



Introduction: First Edition

Love your life! Feel great! Be happy! We deserve to live the best life possible.

This book is not about fixing or changing who you are. How do you increase your awareness of yourself and your surroundings? How do you make wise choices that best enrich your life so you can fully live and enjoy it? What does self-care look like?

This book is a safe beginning for individuals just starting their journey to fuller self-awareness and creativity. It also provides support and stimulation for creative individuals already living their dream.

What I know comes from my own life experience and the experiences of my students and clients as we have learned through practising the arts and integrating body/brain learning. These insights I share in my workshops and in this book. Combining the arts with awareness techniques and living skills can produce powerful, life-changing results.

I believe that as we grow up, many of us develop blocks to our awareness, sensitivity, perception, intelligence, and capacity for happiness. These blocks can cloud, confuse, mask, and/or inhibit hearing our wise, intuitive inner voice and body intelligence, making it difficult to choose what's best for us and those around us.

We don't need to understand, label, analyze, or share all these blocks to transform them into learning tools that can assist us in our daily living. Studies show that when feelings and emotions are expressed, they become unblocked. They transform and evolve. Having feelings and emotions witnessed makes the experience stronger and more transformative.

The arts will stimulate the neural pathways in your brain with new perspectives.

The arts offer us a non-verbal and non-threatening form of self-expression, allowing us to translate and transform feelings and emotions without judgment. We can feel relaxed, open, energized, and receptive to learning. And we often find hidden strengths and resources.

As a child, I knew anything was possible, and knowing that made it true. As I grew older, I started doubting the miracles of life, the awesome positive energy and power in our universe. I began to ration my wishes, hopes, and dreams. Looking back, I also sabotaged some of those dreams. As I grew to understand what was happening and what I was and wasn't doing, I gradually came back to the knowing of my childhood, to knowing that the source of creation was within me, that we are all possibilities, that we are creative already.

With clarity of mind, body, and spirit, we can access so many possibilities. I experience, see, and live this most of my moments and I want to share it in a simple, enjoyable way that I believe is true to our human nature.

The challenge is to communicate this abstract, non-linear thinking, to put into words and action the non-verbal concepts. In the “doing” of creative non-verbal actions, we can pull away barriers and blocks so we can access our true potential, our true happiness. We can observe our life stories in art—we can build and strengthen our resources.

In this book, I refer to many forms of non-verbal communication, including music, dance, and, most frequently, drawing. Drawing helps us to develop perception skills, which in turn serve as a foundation for visual communication. Learning to draw is to visual communication what learning to write is to verbal communication. Drawing is accessible, economical, and instinctive. It opens our eyes. After drawing, we cannot help but see our world differently.

This book is a guide to “doing,” finding, accessing, and communicating what we already know deep inside us. The doing brings to surface the awareness, thoughts, wants, desires, ability, and power that got buried along the way. In the doing, we access our own truth, and that will help us find our own way to live well and be absolutely happy.



Introduction: *Second Edition*

Since self-publishing the first edition of this book in 2004, I have been welcomed into the Expressive Arts Community internationally. I realized that I had been practising expressive arts as an adult and a facilitator for over thirty years. These concepts have always made sense to me, and the proof is in the continuing successes of my students, my clients, and myself.

In 2006, I graduated from the Expressive Arts program at Sir Sandford Fleming College, Haliburton, Ontario; in 2009, I graduated from a three-year intensive program at a private college, ISIS Canada, in Toronto, Ontario, in Expressive Arts Therapy. In 2011, I successfully completed the Masters level for Expressive Arts Therapy at European Graduate School (EGS), Saas Fee Campus, Switzerland.

Since 2007, this writer has practised EXA therapy on private clients and youth groups for hospice, the local boards of education, and the District of Muskoka. With this accumulated Expressive Arts experience and studies, I am reshaping the book *Loving Your Life* for a revised second edition.

I am very pleased to say that the book continues to stand strong on supporting individual creativity and supporting self-care. This edition includes some expressive arts terms.

In some of the creative practices, I have offered additional exercises to further the creative experience.

I have also added a chapter on dying. Death is a natural part of our life and an important part of loving life. In my experience, our society does not manage death and loss well, which I address in chapter seven.

The resources and reference sections have been expanded to reflect my continuing research.

The purpose of these subtle changes for this already successful, well-received book is to enhance the reader's experience by being more positive; bringing more hope; offering more varied art discipline processes; and offering more reference materials, more community, and more of the therapeutic model.

How have I changed since my formal training?

Since my training, five major things have shifted for me in my personal and professional life, all of which have resulted in a more harmonious, fuller life, filled with growing synchronicities:

I am more comfortable with the unknown.

I am stronger in my intuitive sense.

I can sit in the swamp with myself and others.

I am more present.

I am more confident.

When I began EXA, I remember how I detested not knowing the plan or routine ahead of time. I had anxiety over new routines and new ventures. As much as EXA and this education was a dream come true, my anxiety level was very high. I re-mortgaged my house, re-budgeted my finances, rented out my son's former room, and set up a local practicum before I was interviewed for my acceptance by the ISIS college. That was the easy part. Emotionally and physically, my stomach was in knots, and inside I was shaky.

I could manage only one semester at a time. Even though very resistant, I grew more comfortable in not knowing what lay ahead: of a class, travel, my work, or a session with a client. This did not happen overnight, and I would not have believed I could change that much—even though at one time I had wished I could.

All the institutions and practices at ISIS strengthened our sensitivity, our intuition, and our urges, which are so important to this work and to living well. I rely on my intuition and urges in my daily life, and especially in my private practice.

As much as I plan my sessions and get ready, I am open to what the client brings. It is his or her day and time. There are infinite possibilities in what can be brought forward, and I rely on my intuition as to what to do next. The training has helped me give in to the moment, to be open to, and curious about, what is brought forward.

Time and daily practice are essential for me. This regular self-care is an ongoing process; although it used to feel laborious, it now feels more like self-love.

I pride myself as a positive thinker and an action-oriented person. I practise the principles of attraction. A few years ago, my daughter finally burst out in an emotional, crying, gut-wrenching heap of misery. She had been holding back her anger and grief because, she said, she did not want to feel them in case she attracted more of this deep pain. I was taken aback. Stunned, I had to rethink positive thinking, realistic thinking, and authentic feeling. How do I sit with these dark, sad, yukky feelings in a healthy way and not attract more to myself? How and when are unpleasant emotions useful?

This concept and question is very important, as it affects how I live my life, guide my children, and work in my practice of helping others—especially this book.

I have learned to not be afraid to sit in chaos, deep grief, raging anger, deep sadness, and angst-filled questions. I've learned that the intensity cannot sustain itself and can move. Emotions have qualities; they exist, whether useful or not.

What I am learning is how to keep the feelings moving. It's when feelings are stuffed away and suppressed that they fester, grow, and attract more of the same and invite disease. It is hard to sit with someone in his or her swamp; however, it is a journey and a work that has significant rewards. It is also hard not to simply solve things and to sit with more questions—although with EXA, I can.

Prior to my EXA learning and EXA work, I had a horrible fear of death. Working with death and grief has helped me accept my own death and that of others. In my humanness, I still feel the loss of life through death. In accepting death, life has become even more precious and more wondrous.

I have practised and studied meditation for many years. I live in nature as much as I can. I begin my day with gratitude, prayer, meditation, and a long walk in the woods along the river. All this maintenance helps ground and calm me. EXA has emphasized my own self-care.

My EXA training has given me a way to express myself with the arts in an organized way. I can bring myself and/or a situation to a session and am able to “harvest” the new stimulation/ideas my brain has experienced by artistic expression. It's given me a way to understand non-verbal sensations and to get them outside myself by means of art. With this practice, I do this non-verbally or verbally.

EXA has fast-forwarded moving through personal layers of healing—like peeling the skin of an onion—to where I am now. I feel more authentic and grounded in all respects. I feel my life makes a little bit of sense now and again. I live my life purpose. Many days I feel satisfied.

My life is the best it has ever been, and I am the happiest I have ever been; and this I share with the reader of this book.

What Are the Expressive Arts?

Life and art are connected in many metaphorical ways and levels. Expressive Arts invites us to explore ourselves and our senses by art-making. The arts allow us to freely express ourselves outside the boundaries of language.

In a strong verbal world, the arts offer a wealth of non-verbal intelligence, helping to strengthen our creative power and deepen our relationship with life. The arts stimulate the brain in new ways of thinking. You are most knowledgeable of your own life. Your expressions in art are most meaningful to you and your situation.

In the doing of Expressive Arts, we can build on our inner wisdom and resilience. This act of doing could be an act of moving from being stuck.

Expressive Arts can be described as integrating sensory modalities such as seeing, hearing, touching, and using different disciplines such as imagery, breathing, painting, drawing, sculpture, movement, music, play, drama, poetry, and/or journaling (e.g., writing a phrase in response to a painting). Technical experience in modalities is not necessary, as the goal is to “express” an emotion, self, or situation. It is not to create an art piece; it is a way to shape an image for a new perspective. The client requires no formal art training. It is an invitation for self-expression and self-exploration.

Moving from modality to modality in the different disciplines helps us move through a situation or issue.

***Metaphors emerge, new perspectives appear,
and new ideas and solutions surface
as the brain gets stimulated in new ways.***

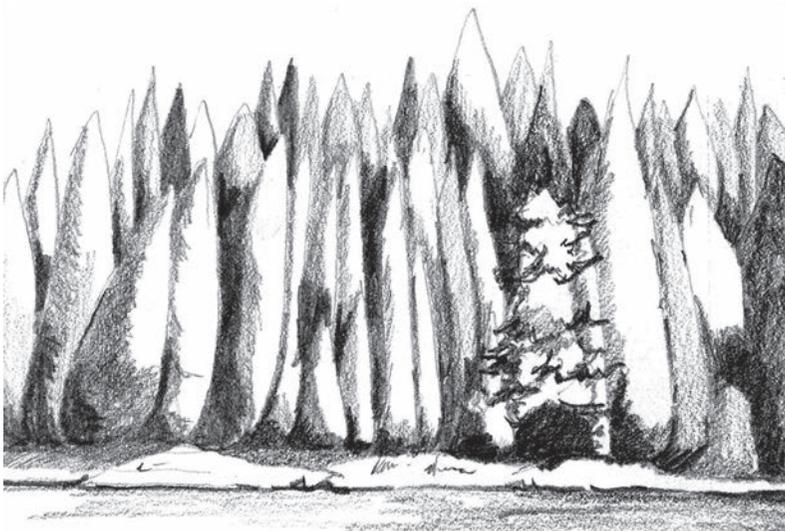
Because most of Expressive Arts is non-verbal, it encourages the individual to stay in body sensations and feelings rather than second-guessing and overriding the feelings with thinking, judging, or analyzing the experience.

Expressive Arts is different than traditional talk therapy in that it allows for process/goals to transpire in a non-verbal way. Sometimes language and words are not enough. Sometimes finding words is difficult. Young people in particular usually do not have the life experience, articulation, and understanding that are required to communicate their feelings and thoughts. Words in themselves can be limiting in the expression of feelings. Doing art allows those feelings to be expressed, witnessed, and acknowledged as they are being experienced by the maker.

***Discoveries are made in the exploration,
and perspectives are unique and meaningful to the maker.***

The reader can work on an issue and focus on creative play and/or stress relief. The focus could be artistic, emotional, sensory, and/or aesthetic. The focus is totally dependent on the goal of the participant, the group, and the workshop.

My hope is that the methods given in this book will help in deepening your life, as it already has for so many others.





Introduction: Third Edition

Loving Your Life has been going strong for 12 years. After the first edition sold out, I refreshed *Loving Your Life* to reflect my intensive studies in expressive arts. The second edition was also well received, and after recent international travels with expressive arts I have refreshed it again. The core content remains the same, but now *Loving Your Life* is internationally compatible, sensitive to other cultures around the world.

I have intentionally kept the language simple and the format easy to read so that the goal of living life creatively and intuitively remains accessible to everyone, including readers whose first language is not English.

It is an honour to bring the book to you. Completing the creative practices offered here will help you love your life! Enjoy!

