



The Garden of Tranquillity

Barbara Johnson

We invite you to read the story of how this garden grew

I offer this as a healing tale of love, courage and continuum. This story relates the events leading up to Monday, 17 April 2000. A day which promised to be like any other. Plans for Easter were under way, my son Greg would come home Thursday through to Wednesday. We would celebrate with a family dinner. We would all spend time in my garden. All events to look forward to. However, Monday, 17 April 2000 ended as a tragic day for a young man, a mother, a family and the staff of MidCentral Health Mental Health Services.

The story tells of how through Love and Inspiration, that tragedy was transformed into an inspirational idea, a vision for a Garden of Tranquillity. Supported by the Board and Senior Management of MidCentral Health, the Garden will become an asset for Palmerston North Hospital. It will be a peaceful sanctuary, a place for quiet reflection, a place of peace and contemplation, a Garden dedicated to Healing, Restoration, Inspiration, Vision and Empowerment.

Love knows not its depth until the hour of separation

Gregory Allan Johnson, my eldest son, to be 39 years of age on 4 July 2000, had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, some 15 years previously. It had been a long journey of many trials and errors, of much pain and disillusionment. For the two years prior to Greg's death I struggled to find help. I believed he had the right to a better quality of life. To us Greg wasn't just a patient with a name on a file, a client with a mental illness, a consumer who "didn't meet the criteria". Greg was an intelligent, sensitive, courageous man, my treasured son, a loved brother, family member and friend.

On 9 February 2000 an incident occurred at Greg's place of residence, the Police were called and Greg was subsequently admitted to the Inpatient Psychiatric Unit. He was in this unit for six weeks and over this time made excellent progress in regaining his well-being. On 24 March 2000 Greg was moved to the Subacute Unit and within days of this move he experienced feelings of depression and suicidal thoughts.

He was given medication which seemed to help, however he often told me of how he experienced feelings of claustrophobia and imprisonment in this environment. Greg's admission to the Subacute facility was intended for short-term inpatient care, and he believed he would not get "any weller" by staying in Subacute. It became increasingly important for him to be discharged and be in his own home. With this thought in mind, Greg contacted Housing New Zealand and was told of a one bedroom flat becoming available after Easter. That flat became his total focus.

Greg came home for a first overnight leave on Thursday, 13 April and returned to Subacute in the evening of Friday, 14 April. He was home again on Saturday, 15 April and on Sunday, 16 April. During those four days Greg did a lot of work for me and derived a great deal of satisfaction from doing so. He cut back, pruned and tended many areas in my garden. He cleaned and polished my car. He walked with me and Toby, my dog. We went to look at his flat and discussed the merits of the address being not too far from home, close to shops, in a quiet area, etc. We bought him a watch. He got to see his sister, his brother and his much loved niece, he spent time with Toby. Greg was happy and positive. He and I shared such hope for his future. He had been in hospital ten weeks. He had spent his days with few opportunities for peace, contemplation or tranquillity.

One season had passed, Summer had gone, now it was Autumn, the leaves were colouring and falling.

These memories are precious

Monday 17 April 2000 a day like no other I was attending a meeting at the Subacute Unit, Mental Health Services, at 9:30am, to meet with Greg's two doctors for the first time. Greg had asked me to arrive by 9:15am, sometimes the doctors arrived early. On my arrival I found Greg to be in a state of extreme anxiety. He made two cups of coffee, he smoked a number of cigarettes, he asked several times if the doctors were on their way.

He was assured that if the doctors had not arrived within the next five minutes they would be contacted. Greg was very anxious that this meeting was not delayed.

At 9:30am the Psychiatrist and the Medical Officer arrived and accompanied by a Subacute Staff Nurse, a Key worker, Greg and I went to the interview room. The Psychiatrist made a brief introduction, explained he would be returning to his country of origin in July and passed proceedings over to the Doctor who introduced himself and said he had known Greg for only five weeks, but would continue to be his Clinician once Greg was discharged back into the Community.

There was discussion about the three main issues: Greg was to be trialled on a new medication.

I was eager to ask for an Advance Directive.

Greg wanted permission to arrange a tenancy agreement for the flat he had organised and was hopeful of moving into after Easter.

Greg asked his all-important question "Could he take the flat"? The Psychiatrist was cautious and stated "Not to be too hasty". Greg was bitterly disappointed. The Psychiatrist continued, "Only three weeks longer and the first week will be spent at home over Easter, with your Mum". The meeting concluded at 10:30am Greg went straight to the telephone and cancelled the flat.

Greg was resigned to spending the rest of the day at Day Hospital. He said to me, as he had said a number of times before, "It's like a prison in here, Mum". I looked into my son's face, it was an ashen colour, his cheeks were sunken in, he looked distraught, filled with despair, he was close to tears, but he was brave, he didn't cry. My heart wept for him.

I asked him not to give up hope, that I would be back to see him at 5:00pm. I asked him the time – 10:45am. I hugged him, he kissed me, I told him I loved him, he thanked me for never giving up on him. That was our final farewell.

Already his Soul was preparing for the journey back Home. On that Monday at 12:20pm, Greg had climbed the 3 storeys to the roof of the hospital construction site. From that rooftop he fell to the ground below. Death was instantaneous. That was our final parting. When I was informed, by Police, of Greg's death at 4:00pm on that fateful Monday, it was indeed a day like no other.

Losing one's child is surely the deepest wound

Easter came and went, already a week had passed, another Monday. It felt like an anniversary, as did each successive Monday until already one month had passed. May, June, then it was July. I learnt

that it isn't time, but love which heals.

Autumn's Harvest had been gathered, Greg was in his new Home

Many extraordinary things happened, I seemed to be showered with Blessings, I felt very fortunate, I felt very connected to a presence unseen. Winter 2000, I was in my garden when a thought came to me. I was amazed at the simplicity and in awe of the meaningfulness of this inspirational idea.

A Garden of Tranquillity

The vision was that of a small garden of contemplation and tranquillity to be designed around the new Acute or Subacute buildings. A garden planted and landscaped with care, that incorporated seating, water, shade and sun. This included the choice of trees, shrubs and plantings that enhance tranquillity and contemplation as well as the design of the garden, which allowed for consumers, their families and staff to take time out to reflect. The garden would not be dedicated specifically to Greg, but to all Mental Health Service users, and there would be a plaque with the words:

*"Plant me a Garden
to Heal the Soul
a Garden of
Peace and Tranquillity"*

I talked with the Doctor about this vision of a very special garden where consumers of Mental Health Services, their family and staff could spend time in a beautiful setting. He suggested I contact Mental Health Services with a proposal. The Company Manager at the time, was enthusiastic as she listened to the idea of The Garden of Tranquillity. It was an exciting prospect that the seeds of something wonderful had been sown.

The proposal went to MidCentral's CEO and to the District Health Board. The response was favourable, that a Garden of Tranquillity and Contemplation be developed on the Palmerston North Hospital Campus. A place of peace and tranquillity was indeed possible. It was signed off. The Seasons bring us in touch with the rhythms of Nature and give their own kind of reflection on both the garden and on Life. I began planning a Garden of Memories. I chose the area with care. I created Greg's Garden with love and all the while I thought about The Garden of Tranquillity. The vision for that garden was very dear to my heart, it would be a place of peace and sanctuary where souls would be nurtured, where healing would happen.

To honour Greg was to celebrate his Life, rather than grieve his Loss

“Greg’s Hope”. Doesn’t it say it all?

17 April 2001, our remembrance for Greg’s 1st Anniversary. We celebrated the meaning Greg had brought to our lives. The seasons come and go, the continuing cycle begins anew. Time passes full circle again and again and again. Life goes on. 17 April 2005, the seasons have turned full circle again. This day we celebrate Greg’s 5th Anniversary.

If we keep a green bough in our heart, the singing bird will come

The Garden of Tranquillity comes to Fruition

As with all gardens, it has taken time and patience and trust. The seeds sown in Winter 2000 are ready to grow and flourish.

In the spring of 2005 an area has been given for the garden to be established. This is ideally situated within the existing courtyard adjacent to Ward 21, Acute Mental Health Services, the Chapel and the Women’s Health building. This courtyard will be further developed and utilised with the extension of therapeutic services for people with pain as well as for service users of mental health, their visiting families and staff.

In the new year of 2006, the long held dream will be realised – a small garden, planted with care, with sunlight and shade, a tree or two, some seating, the tranquil sound of water, a mural and a plaque with the words ‘

plant me a garden to heal the soul, a garden of peace and tranquillity’.

The Garden will contribute to a healing environment that is conducive to restoring spirits, hope and self-worth.

Expressions of interest in joining a ‘Friends of the Garden’ group to maintain this garden will be welcomed. Because there are no final endings, but always the promise of new beginnings, we can glimpse the eternal, we can come to know the Continuum of Life.

Amongst Greg’s effects brought home from the hospital was this poem and sketch he had done at Day Hospital. I entitled it

Greg’s Hope

Rainy day blues

Blow the other way

For the sun begins to shine

When you say

That things are getting better

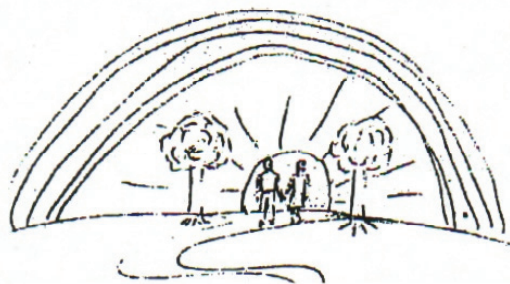
For tomorrow’s not far away

A better future

A feature of my life

To be happy is

everybody’s right



Greg – April 2000



Gregory Allan Johnson
4 July 1961 – 17 April 2000

A vision for the future of the Garden of Tranquillity

The Palmerston North City Council's City Future has expressed an interest in the concept of the Garden of Tranquillity as an asset for the city. In 2006 it is anticipated that a full therapeutic garden would be created for the community in an already established and accessible setting.

Both gardens, the one in the Hospital setting and the other in the city, would be linked by the features of the plaque, the sanctuary fountain, the

mural and the seating. A peaceful sanctuary for people of all Cultures, Creeds and Beliefs Here trees, rocks, water, earth, light and nature have been brought together in harmony.

These elements embrace the ancient and contemporary symbols of life, love, strength and spiritual uplifting.

The Garden of Tranquillity has been developed as a place of quiet reflection and offers an escape from the hectic demands of life.

It is a place of peace and contemplation.

The Garden of Tranquillity is dedicated to Healing,

Restoration, Inspiration, Vision and Empowerment. It is a Garden for all Seasons.

Pathway to Sponsorship

Sponsorship will be sought from charitable agencies as well as private entities as a means of funding this project.

Requests for information may be directed to Barbara Johnson:

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