# Art Therapy Revisited By Betty Dowe

Over 25 years ago I wrote an article “Art or Therapy”. Everything I shared is still true today! Then I had just moved to Tampa, FL. from Decorah, IA. and my husband went on Kidney Dialysis. My Rosemaling got me through 2 years of dialysis and then the Kidney transplant. I taught in Tampa through Hillisborough Community College Art Program. Made many Rosemaling friends and joined Sons of Norway Lodge. After 20 years in FL. and when Don retired we moved back to Harmony, MN. to be near family and Mayo Clinic for Don.

My husband was a clinical Social Worker and worked in the medical field for over 50 years. Mental health influences our daily life, our emotions, our ability to deal with stress and help us laugh at ourselves. Laughter, music, art, a new outfit or hairdo is a way to enhance our mental health and stability. Have you ever heard anyone say Art is my therapy? I have from my students and then they would say and a lot more reasonable that a therapist! There is no magic solution because it is up to the individual artist.

I believe Art is 1 part talent, 1 part continuing education and study the art and 1 part state of mind. My husband always added practice, practice, practice and study some more! Your surroundings are very important. Good lighting and ventilation and a special place to paint. I always play soft music when I paint and surrounded by Rosemaling examples. I always told my students about my 3 A’s. which are Art, Attitude and Achievement. There is a wealth of knowledge waiting to excite, enthuse and stimulate your creativity. With it comes Art Therapy. As I always tell my students keep those brushes stroking and smile.

Early in Don’s clinical practice he gave a talk to a Ladies group on Mental Health. He began by asking “Do you like yourself?” Then he told them to look in the mirror each morning and smile at the reflection and tell yourself I like you and you are a creative and unique person! You will get a smile back too. Now that my husband has died I am even more thankful for my Rosemaling and friends I have made through the years! I have also enjoyed the Rosemaling Face Book site with all the sharing among artists. To continue this beautiful art form we need this type of sharing and encourage beginners. I will always be grateful for Vesterheim and all the classes I was able to take from American and Norwegian Masters for last 35 years! The Rosemaling Letter is wonderful and now we have so much color.

I just finished a 3-day class with Lois Mueller at Vesterheim. I called it my Working and Mental health vacation. It was as helpful as my Hospice Grief classes! We had a full class and I asked how many got the Rosemaling Letter. 4 people didn’t know about it and thought they got it with museum membership. I gave each one an old issue. We exchanged painting ideas and made new friends. During lunch in class kitchen I talked about this article I was working on for the letter. One said art got her through her divorce. Lois Mueller and I talked and she said she would give it some thought. Lois shared the following with me after she got home: “I had not given much thought to the “Art Therapy” aspect of Rosemaling until a recent class at Vesterheim, Thinking back to surgeries, death in the family and more surgeries, when it came time for healing I went to my Rosemaling. Each time it became a major part of my recovery. After one such surgery, within a month, I was in my studio painting and after another surgery, in a matter of days I was packing to attend an event which included teaching a class in Rosemaling. Rosemaling gave me something to look forward to and also was a place I could go to return to a calm in my life, at least as calm as could be under the circumstances.” Lois