

Living Heritage at Work

PROFILE

Bonnie Chapman, Artist / Educator / Researcher / Healer

Everyone has the capacity to be creative; in stillness, in quiet places, in nature, in community. Bonnie Chapman's awareness of the 'other' in society brings depth and meaning to her work as an artist, educator, researcher and healer. Behind her warm, gentle demeanour is a conviction and compassion for others that betrays enormous strength and courage. She is committed to community arts that focus on the power of social history as it emerges through the creative process, bringing with it individual and collective healing.

For the past ten years she has worked with cancer and terminally ill patients at the Bird's Eye Community Hospital Art Studio which she founded as a pilot project. The studio became a sacred space where "memory of identity construction, heritage, and other significant life events . . . emerge through the creative process and bring transformative healing," benefiting the "health of the patient, health-care staff and the wider community."

Born in Prince Albert, she moved with her parents and three sisters to Saskatoon when she was 2 years old. She achieved her B. Ed. from the University of Saskatchewan with a double major in arts and special education. Since then she has traveled extensively and studied with painter, Otto Rogers, and at the international Pilchuck School of Glass in Washington State. She has also completed post-graduate studies in spiritual caregiving and is pursuing a "M.Ed. in curriculum studies with a focus on the compassionate arts as a spiritual care technology and social justice, in which living heritage is embedded." Bonnie's master's research won the Behavioral Science Research Award of Excellence (student category) at the 8th annual RQHR/RHIS Research Showcase.

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“If memory were treated as an object of historical analysis,” Bonnie suggests, “oral history could be a powerful tool for discovering, exploring, and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory; in how I make sense of my past, in how I connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how I use it to interpret my life and the world around me.”

Her openness to and acceptance of the ‘other’ without reservation or judgement is a welcome change for patients subject to a healthcare system focused on treating disease rather than people. Within the sacred space of the art studio, patients affirm their own sense of identity, belonging and place as they draw on their heritage to discover strength and courage to cope with adversity. Bonnie believes, creativity is in fact a “survival mechanism” that provides individuals and communities with a means of expressing our deepest values and aspirations.

Her own art practice has come to be influenced by the cancer and palliative patients she has met at the hospital studio. Recent works include the Prayer Paintings, a series that speak to “an enlarged perspective of human flourishing, you might say living heritage...”



Bonnie Chapman in front of her Prayer Paintings - courtesy of the artist

Heritage Saskatchewan Alliance is the collective voice of all those who value heritage in Saskatchewan. Our vision is to see heritage as a valued and dynamic legacy that contributes to our sense of identity, creates an understanding of our past, is used to build communities in the present, and informs our choices for the future.