

The Other Side of The Mountain

- elevating the carer voice

Presenter



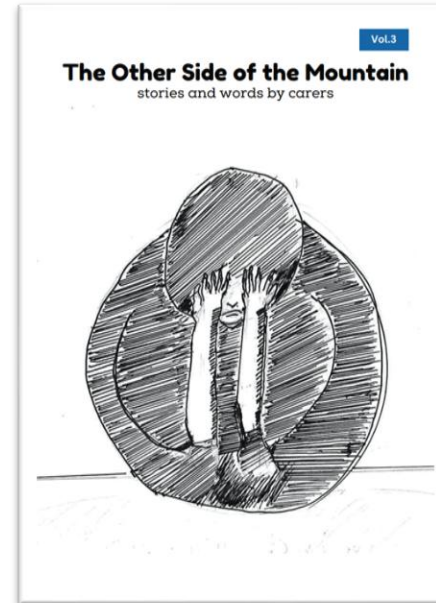
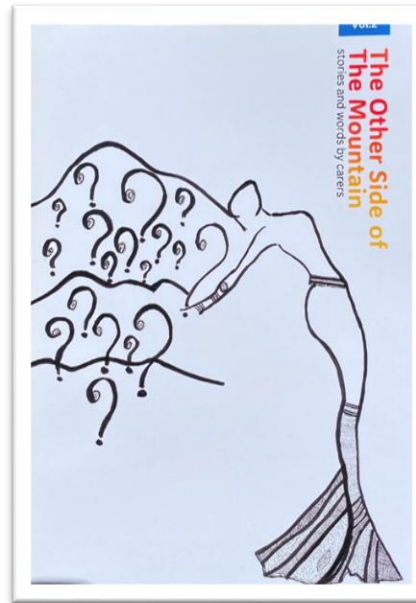
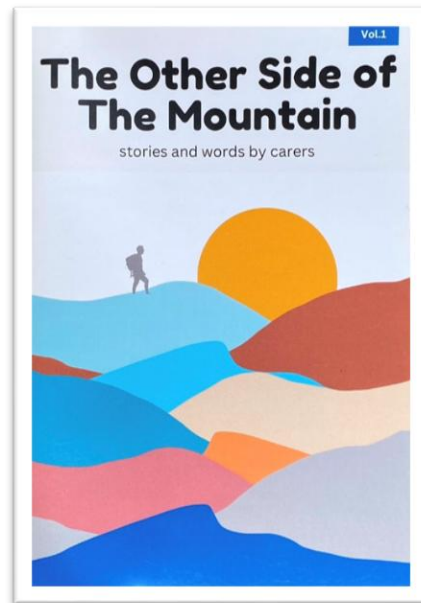
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– Writer / Workshop Facilitator / AOD
Educator

The Other Side of The Mountain

- Elevating the Carer Voice

‘Community-driven, creative approaches in mental health care’



Background



The Other Side of The Mountain is the title of a series of booklets, an outcome of an ongoing writing project created to support carers. These beautiful collections of stories have emerged from a pilot project – a series of Thursday afternoon writing workshops held at the Belgrave Community Hub. They were inspired by the need for carers to come together and share their stories through the joyful process of creative writing.

The Invisible Population

Context Setting

- Carers see themselves as an “invisible population”
- Their work, however, is vital to the health care system and is known to contribute to better recovery outcomes for the people they support

Challenges

- Emotional toll
- Unpreparedness

Project Goals

- Non-clinical creative approach to supporting carers
- Foster connection, reduce isolation, provide therapeutic relief



Workshop Approach

Core Elements

- Safe, inclusive space
- Guided writing prompts
- Group storytelling

Therapeutic Themes

- Building resilience through shared narratives
- Reclaiming personal Identity beyond caregiving roles

Engagement Strategies

- Shared understanding within the group
- Celebrating creativity without judgment or pressure



Evidence-based benefits of ‘expressive writing’



‘Expressive writing is a major medical advance.’
- Dr David Spiegel, (JAMA, 1999)

Evidence-based psychological benefits

- Reduced symptoms of depression
- Lower anxiety levels
- PTSD symptom reduction
- Improved emotional regulation
- Improved social relationships and communication skills

Measurable physical health benefits

- Improved immune system functioning
- Reduced symptoms in chronic illness
- Lower blood pressure and heart rate
- Pain reduction
- Better sleep quality
- Lower cortisol levels

Writing Techniques

- Stream of consciousness and free association
- List poetry
- Significant moments and turning points
- Fiction writing techniques such as: present tense, 2nd person & 3rd person
- The hero's journey structure
- Poetry prompts

*“It’s allowing what’s underneath to come through
and be seen and be accepted and be integrated.”*

“Once it’s out of your head and on the paper, you let it go.”

“You become the observer.”

“I gave myself a superpower to actually believe in herself.”

New Perspectives

“I found I could write about taboo subjects that would otherwise never see the light of day. With this group of people, with similar life experiences, nothing was too awful to write about.”

“I felt like something shifted for me during these workshops. I realised that while my son is always going to be a big part of my story, he’s living his own life story. And, while he’s losing the best years of his life to addiction, I don’t need to lose those years as well as I wait for change.”



The Battle

Who are you and what have you done with my son?
When you look in the mirror who do you see?
The person I see is a stranger to me
I wonder if he is a stranger to you
You hide and you skirt, and you are never present
You lie, and you cheat, and you steal, unrepentant

Who are you and what have you done with my son?
The person you were would not hurt his family
The drugs, now your friends play with your sanity
You believe what you say, and you say with profanity
The addictions are strong and unhealthy that's a sign
Where's your plan, where's your future, where's mine?

Who are you and what have you done with my son?
Inside I am dying, I'm crying, I am lost
The addiction is winning, it's time to be quashed
I will not give up hope nor support this assault
There is love all around you, take a look, take a gamble
Trust yourself you'll survive, there is nothing you can't handle

Who are you and what have you done with my son?
I believe in my son, I don't believe in you
Get out of his head, get out of his mind
Get out of our house, get out it is time
Start again, second chances and third time and fourth
You won't win this battle; he is my son not yours

- Eleni

** Creative writing techniques can give a voice to powerful emotions*

I Once But Now

I once thought I would raise great kids
but that was not to be
I once judged other's parenting
but now they're judging me

I once thought "school's over"
and all our troubles too
I once thought once they turn eighteen
my parenting days were through

I once thought, "if only he would
listen to what I say"
But now I know it's his story
and he must make his own way

I once thought I would never be
controlling like my mum
But now I know she did her best
at the time I thought it dumb

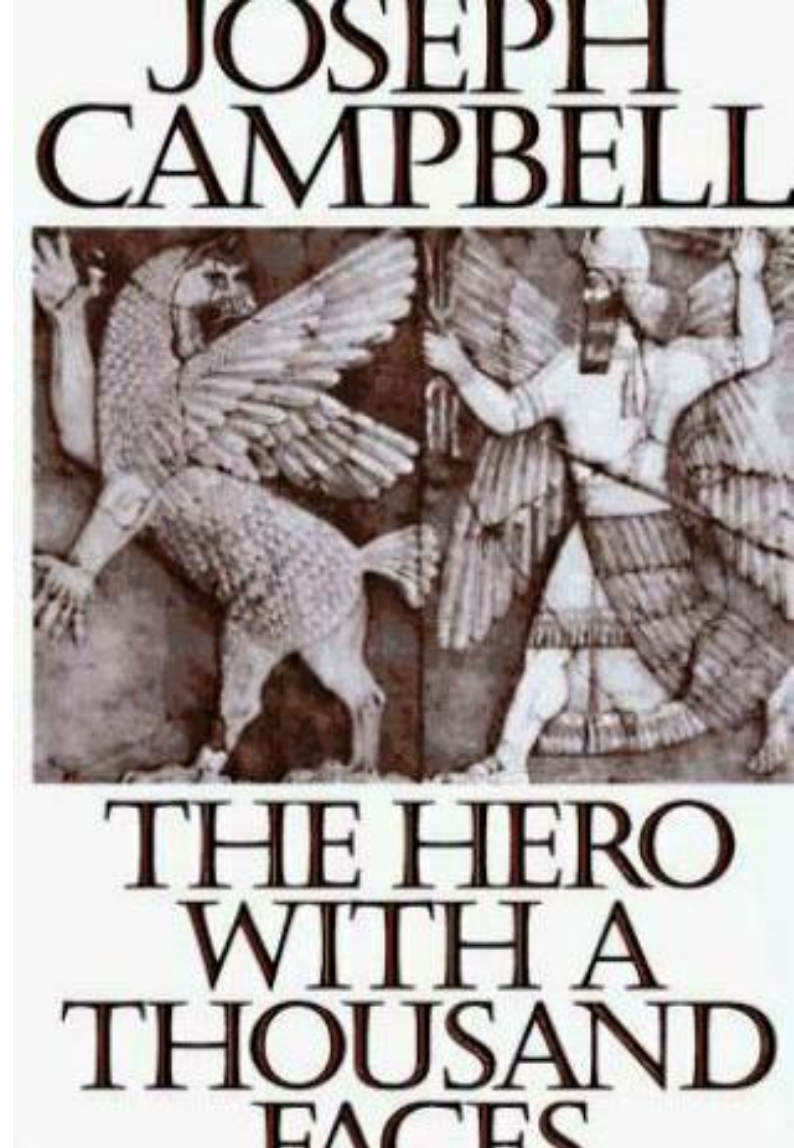
I once thought I was special
and smarter than the rest
But now I know that kindness
is more important than being best

- Wendy

** This 'list poetry' technique allows writers to reflect upon hopes and disappointments, with the aim of finding acceptance.*

The Hero's Journey

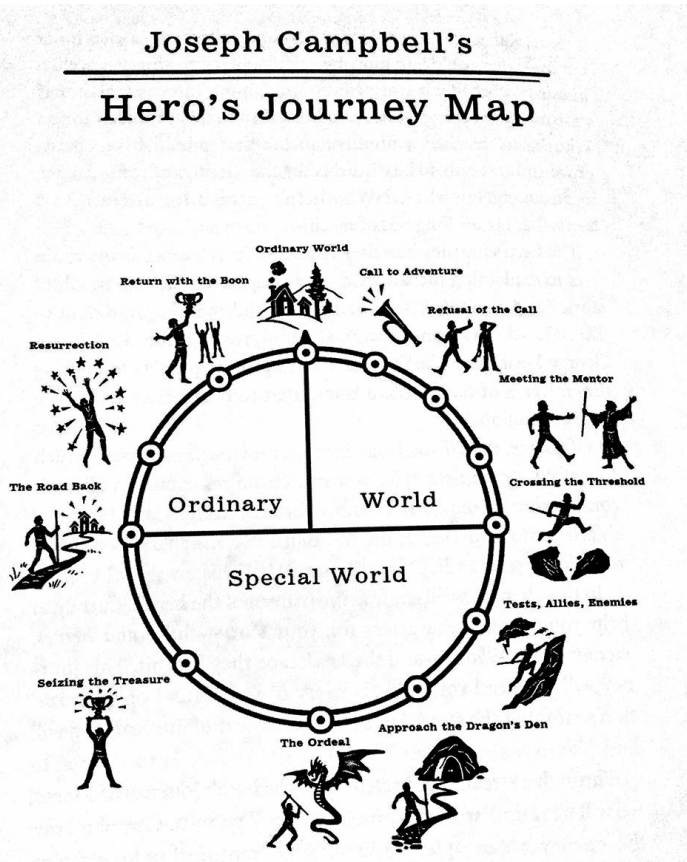
"I didn't realise I was the hero in my own life."



- The call to adventure
- The road of trials & challenges
- The return with the reward

We explore Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. A story writing narrative that can provide structure to what seems like chaos.

The final destination doesn't always mean living happily ever after – but recognising how the journey has shaped you in positive ways.



An Unwelcome Interruption

I'm doing well at work, I'm feeling valued and appreciated, respected. Meanwhile, my son is going downhill; a rollercoaster of hope and despair is my new normal. The court charges are mounting up. Drug possession, shop lifting, non-attendance at court, bail breaches, more shoplifting. We are by his side, we want this to end, we want the best for him. We don't share the shame with anyone.

"Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"Yes, Your Honour, we will allow him to be bailed to our address, we will ring police if he breaches his curfew".

"But respectfully Mrs T, why is this time any different to last time?"

"I don't know Your Honour. I am his mum and I'm trying my best."

Bail is granted. Court dismissed. I switch off the court screen and swivel back to my work laptop screen.

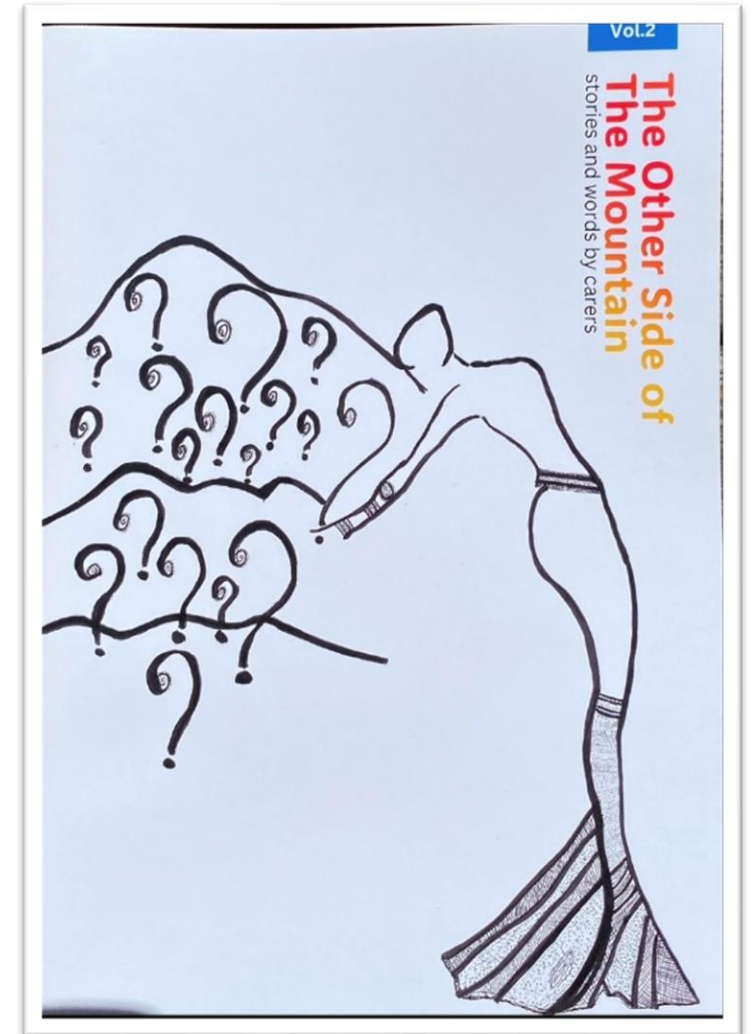
"Sorry about the interruption everyone, I'm back. Now, where did we get to?"

- Wendy

** This piece depicts a moment where strength, resilience and adaptability were required - qualities of 'the hero'*

Significance of this Work

- Relevance to Health Care Systems
 - recognising and supporting carers
- Innovative, Non-Clinical Model
 - bridges gaps where formal therapy may not be accessible
- Broader Implications - Scalable and Adaptable for other, underserved populations



Conclusion – the power of storytelling

Final words from participants:

Support

“I could let down my guard in my writing.”

“Someone wants to hear what I have to say! My story is of value.”

Resilience

“Admiring each other’s resilience, we were able to learn from each other.”

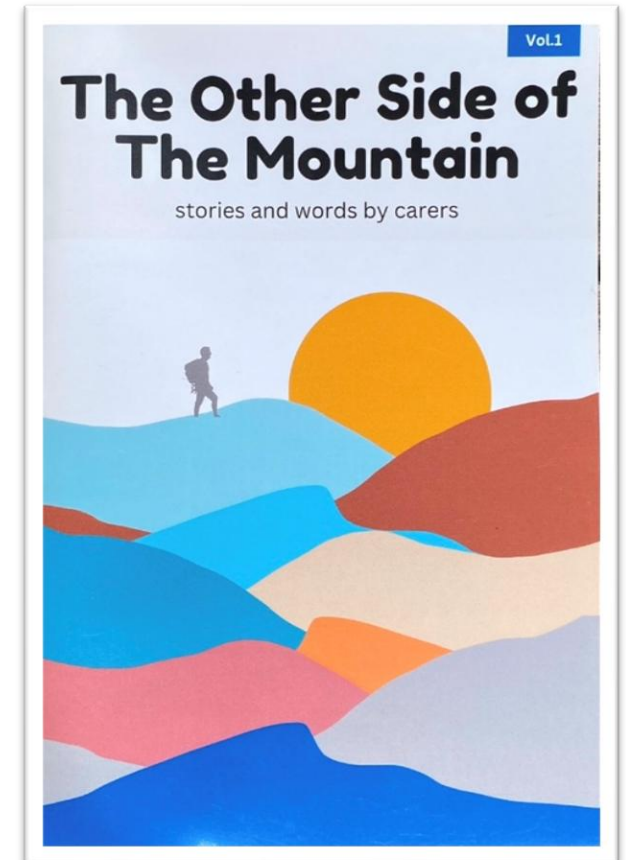
Growth

“I feel better equipped to deal with daily challenges.”

“I now see the journey as ‘pain with purpose’ – we will come out the other side.”

Remembering Joy

“I feel storytelling is key to building empathy and understanding and finding solutions. We found joy through the sharing of our stories.”



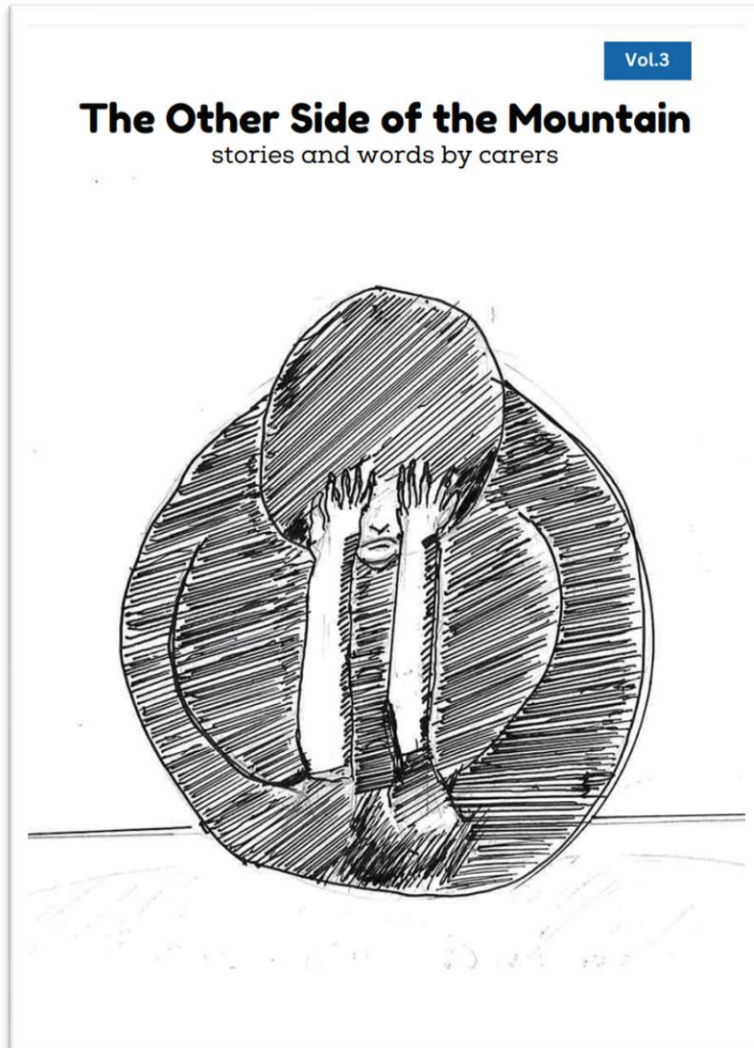
I Love

I love it when lunch is provided for me
I love it when my younger daughter goes to school
I love wearing colourful clothes
I love listening to *Demob Happy* LOUD in my car
I love the fierce, strong women in my life
I love genuine, authentic people
I love it when my brain says “The possibilities are endless”
I love my older daughter’s cheeks becoming fuller again
I love the time and space to be able to write
I love feeling free after years of darkness and despair

** Ongoing stressors can settle over us like a dark cloud, even when things are going well. The ‘I Love’ exercise helps us to reconnect with our capacity for enjoyment and begin rebuilding our lives.*

- Lisa

Remembering Joy



Remembering Joy

“No pressure, but I’m trying to remember you, Joy. The surprise of you, the tear prick, the heart softening and surging, the warmth of you. Where are you, Joy?”

- Gen

Referrals and Enquiries

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