

# Art evoking lost stories...

A group of women, one week out of prison, came together at Los Angeles Centers for Alcohol and Drug Abuse for an art workshop facilitated by AWBW Arts Leader Jill Seither. They shared stories never told before, creating unexpected bonds with one another.



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The Story Trees workshop was the first Windows workshop I (Jill Seither) facilitated at my new job. The women were recently released from prison and would not enter the art room without permission. But there was a look of sheer glee on their faces peeking into the room. I guess in prison no matter how much you want something, you are simply not free to explore it.

I began the workshop with a warm-up and relaxation, which offered them freedom; a privilege preciously missed and now deeply valued by the women. During the creation, each woman shared about a time, a place, the important people in their lives and their hopes for the future. Prior to this, they had no other real appropriate “space” to talk about the parts of their journeys that had come up for them.

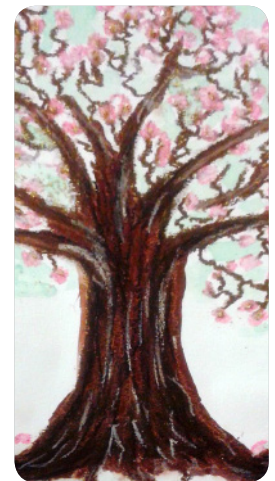
One of the women who almost completely rejects her femininity, created the most colorful tree with the biggest, brightest flowers all over it! This participant felt safe enough to share a part of herself, a part she hides and apparently almost forgot about. She was beautiful in her carefree attitude during creation and even the color in her face was brighter.

Other women shared their incredible stories that the art they created evoked. Here are two examples :

“I went back to my childhood. The last time I felt family pride and unity. I come from a small place in Mexico where there are no lights, no plumbing, nothing. We literally hunted for our food. I remember being a little girl and taking my slingshot to hit a lizard for food. Anyway, I felt myself next to the Cherry Blossom tree in my backyard. From the moment we began the relaxation, I felt myself standing under that tree, re-experiencing the narrative of my life.”

“Oh my God, I don’t know how to explain this... this tree; but I saw it! I was captivated by it! It was see-through gold. I’m telling you, I don’t know where this tree came from... It is like my spirituality is alive or something...”

The stories of the womens’ life journeys brought every one of us to tears. This project was an incredible experience and connected me to the strength and resilience of these participants. The madness that prison has imprinted on these women is horrible. However, as a result of this program, these nine women got to “travel” far away and feel really free in the art workshops!



**Based on annual evaluations submitted by 108 Adult Windows active programs in 2015:**

*96% of Leaders reported that adults are more likely to open up and use professional counseling support after participating in a Windows workshop*

*90% of Leaders reported adults being able to tune in to their present needs and future goals*