

*Rainbow
Voices:*

An Anthology of Creative Writings

Edited by: Cyril Wong

Rainbow Voices

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A collaboration between
The Arts House &
Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH)

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On cover: Journeying Together, Lim See Hong

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The use of creative art as a means to improve mental health and support mental illness is well known. It settles in the space between emotional and spiritual wellbeing. The Singapore Association for Mental Health has been a local pioneer in marrying this with the psychosocial rehabilitation of our clients. Schizophrenia is a disease like no other as it results in loss of contact with reality and the development of frightening experiences and horrific beliefs. If left untreated, it often results in the untimely taking of one's life or a retreat into one's inner world catatonic to the outside universe. With medical treatment, these frightening symptoms are relieved but the illness often leaves the sufferer in a state of moribund apathy. Such individuals in many societies spiral into a cycle of repeated hospitalisation and decline to poverty, unable to function both at home and at work. The need for acceptance not stigma, a job that one finds meaning not additional stress and a family that relates not isolates cannot be resolved with medications. Such individuals need to find a voice to share their experiences, hopes and aspirations, and in so doing, accomplish that which we all desire, a sense of self satisfaction and happiness. I am happy to see that this project, *Rainbow Voices* in partnership with The Arts House seeks to provide such an avenue. This collection of personal scribbblings and songs is the work of those who suffered with mental illness and those that support them. Please take time to enjoy the fruits of their creation.

A/Prof Daniel Fung
President
Singapore Association for Mental Health

When I was asked by The Arts House to conduct writing workshops for beneficiaries of the Singapore Association for Mental Health, I was uncertain about my ability to interact meaningfully with my participants. I was afraid of letting prejudices get in the way of treating these participants with the respect and sensitivity they surely deserved. I had no prior experience in teaching such individuals and these workshops were to run for half a year.

But the more I interacted with my participants, the more I realised that these people were like anybody else: full of relatable hopes and desires. And they were more than eager to share their feelings through spoken or written language that was also surprisingly lucid and eloquent. The more time I spent with them, the more I was reminded that the difference between mental illness and mental health is little more than a trick of language, the effect of a mistranslation, a breakdown in the semblance of untroubled communication. To exist outside of a sensible world may mean being trapped within another less coherent world. However, what might be read as chaos, in one instance, could very well be an internal map of dreams, an esoteric code. A dire consequence of being disabled from sharing one's truths in a coherent and socially acceptable manner is that one gets cast out or put away.

Introduction

This is what has happened in the case of my participants. This is why many of their poems/prose pieces here consist of articulations of failure, wishes to return to a happier time, or yearnings for a simpler, spiritual reality; rendered through metaphors or descriptions of seemingly inane activities like gardening or riding a motorcycle. Another unintended effect of mental illness is that many pieces here end up in the surrealist or "automatic writing" mode: lines become disjointed while images or ideas may jump from context to another bewilderingly different context. The pieces range from being optimistic, despairing to unabashedly philosophical and religious, all the while possessing an unwavering sense of hope for a future uncorrupted by boredom, the negative judgements of outsiders, and feelings of being trapped.

I have done my best to clear up any grammatical oddities, so that the very soul of these writers may come through with shimmering clarity. Although their predicaments might be unique, the private hopes and longings of these writers are fundamentally universal; and it is through this lens of universality that I hope readers will enjoy these brief flashes of confessional insight. People with mental illness should not have to be disregarded, misunderstood or stigmatised. They have their own ways of seeing and communicating what they see. We only have to be patient and try hard enough to read and comprehend them correctly.

Cyril Wong is the Singapore Literature Prize-winning author of poetry collections such as *Unmarked Treasure*, *Tilting Our Plates to Catch the Light* and *Satori Blues*. He also published a novel, *The Last Lesson of Mrs de Souza*. Cyril has served as a mentor under the *Creative Arts Programme* and the *Mentor Access Project*, as well as a judge for the *Golden Point Awards in Singapore*. A past recipient of the *National Arts Council's Young Artist Award for Literature*, he completed his doctoral degree in *English Literature* at the *National University of Singapore* in 2012.

When I Was Seventeen

When I was seventeen years old,
I left school and worked as an office boy
at a company in Jurong.
During that time, I had a road licence.
The boss gave me a motorbike
to send documents to the townside office;
I rode a 150cc Yamaha
from Jurong to townside,
which took half an hour.
I like to jalan-jalan
and also to take a ride. I feel
happy on the ride.

- Mohamed Nor Bin Rasimin

Independence

I don't like this Home because I cannot stay
at my uncle's home. My uncle sent me to this home
about ten years ago. I want to be discharged
from this Home
and I want to be
independent,
myself,
and feel freedom
outside.

- Tan Khor Chye (Thomas)

Friendship

Life is full of surprises. Sometimes things that we do not expect to happen may actually happen. In the same way, someone may one day walk up to you with a couple of wise questions, such as "What is friendship?" or "Of what importance is it to us?" The first thing that will surely strike you is the simplicity and straightforward nature of the question and you will probably be stunned at that very moment. However, if you were to examine the question carefully, it is as important as blood is to us.

- *Tan Khee Ann*

Gentle Warhorse

Translated from the Chinese original by Gaston Ng

Planting seeds of poetry in my heart's garden, difficult beginnings, but after rounds of winds and rain, the fruits are ripe and beautiful.

Fame across generations, is not my ultimate aim, I learn in failure, grow in injury; weak wills cannot turn an alms bowl into steel. To complete the destiny of poetry, even if swallowed by sickness, I can still rise in the holy fire of death as a golden phoenix.

Poetry: it is my religion. I pray to the poetic gods in my pain; I want to use poetry to overcome the pitfalls of fate, using my best works to witness the loneliness of life. My wish is for all you long-suffering poets not to let your tears lash at my gentle warhorse.

- *Chua Hock Meng*

Eagle

Like an eagle
I will fly out of here.

Oh, the sweet smell of freedom!

How wonderful it is!

- Adrian Loh Weng Keong

Reality

I am like a coward because I always
hide and don't face reality;
I act like a mouse.

- Ang Beng Chew (Andy)

Metaphor

I am a little mouse for I like the dark;
I am timid and shy.
This is my character that has never changed
throughout my life.
Most people prefer a black cat.
But I only choose a grey mouse.

- *Chang Chow Chin*

Tiger

Tigers being ferocious and wild,
burning bright in the night,
supposing I should encounter
this beast of the zoo and safari,
the beats of my heart shaken
by those eyes, their stare;
and for safety, my nets ready,
however, the prey not me, the cats
cheering and calling my name
lest I be found, a wandering spirit;
my stripes, also my own life;
these strange feelings of solitude.

- *Lim Eng Teng*

Black Dog

I am a dog named Black Dog.
I am honest to my house owners.
They treat me very nice and care very much.

I like being a member of their family
and thank you very much.

- *Lim Boon Seng*

Freedom of a Bird

I'm tall and big but I like to compare myself
to a bird. They can fly here and there.
I enjoy the freedom of a bird
and they can sing well. They are nice
and cute. Although I can't sing,
their singing relaxes me. They are
very colourful and look like
how we wear clothing.
They can perform well on stage.

- *Leo Chin Yap*

Pigeon

I like to become a pigeon
with a healthy body then I can fly
in the sky from one destination
to another. As I come to understand it,
a bird is not the same as a human being.
Birds don't need to work.

- *Che Swee Tee*

Girl

My happiest memory is of a girl
sitting in the middle
while I was at the edge of the bus.

I did know that girl,
a girl I knew somewhere.

She knew I was there
because we came together.

But between the two of us,
there was a gap,
a distance that was physical
and invisible.

Just that I hope someday
my invisible closeness to her
would be made available to her.
And I thanked God I had
this tiny memory of mine
of her presence forever known.

- *Tai Siang Chiat*

Mankind

I am a man and not a monk.
This is dedicated to the superintendent and staff
of my Home after my past one year stay
here.
There are a lot of things a monk cannot do.
For example, smoking, consumption of alcohol and
eating of meat, etc.
Having all these things do satisfy
the urges of mankind.

- *Ng Tang Meng*

Happiest Memory

Yes! My happiest is when I had a baby.
My wife did not know what name to put
on my baby.

And then I thought about it
and I had my baby's name,
Kama.

And I really love Kama and
my wife. That's all.

That's my happiest memory.

- *Mohammed Rasul Bin Busu*

The Law Man

I the lion was with President Wee Kim Wee
because I was a diplomatic person
when I was young
and energetic. I was also encouraged
by our Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew
and glad that my life was spent
with the V.I.P. of Singapore
who liked my words and how I talked
politician-style. I feel that they were great
to me and they taught me to be a person
grateful to the law. I feel upset
when I cannot help other poor people
who also want to be great.

- Mohd Anwar Bin Mohd Ibrahim

My Dream

Aspirations of becoming a doctor.
Ambitions of becoming a billionaire.
Neither of them are parts or wondrous vibrants of dreams.
They are the colourful taints that motivate us.

But dreams are just dreams
if they are not within us.
Something that is next to impossible.
Dreams can be reality than just being dreams.

This dream should be realistic,
so hoping and wishful thinking do not burn us out.

My dream is to remain hidden
so that popping out from anywhere is possible.

- Tai Siang Chiat

About Myself

Myself

A man who stares
at those who care;
slowly he starts to have
dreams and hope I dare.

A period, I poorly fare
over time. I grew aware
of all those who are rare
and myself, colours bare.

Life

What's joy if you are lonely,
when you don't care about family.
Running after all that's lovely,
realising you come up empty.

Grades and stars we chase
always in a feverish haste.
One whole life we tend to waste
but does life have to have a bitter taste?

- Khoo Yi Feng

Novelty

All my happy memories come
from people's reflections of what
I have been doing, hence I do
not have a particular so-called
happiest memory but it's made up
of smaller memories. Time
is supernatural and does not stop
even at the end of our earthly
life. It's an ongoing process.
Human bodies cannot hang on to
a particular thing for the novelty
wears off.

- Doray Lourduraj Manohar

Patience

Letting it go on until my heyday
might not shoulder well
for my responses under shelter.
It could rain on my parade.
I must seek counsel with transparency
and need a solitary time
in the mornings or evenings,
a greener pasture to lie down,
yet water soothes the thirst.
Like all etiquette, I must follow
and instruct my spirit
to be better and nice, serenely
for bad or good, placing my hands
into sense and mirrored-self,
contending through steadfastness.
A living ordinance that gave much
and more so today; afterwards,
so far, patience spellbound
to twirl the nursing heart
and out of it all, a witnessing
for the day.

- *Lim Eng Teng*

Impatience

Patience is a virtue. I can only know what is patience by understanding the reaction of impatience. In my life, impatience had been the utmost weakness of my personality. It has brought upon me a miserable way of living that landed me finally in a provisional home for vagrants. In this governmental refuge, I am occupying my leisure time reflecting seriously and persistently on the foolishness of being impatient. Impatience and anger go hand in hand with one another. By being not able to manage this personality defect, it had made me resort to violent reactions leading to imprisonment. In this home, my main focus of reflection is to manage this self-defeating attitude and put my past to rest.

- *Marutha Tanapal*

Weather

Today the weather is very dark.
The dark is not happy.
Why the dark is very warm
and no good for you...
The very weather
is not happy. People
do not feel well. The weather
is uncomfortable
and dark.

- Ng Aik Kian

The Fog

The fog is surrounding the island.
The flats cannot be seen anymore
for the forest fire is blazing in Sumatra
and the cause is the far distant sun,
radiation tremendous in space. Oh!
What hot weather, I have to drink
a lot of water. It has made me sick.

- Chang Chow Chin

Poetic Approach to Gardening

My personal approach to gardening
is not as great as those who had more
experience in farming vegetables and fruit trees.
I go through a mixture of planting plants,
potting flowering plants
with leaves that have an effect
on the certain environment of S.A.M.H.
Residents interact with the landscape
as it does have a mental effect
on well-being and tranquility
is the main aim of having a garden
in S.A.M.H.

- *Tan Suan Kiow*

Supernatural

I hear voices that tell me very extreme things, like temptation. I see dark figures and lights. I think the spirits and the supernatural world are trying to contact me all the time. I am trying to heal myself by listening to Bolivian and South-American shamanic music. I also love to watch the sunset and spend time with my family. It makes me really jubilant.

- *Sim Kwang Hwee*

First Prize

When I was a security officer
at Holiday Inn Crown Plaza,
I bought 4D numbers
and touched first prize; I was
very happy as I touched
four thousand dollars.
I spent the money
very slowly.

- *Wanbeck Arther Harold*

My Love is One

Talking about love...
well, love happens through many things
that are real, ok...
I love ilah,
Allah and everybody.
There my love is above
father, mother, my wife,
my baby, my friend.
My love is one in Islam Islamia,
heaven rising and above it...
that all my love is one.

- *Mohammed Rasul Bin Busu*

Ex Cathedra

I love the Catholic Church. I am not talking about the place of worship with beautiful glass windows and beautiful statues of the saints. I am talking about all the Catholic populations of the world under the Pope who is the visible head and Jesus Christ is the invisible head of the Catholic Church. When the pope speaks ex cathedra of the Catholic religion he cannot err. I do not mean to say that he cannot commit sin. He can commit sin and he calls on the ordinary priest-father in the confessional. The Roman Catholic Church can be traced back to Jesus Christ. May the Good Lord bless us all.

- Robert Ong Eng Watt

Every Way of Love

I like love because it made me happy for my whole life from 18 years old. I like to make love, every way of love. Sometimes love was beautiful in my romantic way of living. Sometimes love made me sad because I had no money from the age of 25 years old. I had many girlfriends close to me because during that time I was working as a spray-painter for cars, earning per month \$1500. So in that time I was making love every day, love like a happy new year.

- Lee Chor Heng

Love: A Dialogue

A: I had come so that someone might find in me a caring love, not quite contrary but just a young sort of love between two persons or more. To define the word might mean many things. One: to be honestly dealt with in a confined place with the bonds of natural or aspirated hearty vocals using nicely musical terms. However, I am still a form of music and songs are kind of individual and one would need to stage a long, silent drama in The Arts House for this. I would need a microphone or two; when more people be involved. Actively, love comes from within. And also actively outside of experience. Love, devised in words, in conduct and purity of counsel, with a great hope that we may enjoy life, in the case of matrimony. One simple step to much joy. Who can accept such blissful endearments towards family and child-bearing? Accept by grant and guidance, perhaps? Today, Singapore should build up the marriage counselling journey or a path to a meaningful and sensitive dream. Once-in-a-lifetime choice and chance. Get together in the youth and sporting arena. This be a good democratic phase. Love spells me and you in the right time and there is a calling to live out a very emotional quest just for this one time. Find one good one; besides we are not gay or incested! When luck finds us, be enthroned in one another. Find me not. I am celebrated.

B: I found the one, yet he does not belong to me alone. Friendship also blooms in many ways and thoughts. Like mating the other party. Some will be favoured; some lonesome. One day the songs and jazzy music will become still and not-confirmed. Ring the one after your own. Good neighbours and kinship play their jest and jokes about the birds and bees. One should not be too ashamed. Life and multiplying concerns not one but all. I love and care to take part in seasons and outside to tea, coffee and that cheesy attitude. Nothing wrong with Catherine Downe's imitating Katherine Mansfield from a playwright's point of view. Love for literature and the arts be the gift of literacy's togetherness with somebody special.

- Lim Eng Teng

Unpredictable

Today weather is cold
It makes me feel sad
Hot weather makes me hearty and happy
Sometimes weather is unpredictable
Life is like weather
Sometimes hot and cold
Wet and slippery

- Ang Beng Chew (Andy)

Twain

According to the poet Mark Twain,
east is east, west is west
and the twain shall never meet.
Another side of this same coin
is east is east, west is west and
the twain shall meet in Singapore.
Religion is called food for the soul, and
all the various religious sects are in and
if anyone wants they can help themselves.
Knowledge of science and technology in the state of art;
to thrive here... the unending list goes on.

- Doray Lourduraj Manohar

The New Singapore

Singapore is a very beautiful island but
when it is a bigger place to stay
we will be happy, yes, when the land
is bigger, more people
can stay here. There is a lot
of people who will be staying at
the New Singapore that will be
created by me.

- Wanbeck Arther Harold

Home is in a Nursing Home

Translated from the Chinese original by Gaston Ng

Thank you for giving me a home, a place that doesn't need to be too big.
Thank you for giving me a home, a place that doesn't have much freedom.
I know: life is inevitably lonely, so I bear no regrets, which is why I have the courage
to battle against my own fate...
A rainbow flits across my open wound. Once, in an accident, I fell and broke my leg,
I bore the blinding pain of life!
Thank you for giving me a home: my silence is made from gratitude beyond words;
life is imperfect, so we have to learn to hold back tears of misery and joy. Uniting and
departing: our reunions with our lives on this stage.
Thank you for giving me a home, my face smothered in dust, my body littered
with wounds. This changing world where I have nowhere to retreat to. My soul is
screaming!
I want to stand up! I want to stand!

- Chua Hock Meng

A Dream

Age is a beautiful path we don't know
The street shows me sudden slow steps
Leaving open my mind's eye then locking it
Colours dropping
White body turns gross with age
My face is old since already far from home
Sudden age with friends turning gross
On earth I dream of being in a door

- Abdul Rasit Bin Ali

黃益民老師存念

送人玫瑰

手中留香

日行一善

終生平安

二〇一三年十一月二十八日

蔡福明

Chua Hock Meng

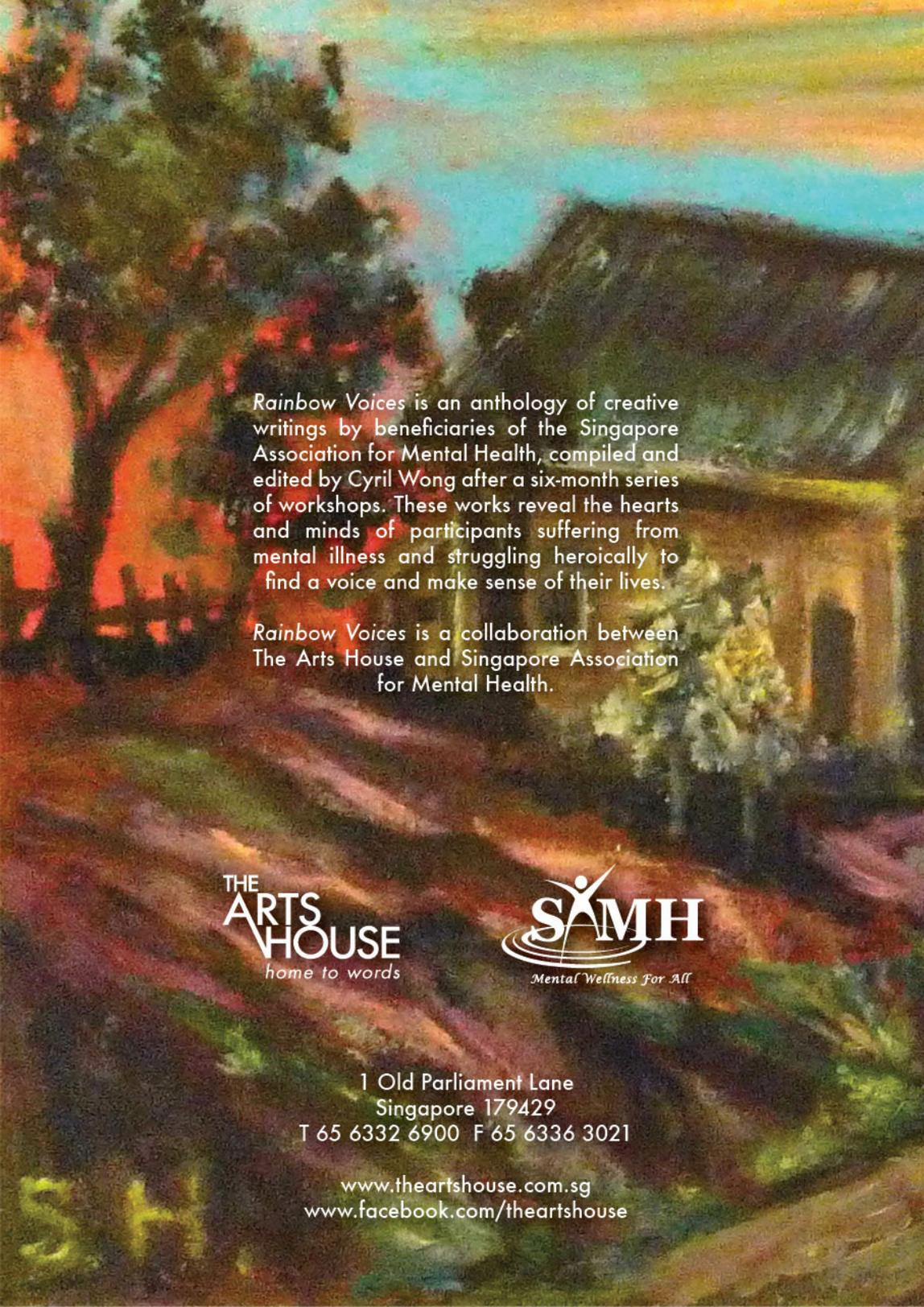
Huang Yi Min (Cyril Wong), the teacher, bearing in mind.

Making a gift of roses, your hands retain their fragrance.

With each good deed, you enter a peaceful life.

28 November 2013
Chua Hock Meng

A gift from beneficiary Chua Hock Meng to Cyril Wong on
the last day of the workshop.



Rainbow Voices is an anthology of creative writings by beneficiaries of the Singapore Association for Mental Health, compiled and edited by Cyril Wong after a six-month series of workshops. These works reveal the hearts and minds of participants suffering from mental illness and struggling heroically to find a voice and make sense of their lives.

Rainbow Voices is a collaboration between The Arts House and Singapore Association for Mental Health.

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