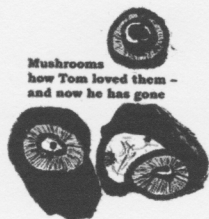


Elizabeth's story...

Elizabeth's Mushrooms



Elizabeth had dementia. When she attended the BCA workshop, the team and volunteers were told that Elizabeth's son, called Tom, had died; but that the staff were not sure if this had registered with Elizabeth. There was a mass of vegetables on the table which participants were invited to draw, supported by volunteers and care staff. After making some scribbles to try out the materials and unfamiliar tools like twigs, sticks, and string with black Japanese ink, Elizabeth definitely selected the mushrooms and succeeded in making some drawings in amongst the scribbles that looked like mushrooms. Throughout the experience, however, she continually asked where Tom was; a question upsetting to the volunteers as they could not reply and alleviate her distress.

The participants were then asked to give a title or caption to their drawings. The volunteers tried to support the care staff to enable Elizabeth to do this but they found it very difficult. The artist leading the workshop then sat down with Elizabeth and her volunteer and her care staff assistant. Using continual questions like 'Why did you choose the mushrooms?' eventually led, after the whole conversation with Elizabeth, her volunteer and care staff, had been edited, to the caption: 'Mushrooms – how Tom loved them, and now he is gone.' This was a breakthrough, as Elizabeth had now been able to show the care staff that she was indeed aware of her son's death.

A book was made of all the participant's artwork called *Other People's Pages* and Elizabeth's page attracted many compliments from people, even those who did not know her story or even that people who were unfamiliar with drawing had produced the book.

"A lot of healing took place. This is the kind of afternoon that makes my job worthwhile."
Key Care Worker

About 6 weeks later, Elizabeth's key worker, who had not been on the project, knew that Elizabeth's grown up grandchildren were visiting. She thought that showing them the book with their grandmother's drawing might help in their own grief at the loss of their father. When they saw Elizabeth's page, with the ink illustration of mushrooms and the words printed with them, the grandchildren burst into tears, as they realised that they could finally share their grief with their grandmother. The key worker said of the experience 'A lot of healing took place. This is the kind of afternoon that makes my job worthwhile.' Impressed with the potential of this work, she asked that a programme be designed for the staff and residents of the residential home where she worked and Elizabeth lived.