

GROWING



GROW IN IRELAND NEWS & GUIDE

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INSIDE

NEWS

REVIEWS

EVENTS

POETRY

SPECIAL FEATURES

Writing and Mental Health





EDITORIAL

I suppose at first glance there may appear to be no obvious link between writing and mental health. One might, in fact, get an image of a doctor busily writing a prescription and think that is the sum total of the link, other than the notes the same doctor has made about your diagnosis and treatment.

In fact writing has many roles to play in mental health. When I was struggling with mental illness I really welcomed the discovery of books like Not Made of Wood by Dutch Psychiatrist Jan Foudraïne. To hear about people recovering and to be able to find information about the recovery process gave me hope and helped me resolve to keep on trying.

Writing has been a huge force in the evolution of GROW. Our program, which is a psychology of mental health is a written program. It has slowly emerged from the reflective experience of many many people from different cultures and different continents. It has been translated into German, Greek, Serbian and Vietnamese, which is just one wonder of the written word. It can appear in different words, even different alphabets and yet contain the same meaning.

The leadership paper has formed the basis of much of GROW's program commentary. The 'Brown' book, the Red book, Ann Waters book are all collections of these papers. Every two months different people around the world put their thoughts onto paper and begin to explore different issues of mental illness and mental health. In Ireland we are currently compiling a new Program

Commentary which will reflect the experience and thinking of people here and now.

In GROW we are invited to write our stories. In so doing we begin to be reflective about our past. Writing, in some mysterious way, makes our life journey real. It allows us space to sit back and reflect, to look at ourselves and at all the people who have helped shaped us. It allows us to make decisions. To forgive or to allow ourselves to feel justified anger and then to move on. To discover what exacty we were troubled about, and how important it was.

In the GROW residential in Australia people spend one hour a day studying parts of the GROW program. They are encouraged to write down their thoughts. If you do this you will be amazed at what you discover. The program has layers of meaning and it becomes alive when you take the time to study it.

Writing can be used to keep a diary. To learn to understand one aspect of life. You can keep a fear diary or a food diary, or a pain diary. In so doing you are living the program by 'striving to increase your knowledge and understanding.'

Finally writing can be used to encourage other people. A short note from someone when you have had a bad week saying something as simple as "I think you are great!" can lift a person's spirits far more than any tablet.

Next issue: Change

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	1
CREATIVE IDENTITY & RECOVERY	2
A NEW BOOK FOR YOUNG ADULTS	3
BREAKING ISOLATION	4
CAMILLA'S STORY	5
THE LEARNING JOURNAL	6
KEEPING A PAIN DIARY	7
WRITING ABOUT MIKE WATTS	8
UNDERSTANDING HOW GROW WORKS	12
FAMILY & FRIENDS OF KEVIN WALSH	12
WRITING A LEADERSHIP PAPER	13
BOOK REVIEWS & POEMS	14
WHAT IS 12 STEP WORK	15
WRITING YOURSELF INTO BEING	16
STEVE CLAYTON	17
PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE	18

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CREATIVE IDENTITY & RECOVERY

AN EXCERPT FROM RECOVERING MENTAL HEALTH IN SCOTLAND A REPORT ON NARRATIVE INVESTIGATION OF MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY

An excerpt from Recovering Mental Health in Scotland

A Report on Narrative Investigation of Mental Health Recovery

This Scottish study asked people who had recovered, or were recovering, what helped them along the way. Creating a creative identity was found to be very useful.

Through creativity, individuals developed a new means by which to express their identity. Diverse forms of creativity from sculpture to gardening were identified as a means of pleasure and self expression. Using creative means to express things that were otherwise difficult to communicate was also found to be a positive step on some recovery journeys.

“Because you can’t communicate when you are ill, you haven’t got a voice, you don’t know what to say, you can’t say what you are feeling, I found that writing it down got it all out.”

Creative activity had positive benefits for mental well being. Those benefits ranged from gaining

socialisation skills through participation and developing different forms of self expression, to developing self esteem through recognising creative achievements. This provided numerous individuals with an improved sense of purpose or meaning.

“I wrote some poems when I was recovering as well and I’d never need able to do anything like that before so it was like a different part of my brain was working and I’ve had some poems published.”

Creativity, like spirituality, effected change and growth on a personal level. Narrators from this study who practised creative recovery routes were passionate about its potential to facilitate recovery. It has been used in therapy as a means to self express, as a pastime, as a means of developing skills, as a social leveller and as a means to integrate self into communities.

“I’m actually doing glass cutting just now. Its learning diferent skills as well. So I’ve actually learned something I wasnae aware I could do. That’s been a big boost to my recovery.”

a new book for Young Adults is coming

So Please get Writing..if you are lucky enough to still be young!

A New Book for Young Adults is Coming

So Please get Writing...if you are lucky enough to still be young!

As part of the Vodafone "Making a World of Difference" programme we are currently compiling a new book of readings for mental health. The book will be launched next June and will feature in a planned end of year conference to be held in Galway.

The book will consist of two kinds of writings. Both types will aim to empower people to deal with any issue that young adults have themselves identified as threatening their mental health.

The first will come from our own members experience. Each will briefly identify the issue, describe the effects it had, and most importantly, how it has been dealt

with. We are all experts on our own experience, and many people find they are excellent writers once they allow themselves to try.

The second series of articles will be written by invited experts who know how to help people recover from the effects of these issues and can offer us hope, wisdom and direction. So far we have had an exceptionally positive response with articles promised from people like Tony Bates, Terry Lynch, Tony Humphreys, Bodywhys, The Rape Crisis Network.

Each article will be short (not more than 1500 words) and in very clear language. The aim is to inform, encourage and empower people to realise that whatever happens in life, it can be overcome, given the right kind of help.

We believe that the book will be tremendous resource for our young adults but may even have a wider appeal.

Paul Clabby the Director of the project has been carrying out a number of surveys to identify the issues that tend to cripple and maim. One of these is isolation. The following article was written by Siobhan, a member of the Galway young Adults group. Please help us with this project and send in accounts of your own experience and triumph to myself Mike Watts at GROW, Barrack Street, Kilkenny, or email to mikewatts@grow.ie

What about a Title

Any ideas for a title. The Rocky Road to Wellbeing? Please send suggestions to mikewatts@grow.ie





Breaking Isolation

By Siobhán, Galway Young Adults Group

Friendship is very important. I know, because I have been healed through the many friendships I have found in GROW. Before I joined the organisation in Feb. 2005, I had become very introverted following a personal problem. I ignored or failed to recognise the fact that I was growing maladjusted and more and more isolated.

When I joined, the only socialising I was doing was with my parents and maybe talking to a few people after mass. GROW offered me the hand of friendship. I really looked forward to and enjoyed Wednesday nights. After a while, we started meeting up on a Saturday to socialize, to get to know each other outside the group. This was a great event for me. I used to really look forward to it and really benefited from it. I am still good friends with two of the people who were with me at that meeting, three years ago!

When we are in company, we temporarily put our negative feelings aside and adopt a cheerful, friendly attitude (nobody wants to chat to someone who is always complaining about themselves and their problems!). Even though we may feel lousy within, when we act cheerfully and put a smile on our face, our feelings gradually come around and take on the attitude that we project.

Moreover, when we take an interest in other people and ask them how they are, we are temporarily taking the focus off ourselves! This brings to mind the GROW saying "To best help yourself, help someone else. To best help someone else, let them help you!"

If you are focused on yourself all the time, you will begin to feel miserable! I remember the first time I joined

GROW. As I said earlier, I was very introverted. I was used to discussing with my parents (those closest to me) how I felt all the time. This was making myself miserable, and very difficult to live with! At the GROW meeting, I spent all my time thinking about my problem; how best to voice it, how others may be able to help me. I just didn't register with other people and what they were saying. I had developed an excessive interest in myself. I wanted to get well, but my will to stay maladjusted was probably stronger.

Little by little, I began to register a bit more with other people, and what they were saying. I found I could draw on my own experience, and use this to help others. I began to discover what pieces of the book really worked for me, and what actions helped me get well. I found out I was not the most unfortunate person in the world. Here were people with problems possibly even worse than mine, and yet they were capable of helping others and being great friends! If they could do it, so could I!

It's good to help other people. When we do this we temporarily take our minds off ourselves, and focus on something or somebody else. We get a sense of satisfaction and achievement from helping someone else and seeing their increased happiness. When they confide in us (a problem shared is a problem halved), or when we give them good advice, and they become more hopeful it makes us realise that we are useful and good people.

GROW friends make very good friends. They see us at our most vulnerable, as well as at our best. To the general community, you may be a confident, fearless doctor. The GROW members know you are struggling with OCD and

that you worry at times about your patients. Especially those few patients that you cannot help, beyond offering your support. (eg people with severe MS or cancer). GROW friends are people with whom you can be yourself. You may have changed jobs or become unemployed, and the people you have daily contact with may have changed. Usually, many of your group's familiar faces, will still be there.

GROW has a very important saying. "Don't be an emotional reaction – be a person"

If you are constantly talking about your emotions, you wear down those closest to you. If you have an excessive interest in yourself and your problems, you will find it increasingly difficult to relate to other people, outside of this setting. Therefore, it is important to moderate desire (in overcoming evil), and try to see the positive side of things, and to treat these people with the same kindness that they treat you! Keep the negative feelings in ("Feelings are like children in a classroom") and freely pour out those that are positive. Tell them the good news, don't tell them the bad news especially if you've told it to them before!

I hope you see from this essay, that friendship is very important, in fact, GROW has proved to me that they really are right when they say: "Friendship is the Key to Mental Health!"

From the GROW Program, Blue Book Page 7 Friendship

"Among human relationships, friendship is the special key to mental health. As I am healed and harmonised by responding to the offer of true friendship, so the measure of my maturity is my capacity to be a true friend."

Camilla's Story



My name is Camilla. I've been in GROW 8 years and hospitalised 3 times prior to this. Looking back now I realise I've had depression most of my adult life. As time went on I knew there had to be a better way of dealing with it and I also knew I needed a back up plan to get me stable and keep me out of hospital. Depression came into my life uninvited, unwanted and unwelcome. It used to overstay its welcome and it used to be a frequent visitor. I would have had good days, better days, bad days, worse days and now thanks to GROW I have brilliant days!! On good days I could get out of bed. On better days I could function as a human being. On bad days I was weepy, needy and abrupt with family and friends. On worse days I stayed in bed paralysed with feelings of fear, anxiety, frustration and guilt. And now on my brilliant days (and believe me I have plenty!) all's well in my world, I'm happy to be here, I'm confident with me and my life. There are even times I think if the world leaders had me on their side history would have been re-written!! I'm so unique and positive it scares me!!

Some people will say there is no cure for depression and it never really goes away. Well, that may be the case. But, because of the GROW program I've managed to put mine into a small box in a small corner of my mind, where it visits me once in a while when I least expect it, or, on dark sleepless nights along with fearful, fretful memories. But thankfully it doesn't stay long. I've learned to live with it – success for me has been learning to live with it. My most powerful weapon against depression has been my sense of humour, my ability to laugh with others, at myself and situations affecting me. This sense of humour has been my saviour. My recovery has taken time but

it has been time worth waiting for.

The first improvement I noticed in myself was my personal value. I stopped judging myself on others evaluation. I firmly believe self esteem is an inside job. It comes from within your spirit, heart and very soul and eventually gets to be part of you that expresses your feelings. I had the choice to respond to bad habits of thinking or choose a new way of behaving. I choose to change – to let GROW change me and boy what a change!! So much of my happiness came from the choices I made. I made these changes with the help of the blue book. On page 13 right down at the bottom there are 11 simple words. Read them, apply them and reap the benefits. "Change of Thinking and Talk, Change of Ways and Change of Relationships"

The choices we have in this life are endless and our right to be happy is our God-given right. I've worked hard for happiness and by God I intend to hold on to it because I have earned it. My life will not always be the way I want it to be but GROW has shown me how to change it to make it better. If I were to sum up GROW in one word that word has to be "HOPE" because hope gave me not only the reason but the key to the best in life, love and happiness. Eight years ago I almost gave up on hope and felt hopeless. Eight years ago the road I travelled on became too difficult and unbearable but somehow in some way God was in the driver's seat that day and I was just the passenger. He steered me to GROW where the view was much nicer and bearable. For me, I feel my depression has been like living in a storm, right slap bang in the middle. GROW has guided me through this storm and at times I have been battle-scarred and weary but I've made it through to the other side.

As for me now. My life today is a changed life, I am living it to the fullest – standing tall (all 5 foot 2 inches of pure dynamite!!) and taking my place in society. I still make mistakes but I turn them into a learning experience. I refuse to be unhappy or let my troubles multiply – I take them on one at a time one day at a time. GROW has closed a door on my past and given me the gift of a future, all because I had the courage to believe in the program, the faith to believe in myself, the freedom to change and grow, and while doing this I've found inner peace at being accepted for who I really am. My God GROW what have you created! At long last and after many years I'm finally happy and happiness is a choice I never forget to make every day. I didn't choose to have depression or the circumstances that led me to GROW but I can choose my reaction to depression. I've grown a lot these past few years and I view my experience as a positive one. I know I wasted a lot of time lying in bed locked inside my own head with negative thoughts, but, that was me back then. I now know depression will never rule or ruin my life again. As for that time I wasted in bed.....I can honestly say I've truly gained much more. I'm grateful for the choices I've made, both the good and the bad because lessons I've learned in GROW will help me with decisions in my life.

I want to finish off by saying thank you to my fellow GROWers who have supported and sustained me through the years. Without your help, good advice and support I don't know where I might be today. I wish you all and the GROW organisation the best in life, love and happiness.

THE LEARNING JOURNAL

Learning from your own experience

Having been educated in the traditional manner for people of my age (and I am not going to publicise my age) the concept of a learning journal was something that I knew nothing about. Until I undertook an 8 week Training and Development course with IBEC that is. On the first day of this course I heard about projects. This did not phase me in any way. I had been there before! However, on being informed that there would be a final examination I must say I became a bit shaky. I had not sat any written examination since the early 80's and I questioned myself why am I putting myself through this? Next on the menu was the learning journal. What was it about? Who could see it etc? These were all questions that ran around in my head until I learned of its importance. It would form part of the overall marking. Suddenly the learning journal took on a new meaning and I thought I must get down to it learn about it. I then proceeded to ask a number of people about it and to my surprise they knew nothing about it as it hadn't formed a part of their past learning. Then, an even bigger surprise I spoke to

someone who had recently completed one as part of their overall course and to my relief said it was a great learning tool.

Well how does it work? It is really quite simple. At the end of each academic day you take some time to write down a brief resume of the day. More importantly you highlight what you have learned on that day. You can also include and indeed you should include how that learning will be useful to you in your own workplace.

Equipped with that information I was really excited about the whole concept. When learning is experiential and related to what one does in one's workplace, it always becomes worthwhile for me (and I am sure for others). To a certain extent it takes the slog out of learning. On courses such as the one I completed tutors and assessors are always interested in learning outcomes. How you will apply them? Where your starting point was, your self assessment with regard to where you saw yourself at the start and the end of the course. By including this

kind of information you are merely stating a fact and facts are important in an overall assessment.

I completed my learning journal every evening. The benefit of that is that it is still fresh in your mind. It helps you with revision if you are taking an exam and I would advise anybody doing it to take a copy of what you write. The learning journal in my case was a notepad given out by the tutor with my name on it. In my case it had to be handwritten but certainly you could put your notes on the computer for future reference. Don't just forget about those valuable notes. Return to them from time to time. They can be a really useful tool in your everyday work.

Finally having had an opportunity to do the course and having got over my initial concerns, I can now look back and say it was a really worthwhile exercise and I will never forget learning journals. More importantly I acknowledge their place in adult learning.

Mary P Greene
Regional Manager



Keeping a Pain Diary

You are the only one who knows how much pain you are feeling. When your doctor asks you about the pain, you probably won't remember how hard some days were. You may not remember how bad the pain was. The diary is to help you describe what is happening to you while it is happening. It will be very helpful to your doctor to know when the pain was bad, what made you feel better, and what didn't make you feel better.

Don't worry about how much to write. You don't even have to write sentences. Just write the words that describe how you are feeling. Don't worry if you miss a day. Do it when you can. If thinking about your pain every day is too hard, put the diary away for a few days and go back to it when you are ready. This is your diary. Write when you can for as many days as you can and then stop.

Keep a small notebook or tape recorder with you all day and, during the course of the day, write down what you are feeling. The following questions might help you. Write the date and time every time you write in the diary. If writing is too painful, ask a family member or friend to do it for you or record the diary on a tape recorder.

1. Where does it hurt?

List every place that hurts. Does the pain move? Does the pain feel different in different places?

2. How does the pain feel?

The following words might be helpful: burning, stabbing, sharp, aching, throbbing, tingling, dull, pounding or pressing.

3. Did you have?

4. Does the pain change during the day?

5. What, if anything, makes the pain better or worse?

6. What medicines are you taking? Do they help - never, sometimes, always?

List all of the medicines your doctor gave you and all of the medicines you bought for yourself at the store.

7. Have you stopped taking any medicines because they made you constipated, sleepy or sick, or for other reasons?

8. Do you do anything to help make the pain go away other than taking medicine such as getting massage, or meditating, etc.?

9. Do you have trouble sleeping because of the pain?

10. Does the pain keep you from spending time with family or friends?

11. Do you skip meals because of the pain?

12. How has the pain changed your life?

*Reprinted by permission: American Pain Foundation, Baltimore, Maryland;
www.painfoundation.org*

WRITING

ABOUT Mike Watts



THE SOUL WHO SURVIVED

by Denis Bergin

Somewhere in my files is a historic document that sets out the status and goals of GROW for the early 1980s. It represents what I believe to be my first contact with Mike Watts and GROW, a connection that has endured down the decades, so that I cannot now say with accuracy when it actually began or what it involved at any given time.

All I know is that at various moments and periods during those twenty-odd years, the phone call would come, the idea would be put forward, and the initial meeting would take place.

A day or a week or a month or a year later, a piece of writing, a leaflet, a report, a magazine or a book would be produced. The projects were so varied and so intense that I cannot pick up any one of them now and remember anything worthwhile of the circumstances that surrounded them or the work that went into them.

There were no large committee meetings, no heavy schedules or toings-and-froings: mostly it was just Mike and myself in a room with heaps of paper and a to-do list. Occasionally we would meet someone else on official business (Conor Mac Liam was part of our little team at one time) and I can remember appointments with others in places as diverse as Dublin's Merrion Hotel, the Heritage Hotel in Portlaoise, Pádraig O'Morain's house on the South Circular Road in Dublin. It was all about new ideas and plans and finances, and spreading the word about GROW, how it worked and what it achieved.

In all of this, I had absolutely no contact with GROW groups or individual GROWers other than one or two who from time to time were interested in working with words in the service of the

organisation. If I met half-a-dozen officers or employees of GROW in my lifetime, that is about it.

I have never been to a GROW meeting (although I had a narrow escape in Birr a few years ago). That was almost deliberate, as I wanted to treat the writings of GROWers and the GROWers themselves as what I perceived them to be: individual expressions of personality that were little different from most of the 'other half' of the population who have their dysfunctions too but have never been driven by crisis, trauma or truthfulness to admit them or do anything about them.

All I knew from the material I dealt with for publication was that GROW helped people in a proven and remarkable way to cope with the pressures of daily living and to recover when the pressures got to be too much and breakdowns occurred.

Mike's respect for the power of the written word as a means of communication and a therapy was based on his own unique background.

The son and brother of doctors, Mike grew up in the privileged circles of professional Leicestershire, where his father was a highly-regarded general practitioner in the village of Ibstock.

A Message From Michele Kerrigan

Chief Executive Officer of GROW in Ireland

Mike Watts joined GROW in 1976 in Clare out of personal need. Over the course of the next thirty-two years he served in various leadership roles within the organisation. As part of his own recovery and personal development he gained a primary degree in Psychology (UCG) and a Masters in Family Therapy (UCD). He was appointed as a Fieldworker in 1983. At the time there were very few staff members in GROW but this has changed dramatically over the past 25 years. Since 1996 Mike has been the National Program Coordinator of GROW.

Over the years Mike has been loyal and committed to the work of GROW and this continues to this day. Over the course of his 25 years he has seen many changes, some of which he himself instigated. He has achieved many things in his time – too numerous to mention. However we acknowledge the part he played in developing a national training team and the work he did with the Organisers', Records' and Regional Teams. Mike has always been generous with his time and over the years has played an active role in the encouragement of GROW members and his attendance at both Regional and National Weekends.

On behalf of GROW in Ireland I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mike for his continued support, his input and his experience and to wish him and his family all the best for the future.



Yorkshire (near Bishop Auckland) had allowed him to qualify as a doctor with a commitment to missionary work. His assignment in South Africa in 1938 with his doctor wife Betty was interrupted by war and service as far north as Mogadishu (Somalia) with the South African Medical Corps, but a military course in psychiatry just as he was about to return to Britain changed his life.

By a strange co-incidence, in the year that his son Mike was born, his father began a serious study of psychiatry in general and of depression in particular. This grew into a series of papers and theses, and eventually in a book co-authored with his wife, and published in 1952 as 'Psychiatry in General Practice.' (It was republished in 1994, after Arthur became internationally recognised both for his work in combating depression and as a founding member of the College of General Practitioners, for which he also received an OBE).

Meanwhile Mike was experiencing the turbulence associated with growing up privileged in the 1960s, with its emphasis on fast living, alcohol and drugs. The shy, sensitive youth from a family of high-achievers, with three outgoing older sisters, became confused, withdrawn,

anxious, and eventually over-medicated (Librium was his first prescription).

Seeking psychiatric help, he became involved in a 'medical-model' process that brought some relief and improvement in his condition, but also showed the limitations of the science. Along the way he found another soul who mirrored his background, life experience, sensitivity and insight: a young Dutch woman named Fran Hage, who became his wife.

Fran and Mike looked at their options, and, with money from a family legacy, bought a farm in Co. Clare to live out the dream of a healthy lifestyle and a nurturing environment for the children they planned to have.

But the dream turned to a nightmare with Fran's post-natal depression, a horrific breakdown that made Mike seem extremely sane by comparison. He was forced to adopt a new role of interpreter and high-level care-giver as Fran did the rounds of committals and relapses (I am breaching no confidences here; their story has been told many times, most harrowingly in Mike's public submission to an Oireachtas Committee on Mental Health in December 2006).

The hope for Mike and Fran came

with involvement with GROW from the mid 1970s. The movement had been introduced to Ireland from its Australian origins by Fr. Sean O'Hanlon, a Cork-born missionary priest who had come across the idea in Papua New Guinea, where GROW co-founder Albert Lucey was visiting at the invitation of a psychiatrist friend.

In Clare, one of the thirty groups then in existence in Ireland was putting the strategies and steps of the GROW movement into practice. Mike and Fran stayed with it as it grew larger and eventually got to the point where it had permanent administrators and field-workers (the first, another Corkman named Paul Cotter, was funded from Fr. O'Hanlon's order, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in 1980; the second, Pat Hegarty, by the Southern Health Board, who were early supporters).

Soon the recovery achievement and natural talent of Mike Watts led to the obvious course of action: make him a fieldworker. He moved to Kilkenny with his growing family, and became an organic part of the GROW 'alternative establishment' in such a way that very few people could really give his proper full title (National Program Co-ordinator? National Training Officer? National Spirit of GROW?) at any given time.



results, whatever his title, his official role or his job description.

His deep understanding of mental illness and of mental health, based on personal and family experience, gives him an authority that is not easily confronted or breached, particularly by officialdom.

The network of those who know, love and respect him is nationwide and extends to those beyond these shores who have come across his writings and research.

And on the bookshelves of any self-respecting institution with an interest in mental health are the testimonies of hundreds of GROWers as they have appeared in GROW News, GROWing and 'Soul Survivors.'

In those same publications they will also find the validation they need for the effectiveness of the GROW method. If they need any more, they need only walk the streets of any Irish town with a GROW group.

There they will see functional friendly people there who but for the work of Mike and his colleagues would be in locked wards or darkened rooms, afraid to face their demons or their families.

Meanwhile in Poulgour the Watts home has been extended, the garden is full of healthy vegetables and fruits and the whole place rings with the buzz of a busy family life.

The Watts children are all nearby, Peadar just up the road, Claire (and husband Phil) in Thomastown with children Sarah and Rebecca; Tom (and wife Mags) also in the Thomastown area with Charlie, Guy and newly-arrived Poesie.

Fran presides over it all with that direct and honest Dutch approach that has survived the years of medication and misery to emerge in common sense, serenity and openness to all.

The only one not normally in the vicinity is the youngest member of the Watts family, Lizzie. She is at university, using her high Leaving Cert points score to secure a career where she can be most effective and make the best use of her unusual family background, interests and insights.

She is going to be a doctor. Call it fate or full circle or whatever you like. To the average person reading this, it must look very like a full recovery.

About Mike

I have worked with Mike Watts for over 25 years, Mike is the person that brought me to GROW and is the person that has kept me in GROW through the years. I see Mike as an



inspirational and motivational figure. He is the kind of person that calls people forth, and brings out the best in people. Mike's enthusiasm is contagious – he is the type of character that inspires and animates.

Mike Watts is a very spiritual person who is full of goodness. Part of his essential spirituality is his strong belief in people as 'persons'. I can say that over the past 25 years Mike has never seen anything but the best in everyone he has met. I have noticed that even when people let him down he would still look for and see the best in the person, bringing to mind the quote from Desiderata "As far as possible without surrender be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and ignorant; they too have their story."

I see in Mike a person who is full of wonder at the world about him, with a fantastic imagination. He is an open channel for bright ideas, where-ever they come from. Having said that – Mike might have the bright ideas but, by the time they have developed their hands and feet, Mike has moved onto the next bright idea and left those around him to finish the first one.

Mike lives and breathes in a classless society. He has the common touch and can mix with everybody and anybody and see them as all the same. He is a connecting link between all classes of society. Long may he continue to inspire all of us.

Gertrude Howley





Eileen Watson

“Oh Mike Watts!”

When I came to work for GROW Mike was fieldworker for the South East region. Even though I had worked in an office before, I had come from a background of industry. You can imagine my surprise when I arrived at GROW to find chickens in the yard, and a loom in the office!

I was asked by a very nice gentleman if I would like a cup of coffee. I later found out that his name was Tom and he was part of a special group who came daily to the centre from St. Canice's Hospital.

Mike took me up flights of stairs to a huge room that had two desks, a filing cabinet, and a portable type writer owned by Mike himself. I should also add that in pride of place in the office was a photocopying machine! He showed me which was my desk and told me to familiarise myself with the office and he would be back later because he had to go downstairs to the workrooms to a meeting with the team workers.

He threw me into the deep end and I learned to swim because I had no choice. When I eventually got to work with Mike he had minutes of meetings, letters to organisers and memos to members of the Executive to be typed on that famous portable typewriter. I still bless the inventor of Tippex strips. They saved my sanity in those early days.

On the second morning, Mike invited me to sit in on my first GROW meeting where I started to learn about the organisation I was to work for. It was an eye opener, but joining GROW was definitely something I have never

regretted.

In the beginning I thought Mike Watts was a saint. I put him on a pedestal – I couldn't believe the patience of the man. He was like no person I had ever worked with or for. I was used to having to stand up for myself and fight my corner but Mike would confuse me by backing off if I got hot under the collar. He eventually told me that he couldn't handle my aggression and I had to look at my way of dealing with people.

We had some right ding-a-lings in those early days and Mike soon fell off the pedestal. As he himself said to me at the time “the honeymoon period is over.” We then had to learn to work together as human beings, people with faults and failings – I with mine and Mike with his. But we did. We reached new understandings and played to each others' strengths.

Mike is a visionary; he can see and do things others can't even dream of. He would come into the office with an idea and my first reaction would be that it was too much, it couldn't possibly be done. But he would eventually get me to give his idea a try and with hard work and his enthusiasm we would get things up and running.

Our first fund-raising cycle trip was thought up by Mike. The original idea was a walk between St. Canice's and the hospital in Tipperary. He even named it “It's a long way to Tipperary”. We eventually agreed on a cycle but we did get one man to do the walk. This cycle is still one of our biggest fundraisers.

The next thing he came up with was fuchsias – 10,000 live plants to be sold in the region within a four- week period.

It was a huge task but he was determined and once again I was press-ganged into helping. Keeping the plants alive between sales in the region by using the bathroom in the old Ormonde Home was a major achievement. Marie, one of the FÁS workers, showed me how to drown the plants in the big bath. I needn't tell you I prayed for Mike when I was up to my knees in water and compost but once again he was right and we got much needed money into the region.

Around that time too we also got our first computer, and Mike decided it would be great to have a GROW newsletter. Mike took to learning the computer with his usual enthusiasm and left me standing with how fast he learned. The written word is Mike's forte – he can paint pictures with his prose and even his nonsense poetry is amusing. And in that too he was right because the *GROW News* idea is still going strong today.

We moved premises twice since I came to work with GROW and we have been in the former Ormonde Home in Barrack Street since 1990. Mike started to work with GROW National as a National Program Co-ordinator about ten years ago. In his usual way he gave the work his all, working hard to promote GROW to get the name into the national arena. He would lobby politicians, people from the entertainment industry, sport people and anyone he thought might raise the profile of GROW.

In Kilkenny if you mentioned GROW, people would respond ‘Oh Mike Watts’. He became synonymous with the organisation. I hope he will be

Understanding How GROW Works

THE HELPER PRINCIPLE

Time before time, when the world was young, two brothers shared a field and a mill. Each night they divided evenly the grain they had ground together during the day. Now as it happened, one of the brothers lived alone; the other had a wife and large family. One day, the single brother thought to himself: "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have only myself to care for, but my brother has children to feed." So each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary to see that he was never without.

But the married brother said to himself one day, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has no one. What will he do when he is old?" So every night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary. As a result both of them found their supply of grain mysteriously replenished each morning.

Then one night the two brothers met each other halfway between their two houses, suddenly realised what had been happening and embraced each other in love. The story is that God witnessed their meeting and proclaimed, "This is a holy place - a place of love - and here it is that my temple shall be built." And so it was. The holy place, where God is made known, is the place where human beings discover each other in love." (Spirituality of Imperfection Kurtz & Ketcham 1992 p 11.)

Family And Friends Of The Late

Kevin Walsh

Kevin was a valued member of the Enniscorthy Group. He attended a number of GROW events and touched all those he met. Kevin left us very suddenly and this has only added to the pain of those left behind. He was a kind gentleman and is sadly missed by all who knew him. Kevin's great wish in life was to be happy. I hope and believe that he is now at peace. . Rest In Peace Kevin.

GROW would like to thank the family and friends of the late Kevin Walsh – Who collected and donated a massive €1,500 to GROW in the South East. This money was collected at the funeral and around the time of Kevin's death. . . A heath felt thanks to all those who contributed so generously.

Mary B. Walsh
Fieldworker

WRITING.... A LEADERSHIP PAPER

PETER GALWAY. RECOVERY

Recovery is not an event, it is a process. It is the kind of thing we have to persevere in before we see results. In that sense, the GROW experience is quite an ordinary thing. All around us in life we see processes that take time to come to fruition, like gardening or nurturing a business, doing a jigsaw or raising a child. So will it be with our mental health.

Recovery is like a building site that we pass every day. From an area ridden with debris, the skeleton of a building sprouts up, then over months takes on its shape and colour. Finally the site gets cleaned up to reveal what it was going to be from the start.

It is true that our initial encounter with a group is a big event for most of us. It may even cause elation and there may be a honeymoon period, but it won't last. If we think that recovery is just a series of good things that will now happen since we have entrusted ourselves to the group or to God, we are not going to stay the course.

We can be sure that after the initial honeymoon phase of joining up, the next step in our recovery is that providence will surely send us right back to our old problems as if God were saying to us that we can't run away. We may find situations coming back again and again, and this is a sure sign that God wants us to try again; try it differently, try until we get it right. This is to be expected. It has taken time for others to recover; it will be no quicker for us.

Necessity is the mother of invention, and suffering can be the mother of patience. Patience grows in circumstances that

challenge us to lose our composure, and trials like this are sure to come to us, as they come to everyone. Meetings will not deflect these ordinary problems away. The function of GROW is not to parry the problems but to help us deal with them. We can trust that God will not test us beyond our strength. "He knows me better than I know myself.... therefore I will trust him" (BB p.9) "God is always good and is always good to me." (BB p.24). Even when it seems he is dealing harshly with me these situations are opportunities to practice keeping it together, so what we must learn from them is endurance.

C.S. Lewis calls it courage. He writes that it is a two-fold virtue.

Firstly, courage means acting in spite of fear in order to carry out what needs to be done. Secondly, in relation to step 6, courage is what people sometimes call Guts or Character, namely the ability to endure a tough situation.

"Character is spiritual strength, and there can be neither maturity nor happiness without. (BB p.27)."

During the development of mental illness we are robbed of our endurance and patience; our recovery involves getting it back. To hear endurance talked about as a newcomer may give the impression that this programme is about tough love, "no bleeding hearts here please". It can be off putting for the maladjusted person who looks into themselves and sees no strength left. But this is only one side of the group; if the sufferer lacks endurance or perseverance, the group will be patient and love her back to health (BB p.74), and her endurance will grow. So the rest of the group needs to endure also,

for the sake of the newcomer.

Old Peig Sayers from the Blasket Islands was not a popular author with secondary school pupils, nevertheless we can still learn from her, because she said that the only way to deal with suffering is to kill it with patience.

"Patience is a virtue, have it if you can, seldom in a woman, never in a man." The pessimistic old rhyme doesn't seem to give any of us much hope, but maybe the rhyme should instead serve to remind us that it doesn't just come to anyone, like the sunshine warming us whether or not we deserve it. No, we have to strive for it.

We need patience with ourselves if we are making slow progress or disillusionment will set in. "The choicest part of growing up is growing little. (BB p.52).

We need patience for people around us that are difficult to get on with; this will make us more able to integrate into society, and less dependent on whether people are nice to us or not.

We need patience with society, because it can only turn around slowly, like an oil tanker in the docks.

We need patience with God, because as the saying says, "The wheels of God grind slowly, and they grind exceedingly small."

In the end, our endurance can win back our lives for us, and it will, if we are patient.

It takes time, but the One who made time, made plenty of it, and he will not fail us.

Writing and Mental Health Anyone Interested?

Are you someone who likes to write? Maybe you are a member of a writers' group or maybe someone who has a secret wish to join one. If you are then read on. The National Program Team are considering organising a writers weekends to be held next spring. The weekends will devote itself to exploring ways in which we can tap into the wealth of experience among Irish GROW members. If you are interested please contact the GROW office.

TWO BOOK REVIEWS

by Anita Daly

Develop your mind “Just for Today I will strengthen my mind I will study”

Alice Munroe: Dance of the Happy Shades, A Book of Short Stories. 1968



This book of short stories was published in the 1960s. Despite this the issues it raises are still topical. The subjects are about intimate relationships which aren't always happy. Not always, but sometimes. The book is not depressing.

Assertiveness is the theme of one of her stories, it is very well written. A landlord starts calling to the home of one of his lodgers too often. The heroine begins to stand up for herself and at first is successful. The landlord doesn't like this and begins to get very obstreperous.

Other stories deal with different phases of life, childhood, adolescence and through these lenses examines subjects such as work, marriage and death.

Alice Munroe's characters are funny and contemporary. Some of them learn from their mistakes, others don't. One story examines relationships between a daughter and her father and mother and the tensions this can create.

Just for Today I will read something that requires effort, thought and concentration

How to listen to modern music without ear plugs David E Walden 1999

This well written and humorous book examines different types of modern music from the point of view of rhythm harmony and melody. The author recommends listening to each piece three times in order to become familiar with it. If you do, he promises, it will grow on you. David Walden is himself a composer and his book talks about the difficulties young composers may have in having their music published or performed.

The Phenomenon

Ah that feeling again.
Hello old friend...I've missed you.
I'm back where I belong.
At the centre of the universe.
The landscape is being scrolled out in front of me.
Like on a giant video game.
Although the speedometer is at twelve o'clock
On the Honda Super Four motorcycle, I'm definitely stationary,
And I have been for some time now.
There was a time when I believed that I was moving.
Back in Naas I think. But that was an old idea.
I look down
The rain bouncing off my wets.
The roadside flying past as if on a high speed film.
The planetary systems are there to entertain me,
I might rearrange them tomorrow...
The rain: A fungus that expands into every gap in my wet gear.
The journey is resuscitating my spirit,
After three months of Cars and Houses, Cars and Houses.
The journey is the destination and I've definitely arrived.
My spirit is with its tribe at the hill of Tara.
And the Druids.
I warn my pillion passenger about a large pothole approaching.
“Hold on tight”.
Smack.
I am the landscape. I am the moisture laden particles.
This is where I belong...
I've come home. The landscape is hugging me. Her son has come home.
Tears of joy fall from her heavenly eyes.
She knows that I will have to leave again but for this one moment.
I am hers.
The journey continues
Into the farthest reaches of my own mind.
The tumultuous weather system above has become
A map of my emotions.
Wherever I look I see them.
Part of me knows that I'll have to awaken from this state soon.
And return to the concrete and metal seas.
When the super four needs feeding.

Liam Daly

The Clouds Duty

**A cloud arrived recently.
Hanging like a tuft of cotton
suspended by an invisible magical pin
over a city that had'nt yet realised,
that to waste a Bank Holiday weekend would be a sin
Abandoned by the rest of the clouds to do its
sacred task.
To teach us humans that it was the long weekend.
Relax, rest. Enjoy the weather.
And the cloud did this for nearly two days that May,
Until relieved of its duty by the other clouds
at the end of the holiday.**

Liam Daly

What is Twelfth Step Work?

We carried GROW's hopeful, healing and transforming message to others in similar need.

Twelfth step work involves things like contacting group members who have not been present at the current meeting. These might include somebody who has relapsed and is back in hospital or somebody who was distressed last time they attended and maybe facing serious problems.

It can also involve trying to reach people who haven't yet heard about GROW but are in real need of help, people who are isolated, depressed or just plain lonely.

Twelfth step work may also involve helping a fellow group member find a job or accommodation, going on outings together helping someone take up a skill they have lost, learn to drive a car or even better get them to help you with a need of your own.

(To help others best, let them help you.)

A good way to get people involved is to include them in twelfth step work you are doing with others, to come along to the cinema or a show.

In a broader sense 12 step work involves carrying the message into the community. Placing advertisements, writing your story or an article for publication in a newspaper, putting up notices in doctor's surgeries or shop windows. It also includes doing what I am doing now, writing for our own magazine GROWing which comes out every three months.

The Group Organiser has a key role in organising twelfth step work. It is his or her job to get group members appropriately involved in carrying this valuable message. Be careful not to overwork the few. Try and get everyone to do something,

however small.

We must also use discretion about making phonecalls. It is up to the person to say they would like a call. No one should feel they must take calls they may be nervous about.

To end this leadership paper it is good to keep in mind that twelfth step work is more quality than quantity. Since we cannot give what we haven't got its not much use trying to help others if we are not eagerly learning, adopting and practising the GROW Program ourselves, changing our thinking and talk, our ways and (where necessary) our relationships so that we can become living examples of personal growth and maturity which we are privileged to share in carrying the GROW message to others in need.

Anthony Broughan. Dublin

Writing Yourself into Being

Writing has always been a big part of GROW. You might almost say it has been its life blood.

Writing has always been a big part of GROW. You might almost say it has been its life blood. GROW evolved through writing and it is through the miracle of the written word that we can hold GROW meetings in Kilkenny, Dublin, Sydney, London, Chicago or Christchurch New Zealand.

As an organisation we offer many opportunities to write. Everyone is encouraged to have a go. We are all experts of our own experience and writing is one way of sharing that experience. It is through sharing our experience and listening to the testimony of others that we learn.

In the early days of GROW people met twice a week. At the first meeting they discussed their problems and made suggestions to each other. These problems included things like finding work, combating loneliness, overcoming stigma, valuing yourself. At the second of which was called a leadership meeting they reflected on what had been effective the week before and began to write down anything that had worked. In this way GROW's program began to emerge. It is interesting to look into GROW's archives and see how systematically the program evolved. Initially the blue book was extremely small.

The leadership meetings first of all became monthly and then bi monthly. As

soon as people were deemed ready they were encouraged to attend. The first item on the agenda was the leadership paper. This would be a topic or issue that was relevant to further understanding of mental health. Three people would be asked to prepare a paper on that topic. These papers were then edited and 'polished' and sometimes became part of our program commentary. This is how Ann Waters book was put together.

In Ireland at the moment we are working at two new program commentaries. One is being aimed specifically at young adults, people aged between 18 and 35. This will aim to deal with issues identified by them in a recently conducted survey. The other is aimed at all our groups and will be a compilation of old and new leadership papers written in Ireland. So, if any of you out there have a flair for writing have a go.

The other place that writing has always played a part is the personal testimony. Telling stories has always been a part of every culture. This is perhaps especially true in Ireland. The tradition of the story teller is still very much alive and the 'ordinary' person, in Ireland has a great delight in language and in the telling of stories. Writing your story gives it a life of its own. When you sit down and go back over your life you have the opportunity to make decisions. What happened to me? What effect did that have on me? Was this a good thing or a bad thing? Can I change

or how have I moved on? What are my goals for the future. Francis Bacon said "Reading makes a full man, writing makes an exact one" Writing helps us understand our selves and gives us a chance to re-evaluate and re-member ourselves. It can be very valuable in exploring the effect that things like labels can have. For many of us receiving a serious mental illness label, felt like getting a life sentence. Because our culture believes that by being labelled you are in some way given a future.

Mellen Kennedy a psychologist working in America asked six GROW members to tell her their story. She used the story as a kind of lens and she explored what she called their 'world view', before they came to GROW and after they had been in GROW for a number of years. She found the story that GROW offered, a story of hope and empowerment enabled them to change significantly. It stands to reason that if the story of an organisation can enable people to change so can your story.

We are always on the look out for personal testimonies. We are currently compiling a collection for inclusion in a new book. This collection will be young peoples stories.

Please send in any written material you have. Your own story, your thoughts about any mental health issue, about any part of the GROW program.

Obituary: STEVE CLAYTON

Steve Clayton was working as a fieldworker for GROW when he took ill during a fund-raising cycle trip for the organisation. His coronary condition was seemingly successfully treated in Kilkenny and in Dublin, and he was discharged within a week, only to die suddenly on the morning of Sunday 31st. August with his family at Loon, near Castlecomer.

Stephen Clayton was a native of north-east England, and was brought up in a devout Catholic family. After primary school he entered first the junior and then the senior college at St. Cuthbert's, Ushaw. This institution, with a tradition that went back over 400 years to its foundation in Douai in France (it had moved to Ushaw Moor, near Durham in 1808), was to be part of his life for the next 25 years.

Steve was ordained a priest for the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and served in some short-term parish appointments before becoming Director of Pastoral Development at the seminary where he had been himself studied.

Through the Ushaw-Durham University academic connection established in the 1980s, Steve Clayton met Patricia (Tish) Warner, the daughter of Portumna parents, who was then studying at the northern university. When Steve eventually decided to forego the consecrated life of a priest, it was with Tish that he set out to realise his dream of combining a loving family environment with a wider and less regulated dispersal of his skills and talents in the spirit of The Beatitudes.

After a few years in Scotland working for his friend and former classmate Andy Williams in the outdoors equipment business, the Warner Clayton family moved to Ireland, bringing with them their infant sons Geoff and Benedict. Initially Steve took on various marketing assignments that provided some income but lasting merriment and then joined the staff of Action Aid, the developing world charity.

Shortly thereafter they moved to a new house, constructed in a modern and sustainable style, at Loon, near Castlecomer, where they added Hal to their family in 1998. There they overcame many early challenges, including the

serious illness of their son Geoff and the discovery of a dietary-aversion condition that affected others in the family.

However their family spirit, genuine sense of fun and discovery, and the fresh air of the Castlecomer plateau, made up for any of the sacrifices they had to make. They also embarked together in a home-schooling experiment that eventually expanded to cover all of the boys.



After stints in fund-raising with GROW and a charity donation scheme Steve began to focus on his true interest of counselling, and was able to acquire a diploma in the discipline at about the same time as he returned to GROW as a fieldworker.

It was then that things came together for Steve, allowing him to combine the pastoral instinct and concern which shone through his every act with a positive and practical approach that he had learned from handling the daily combination of adversity, challenge and joy that is part and parcel of family life.

Hundreds of GROWers, and many dozens of others who were his companions or his clients in the counselling journey that he undertook, benefitted from his unique approach, as did the colleagues who recognised in him the true spirit of community that is the basis of GROW as a mental health movement.

The attendance at his obsequies in Castlecomer, Loon and Clogh bore testimony to the reach of his magnetic presence, across hundred of lives. He did Clogh the honour of being interred in its clay, and it was there that his family, friends and the friends of his children lingered at his graveside in the unseemly late summer sunshine to talk about his life.

In addition to Tish, Geoff (17), Benedict (15) and Hal (10), Steve left his mother (who died at the age of 95 within a month of her son), three sisters and a brother.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Denis Bergin

Let no-one tell you that writing is easy. It isn't. Yet more than half the universe wants to do it, and most of them want to do it well, and some of them want to be famous doing it.

So what is it about this strange compulsion that makes it so essential to our mental and spiritual well-being?

Writing is appealing because we appreciate the pleasure that reading gives us, and the power that the written word has over us, and we want to give that pleasure and have that power ourselves.

Writing is appealing because it allows us to enter a world of the imagination where anything and everything is possible - even the impossible! We can be anything or anyone we want to be, and our life can be anything we want it to be.

Writing is appealing because it helps us to remember things (particularly as we grow older and tend to forget) and to sort out our thoughts and opinions.

Writing is appealing because it helps us make our case: from an application for a job to a romantic love letter, it allows us to project what we are capable of and what our intentions are in the most positive and creative way.

Writing is appealing because when we write about ourselves we begin to create a picture that has some level of objectivity, creating at least a little distance between the person that we see ourselves (and which we may not be happy with) and the person that others see.

And of course writing is appealing because it is so simple to organise - a stub of a pencil and a relatively clean sheet of paper will do (Seamus Heaney said: 'But I've no spade to follow men like them/Between my finger and my thumb/The squat pen rests/I'll dig with it').

I must have written millions of words over the last fifty years. Yet I can always pick up something I've written and enjoy it. It doesn't matter that I am the only one who ever reads it, the only one who remembers it, and the only one who will ever read it

again. It's just me and the fun feeling! And that really is what writing is about.

At another level, of course, writing is a valuable therapy. It helps us face the frights we've had and the fears we feel, and it gives us many choices as to how we express our feelings.

We can write straight fact, selected fact, distilled fact, fictionalised fact, half-fiction or pure fiction based on fact or not based on anything much at all other than our imagination.

We can write in little unformed prose outbursts, half-lines, full-lines, verses, paragraphs. We can revise, re-revise, and revise again to our heart's content (James Joyce was once asked how the writing of a piece was going, and he said he had been working all day but had made great progress: 'I put in a comma, and then took it out again!').

We can even send our creation to people we want to impress, or confront or attack (not recommended unless your legal costs are covered). Thanks to email and Facebook/YouTube we (and the Queen, seemingly) can send our little bouquet of words around the world with the exciting prospect of it being read by people just as crazy or as lonely or as inspired as we are ourselves.

The good news about writing is that it is easy to scribble away happily, and easy to circulate the scribbles to family and friends. If that's all you want to do, you can do it any way you like. People will say "Oh here's another quirky little message from A-----", and you'll have brightened up someone's day already.

The bad news is that unless we are writing just for ourselves or for a readership that we know and love (and that includes fellow GROWers), getting it right is going to be hard, hard, hard.

First there's the grammar, the syntax, the spelling. Even with wordcheck software, we're not always sure if the word we're checking has the meaning we want.

Then there's the interruptions, the commitments, the unplanned developments that prevent us from having the peace, the

quiet and the time to write as we want and what we want.

So what to do?

Begin slowly and simply (remember that if you text on your mobile a lot, you're probably writing more words in a year than you ever would on a printed page in your whole life)

The easiest sentence to begin with is "I was born in (place) on (date). My parents were ..." See how far you get. Stay with writing about your life experience until you know enough about something else to write confidently on it.

If you're going to be really serious about it, work on your English through reading, study and practice. If you're brilliant enough to be published, some editor will clean up your grammar for you, but there's nothing to equal (or save time like) knowing automatically how a word should look or mix with other words.

Revise, revise, revise until you get it right. Everything you've heard about the most successful writers is true. They revise.

Go to the Writer's Museum in Dublin and take in some of the atmosphere of the place. Find writers whom you would like to imitate (in life as well as in skill) and study how they work. Go through the shelves at Oxfam or Sue Ryder and see what books you can find for 20c each. Go to poetry and prose readings and book launches and see how people present themselves and behave (remember, writers are notoriously anxious, nervous and unconfident people, so you may be more together than most of them - and at least you're not pretending!)

Above all, don't assume that pain, drunkenness or madness are essential attributes of the successful writer. It only looks that way.

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