

**JOURNALING CANCER
IN WORDS AND IMAGES**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ARTIST

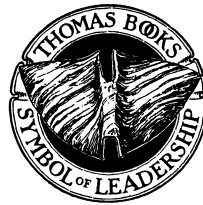
Harriet Claire Wadeson is a pioneer in art therapy, beginning her career in 1961 at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), where she worked for thirteen years. She directed the Art Therapy Graduate Program at the University of Houston for two years and at the University of Illinois at Chicago for twenty-three years, including its Annual Summer Institute at Lake Geneva, WI, which she directed for twenty years. She has published seven books in art therapy, approximately seventy papers in refereed journals, and numerous chapters in art therapy and psychology textbooks. Her awards include the Benjamin Rush Bronze Medal Award from the American Psychiatric Association for her scientific exhibit *Portraits of Suicide*; First Prize for research from the American Art Therapy Association, First Prize for art from the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC; a Resolution of Commendation from the Illinois Legislature; a Distinguished Faculty Award from Northwestern University; and Honorary Life Membership (HLM) from the American Art Therapy Association, art therapy's highest honor. She has served on the Executive Board of that organization as well as serving as its research chair, publications chair, honors chair, ethics chair, newsletter editor, and associate editor of its journal *Art Therapy*. She has been an international guest lecturer, faculty, and workshop leader in fourteen countries, and has led professional delegations to China, Java, Bali, and Sweden. She maintained a private therapy, art therapy, and professional supervision practice for many years. Currently she directs the Art Therapy Certificate Program at Northwestern University, continues her painting, and is working on three novels.

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Caught in the Clutch of the Crab

By

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*This work is dedicated to Neena Schwartz,
who stayed steadfastly by my side on this difficult journey.
Neither words nor pictures can convey the significance
of having a loving companion when facing the
terrors from the clutch of the crab.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My gratitude goes to my many caregivers who helped to save my life, particularly my oncologist Dr. Gustavo Rodriguez, for being a warm and caring physician, even though I may have made him impatient with my repeated questions. My appreciation goes as well to the countless researchers and practitioners, people I do not know, who have worked tirelessly to develop treatments for cancer. I'd like to acknowledge also those sensitive individuals who recognize the extensive emotional needs of cancer patients and have established programs and services to meet such needs. It is so very important to know that you are not alone in confronting the whirlwind of emotions cancer generates.

Many people have been helpful to me in creating this book, both in their encouragement and in their reading of the manuscript. My Portia Group of exceptional women scholars, writers, and artists was the first to hear portions of the journal with accompanying pictures. Their heartfelt enthusiasm for the work prompted me to move toward publication. My friend Sue Roupp, writer, editor, writing teacher, actor, and TV moderator, was the first to read the full manuscript. Her encouragement was exuberant, and her suggestions very useful. Another good friend, Margherita Andreotti, writer, editor, and art historian, read this manuscript with great thoughtfulness and viewed the artwork with particular sensitivity to its importance. I am appreciative of her many kindnesses during my illness in addition to her cogent suggestions for this book. Maxine Borowsky Junge, dear friend and colleague, read the book as soon as I sent it to her and replied immediately with very helpful suggestions. I am especially appreciative of her perspective as a sister art therapist whose views I have respected over our many years helping to grow this profession and through our various collaborations as art therapy authors and editors. In spite of

being so close to the experience recounted, Neena Schwartz was able to step back and view the writing from the perspective of an academic, offering valuable suggestions about its construction and tolerating my descriptions of our interactions. My gratitude goes to Michael Payne Thomas, President of Charles C Thomas Publisher, for his support of this somewhat unusual book and for his generous offer to purchase equipment to produce the accompanying CD.

And finally, many thanks to all those who kept me in their thoughts and prayers throughout my siege of cancer treatment. The significance of such support is beyond description.

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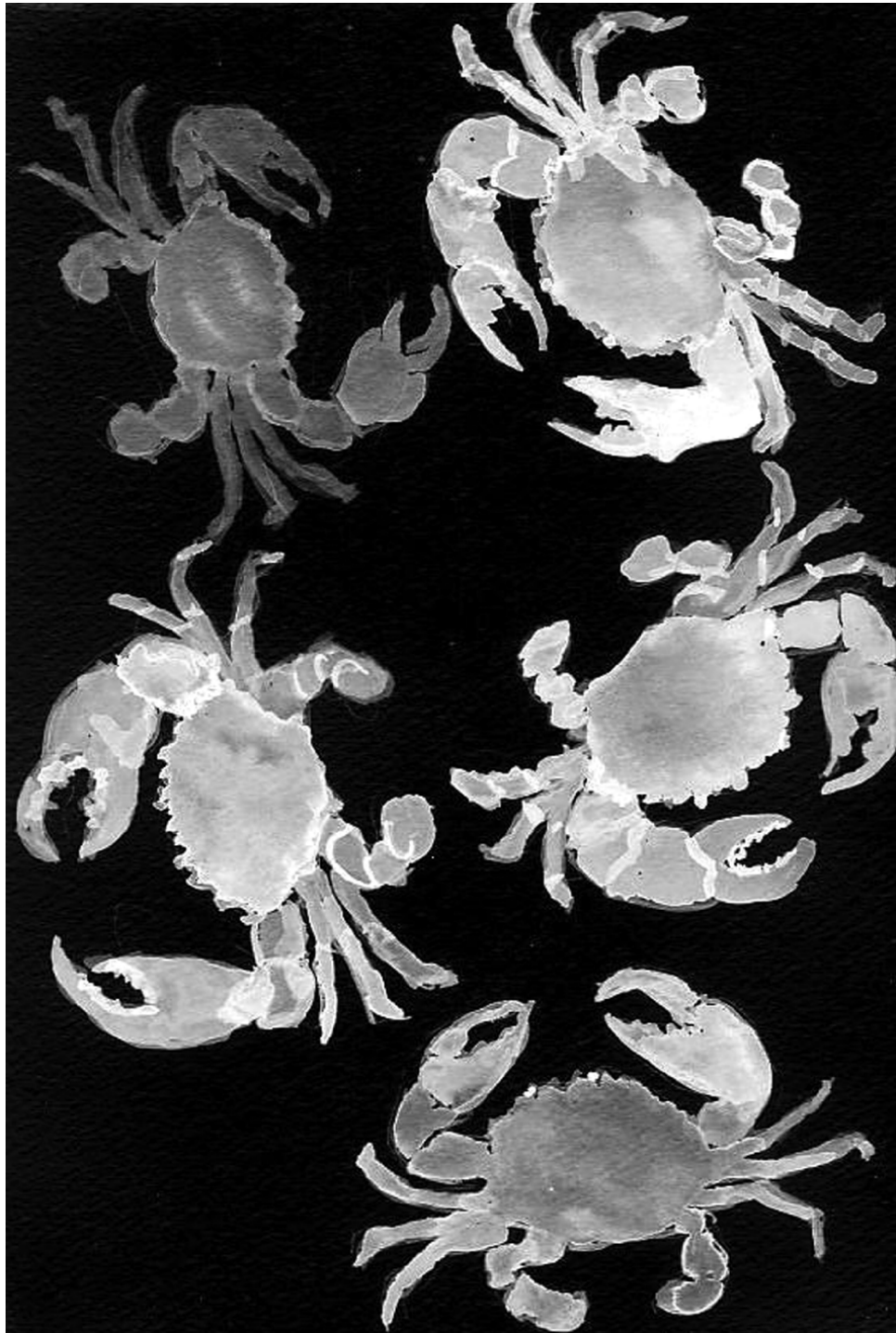


Figure 1.

INTRODUCTION

The American Cancer Society reports that cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States. The disease is epidemic. In this country, 41 percent of the population, half of all men and more than one third of all women, will have cancer during their lifetimes. Probably all of us will have to deal with cancer, either our own or in a loved one, at some time in our lives. Even without this dismal statistic, many of us harbor a horror of cancer. More than other prevalent illnesses, such as heart disease and stroke, cancer conjures up fears of suffering, helpless debilitation, and death.

This is a book I never intended to write. My seven other books are about art therapy, a field in which I have worked for almost fifty years. I began at a time when most people had never heard of art therapy and very little was written about it. Because I entered the profession in its infancy, I am considered something of an art therapy pioneer. Although my books include my own reactions to my clients and to the work, I never intended to write a book in which I was the single case example, but then, I never expected to be diagnosed with cancer.

My own reaction was that I needed to tell my story. Because I am an art therapist, I needed to tell it in images as well as in words. This book is the result. It is very intimate. A problem in publishing any memoir is the concern about what is better left unsaid, particularly publicly unsaid. Obviously, that includes what might be hurtful to others. In my case, it also comprises some symptoms that were pretty disgusting. Should good taste dictate their omission? My conflict has been that I have wanted this book to be completely open and honest, the full experience of my illness. So in addition to awful side effects, sometimes inadequate or rough treatment, and insensitive remarks from

friends, I have also included moments that are frankly embarrassing, when I have lost my temper or harbored resentful feelings towards others. I imagine my friends, colleagues, and students reading these passages and worry about whether they will ever respect me again. My hope is that my all-too-human frailties will warrant some forgiveness, if not identification.

Although I wrote the journal and created the artwork only for myself, toward the end of my treatment I began to think that this combination of words and images might be meaningful to others. Dealing with serious illness and the threat of death is so much a part of the human experience that it seemed to me that using the combination of writing and art in traversing the treacherous terrain of Cancer Land could be of interest to others.

More specifically, I hope that the book will be meaningful to those on this journey and helpful to the people who care for them in increasing their understanding and in enabling them to provide treatment with greater sensitivity. For myself, the publication of this work is a sort of validation, a need to have something good come from the fear and suffering cancer brings.

The book is divided into five sections: (1) A brief passage about *Creative Expression*; (2) *In the Clutch of the Crab*, the daily journal I kept along with digressions into issues that concerned me; (3) *Surviving*, discussions of follow-up experience in the year after treatment and further significant issues; (4) *Cancer Land*, the altered book I created of paintings and collages of my treatment, accompanied by a CD of the images in full color (located at the back of the book); (5) a discussion of *Writing and Making Art* about my cancer journey with a comparison of these two modes of expression, in which my experience of each was vastly different from the other.

My preference would be to include color reproductions of the artwork in the text of the written journal, but that would make this book far too expensive. So the pictures that accompany the written experience are shown in black and white in the journal text but may be seen in color on the CD. Most are from the altered book I made. I discussed the artwork only minimally as I wrote the journal, but it is reviewed in Section 5, *Cancer Land*, which is about the altered book. I am very happy to include a CD so that all the pictures can be viewed in full color. They are a particularly important component of this work. I

hope that readers will view the CD as they are reading the *Cancer Land, An Altered Book* section, rather than interrupting reading the written journal to look at the pictures in color.

Although there is some inevitable repetition in this twice-told tale, I believe the words and the images tell their stories in different ways and ultimately enhance one another to give a full picture of life in Cancer Land.

Because this book is such a personal account of one of the most threatening experiences of my life, I feel very vulnerable in sending it out into the world to be viewed not only by friends and colleagues, but also by people I don't even know. I have valued responses to my other books, so I am especially eager for the personal responses that I hope the personal nature of this book will prompt.

I believe that one day cancer treatment will be more specific to target only cancer cells, rather than the current sledgehammer approach that destroys so many other cells and disrupts bodily processes. That is a goal of current research, but I doubt that I will live long enough to see cancer treatment become more humane as a result.

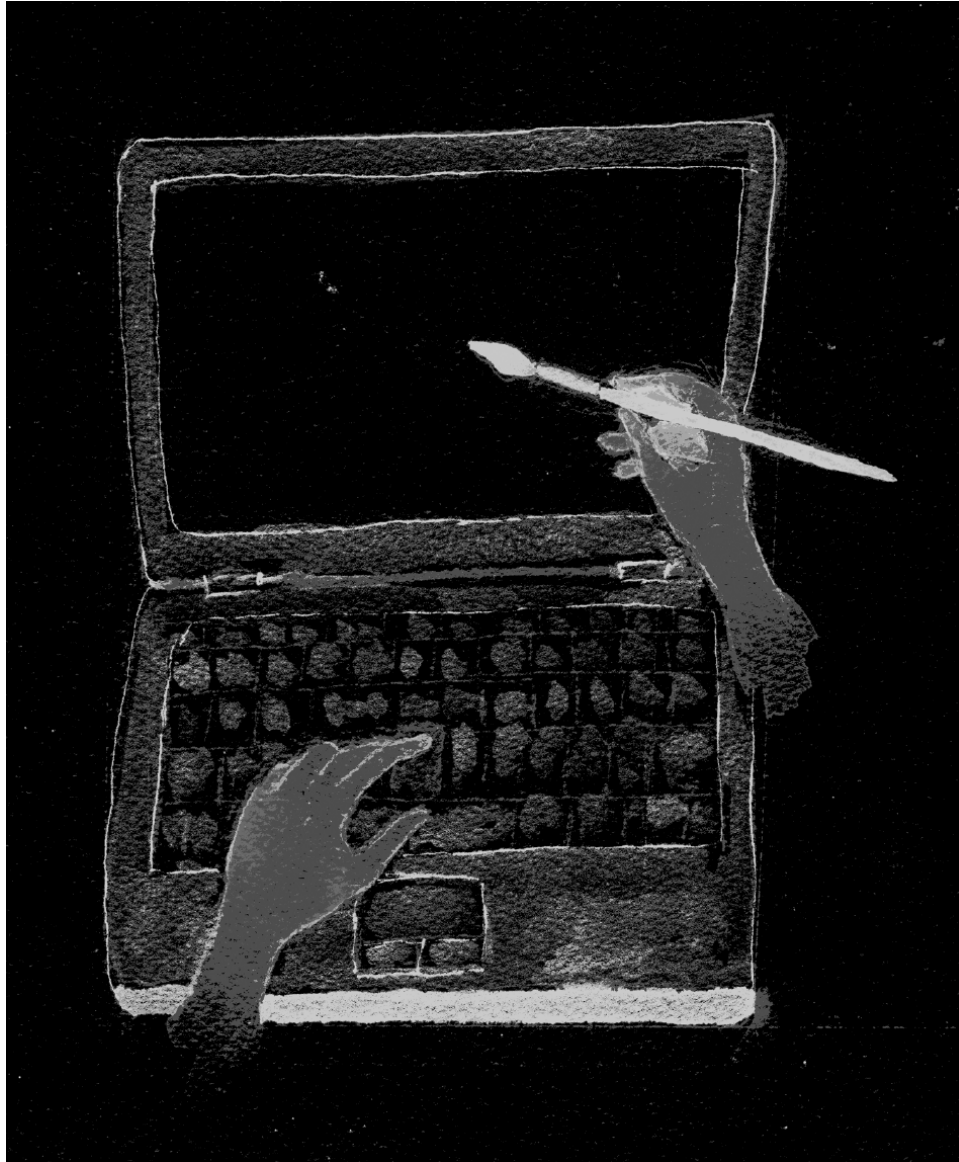


Figure 2.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Cancer imposed its own special kind of helplessness as I was cut open and parts were either removed or irradiated and blasted with chemicals that destroyed cells and interfered with my physiological functioning. Others have turned to a number of outlets under this kind of duress—religion, meditation, music—I don’t know what else. For me, I needed to *do* something, to be active to oppose my resignation to the tortures imposed upon me. I needed to assert my personhood as I passively underwent frightening, debilitating, and humiliating procedures. Writing and making art were my saviors in times of trouble or pain in the past, so it was only natural for me to turn to them to help me through the cancer challenge to my life.

I began a journal the day I was diagnosed. I am not sure what I had in mind, but I think it was to anchor myself during the heavy buffeting for which I knew I was headed. What I have found is that had I not written about it, I would have forgotten much of what I experienced. So, unintentionally, the journal has been a kind of record keeping as well.

I took my paints with me to the hospital when I had surgery, my first treatment shortly after I was diagnosed, but I was unable to use them the few days I was there. I started painting soon after coming home, however, beginning with plants and flowers friends brought. My first cancer picture was of my hand taped with the tube infusing me with chemicals and the pole with the beeping chemo machine behind it that I painted in my first chemotherapy session. There were other paintings, but they did not get organized until I attended an altered book workshop. Creating a book was a powerful impetus to tell my story in images.