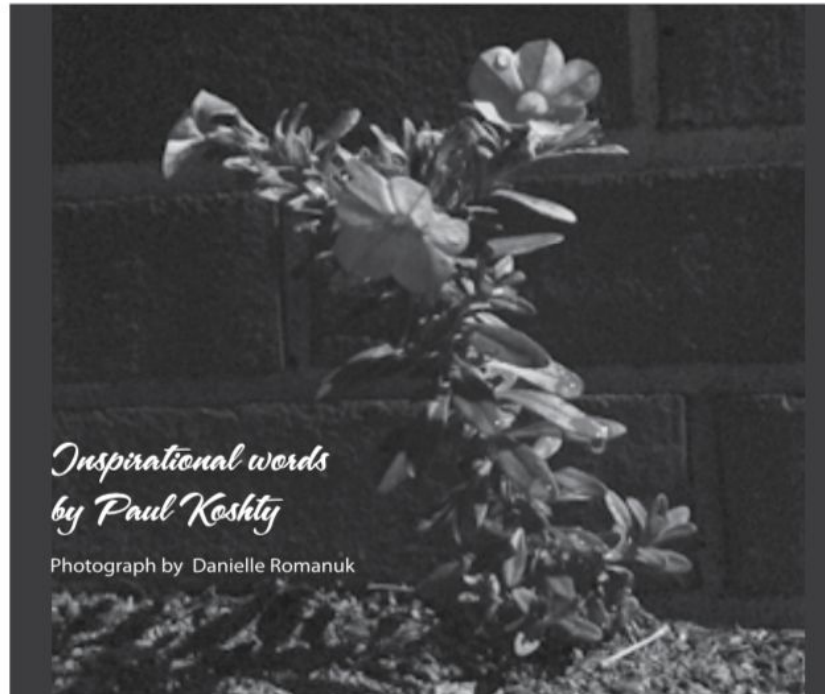


One out of three people is confused by Kid Danielle ...

... and sometimes she even puzzles herself.

Like my face? Like my Facebook page too!
www.facebook.com/Kid-Danielle

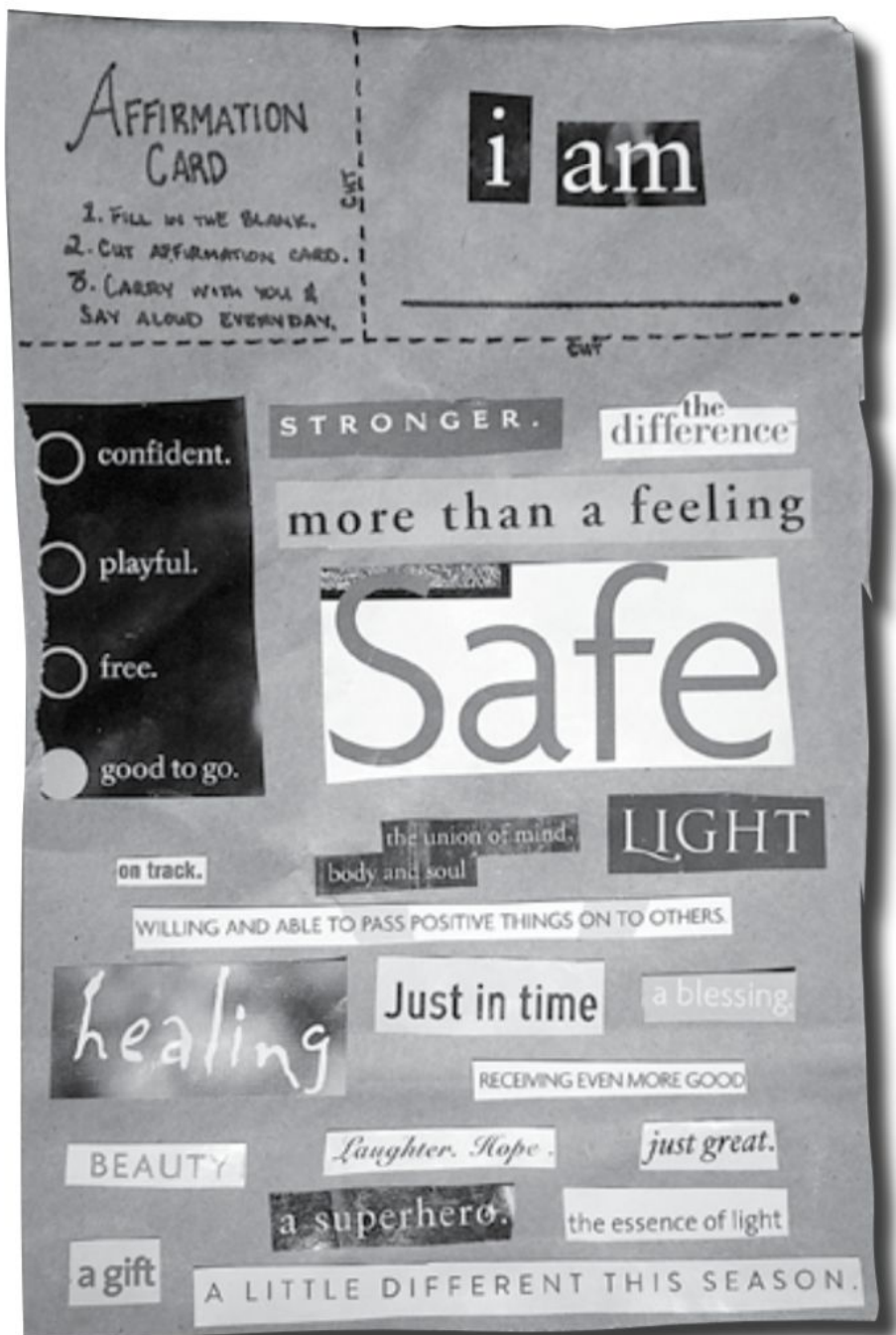
Kid Danielle is the property & brain child of DANIELLE ANTONIETTE ROMANUK



*Inspirational words
 by Paul Koshty*

Photograph by Danielle Romanuk

Despite facing the ups and downs, left field challenges, blindsides and surprises, brought on by life's daily experiences and by other people, as well as the roller coaster rides, dealing each day facing whatever life brings my way, good or bad, I've learned to be thankful in all things, rising and overcoming these various diverse situations, circumstances and people, dusting myself off, rolling with the punches, keeping my chin up, smiling, encouraging, remaining strong, being true to myself and to others, looking and searching for solutions, being resilient, persevering, moving through and forward in a better direction and knowing the fact that at this moment in time today, I am still alive, grateful, still standing tall and upright, enjoying life to the very best of my abilities, step by step, one day at a time with God's help, the assistance of others, good people, and my own best efforts. -



Free mental health and addiction support services in Niagara.

COAST Niagara - 1-866-550-5205

COAST Niagara provides mobile crisis outreach and intervention service offering immediate telephone counselling, and if necessary, on-site crisis outreach intervention in the home or on community locations. 24/7

Distress Centre - 905-688-3711

Distress Centre provides support to individuals in distress or crisis and education to the Niagara community which assists people to take ownership of personal choices and manage their lives in a healthy manner 24/7

www.distresscentreniagara.com

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Niagara - 905-641-5222

Urgent support and walk in Counselling

Mental health counsellors provide same day service to individuals by exploring their immediate concerns and offering assistance with crisis management and problem solving. No appointment required.

St. Catharines- Tuesdays 11:30- 5:30 PM, Branscombe Mental Health Centre, 1338 Fourth Ave
Niagara Falls- Wednesdays 11:30- 5:30 PM, CMHA Niagara Falls Resource Centre, 6760 Morrison St.
Fort Erie- Thursdays 11:30- 5:30 PM, CMHA Fort Erie Office, 20 Jarvis St.

www.cmhaniagara.ca

CASON- Community Addiction Services of Niagara - 905-684-1183

CASON provides comprehensive alcohol, drug, and gambling addiction treatment for individuals and their families.

www.cason.ca

Niagara Sexual Assault Centre (CARSA) 905-682-5258

CARSA provides services in a safe and comfortable environment for survivors of child sexual abuse, incest and adult sexual assault. They offer a 24-hour crisis line, emergency services, individual and group counselling, accompaniment and advocacy through medical and legal proceedings, public education programs and community events.

www.sexualassaultniagara.org

**For more info on these and other services, visit
Niagara Community Information Database www.niagara.cioc.ca or dial 211.**



WILLOW
ARTS
COMMUNITY

Willow Arts Community is a non-profit organization dedicated to removing barriers for artists living with mental illness/substance use to access creative spaces to make & exhibit work, exchange & advance skills, & expand professional networks.



Brock University

We use the arts as an agent of social change by connecting & engaging the public with exhibitions, publications, & performances to lessen the effects of stigma & social isolation.



This zine was created during the Fall 2019 Professional Arts Training season, supported by partnerships with Workman Arts Toronto & Rodman Hall Art Centre & with thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation, St. Catharines Cultural Investment Program, & The May Court Club of St. Catharines.



Generously supported by the St. Catharines Cultural Investment Program (CCIP)



Art colours to create, enhance, reveal and establish the mood of an image.



Fun Fact: Colour can sway thinking, stir emotions, and cause reactions. It can irritate or soothe eyes, raise or lower blood pressure and even suppress appetite.