

# NI Hospice Rebuild Integrated Arts Project

## Creative Consultation

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*Artists: Deirdre Cartmill and Sheelagh Colclough*

**Be At Peace**  
*By the Tuesday Patients Group*

I like Elvis, but not in the bedroom.  
Soft music like pan pipes or waves on the shore.  
Calmness, serene, the sound of the sea,  
or Acker Bilk Strangers on the Shore  
- I could listen to that all day.

A picture of a dog would give me comfort.  
A painting of a hayfield, where there's sun shining  
and people in it, or the horses ploughing.  
Our glasswork of the birds, the butterflies and the flowers  
- it makes you feel good.  
Photographs of things we've done - having that as a memory.

A big log fire, wood burning.  
Chestnuts in a nice brown bowl.  
Looking out the window and seeing the blue sky.

A bedroom to me should be restful and peaceful.  
The colours depend on how you're feeling at the time.  
Roses are nice in any colour.  
I like touching things  
and the feel of a nice, soft carpet underfoot.

Soft muted shades and calm music  
to help the family.  
Soft lights to give people contentment.  
A quiet, peaceful atmosphere.  
The smells of families  
and the smells of Christmas – apple and cinnamon.

A garden full of Victorian chimney pots, Belfast sinks  
and old boots with plants in them.  
A gazebo to get out of the sun  
and a water feature, very restful, flowing down.  
A feeder for the birds to come.  
I love the birdsong  
as long as it's not too early in the morning.

The Sanctuary is something dear to me.  
It was very relaxing.  
It made it as easy as it could be.

It's not the building; it's what you put in it.  
Sometimes just coming here lifts your spirits.  
No-one else understands; you need people like yourself.

The Hospice is like a big, cuddly teddy bear.  
If it could speak it would ask me  
are you still with me  
or tell me to be at peace.

## Methodology

This creative consultation focused on using creative writing and visual art to elicit and capture people's thoughts and feelings about the NI Hospice rebuild project at Somerton Road, with a view to informing the public artwork for the new build.

The sessions engaged with patients, carers, staff and local residents.

We used the widely known Buy A Brick campaign as a way to engage with groups in order to explore their hopes and wishes for artwork and the atmosphere that that could help create in the new building.



Using a brick as the basic foundation for engaging with groups we asked what elements they would use to construct their dream hospice environment. Developing this, we asked them to imagine they were a brick in the wall in the place in the Hospice which was most important to them. We then asked them to imagine the kinds of things they would like to see there, capturing this through words, images and poems. Post-its became our visual bricks as we recorded and helped them to develop these ideas. Mood boards and maps allowed the groups to visually represent and organise their thoughts.

## **Findings**

There were many elements that were universal to all the groups we worked with – patients, carers, staff and local residents:

1. A calm yet uplifting atmosphere
2. Positive images
3. Bringing nature inside
4. Bringing a sense of home into the Hospice
5. Engaging, changing artwork that breaks the monotony
6. A multi-sensory experience
7. The importance of the Hospice entrance area
8. The importance of the garden



## 1. A Calm yet Uplifting Atmosphere

*'The Mona Lisa's not going to cheer anybody up.'* Carer.

Words repeatedly used to describe the ideal environment included; tranquil, peaceful, calming, uplifting, nurturing, caring, warm, comforting and soft.

Artwork that appealed had no hard lines, but gave a sense of fluidity and motion.

Despite the consistent call for tranquil music and calming colours, this was always balanced by the need for something upbeat and uplifting. People would temper their desire for soft, muted colours by adding comments such as 'but with a splash of red.' The ideal colours mentioned often reflected nature - yellows, oranges and pinks 'because they're warm like the sunset,' or bright fresh greens to give a cheery feel and 'a feel of the outdoors.' Patterns and designs were also suggested to break up the blandness.

Subdued lighting, peaceful music or relaxing sounds such as water features and birdsong were also proposed for a tranquil feel. Yet it was very important that nothing felt too sombre.

Something that also was important for all the groups was art that changed somehow with people's changing mood, satisfying this need for both a calming and uplifting environment. Suggestions included the use of light to change mood and atmosphere in a space. For example a sculpture that was lit one way during the day and another way at night, or the use of sound to add another changing element to the artwork.



## 2. Positive Images

*'Food for the soul. Symbols of hope, new beginnings.' Staff member.*

'Artwork in the hospice should offer a sense of hope and possibility.' 'No-one wants to feel this is the end.' 'People need something life affirming to distract them and lift them from their feelings of heaviness.' These were all sentiments that came through strongly across all the groups.

In terms of style, in general most people stated that they would prefer to see figurative work rather than abstract. However it was very important to them that any imagery should not focus on the negative aspects of illness. People felt that a large part of why Hospice care is so valuable is because it lifts people's spirits. Some patients and staff indicated they would like to see artwork that was significant to their own experience of Hospice care. One poignant image that came up multiple times during the consultation was hands. As one staff member said; 'sometimes all you can do for someone is hold their hand' 'It reminds you of what we're about.'



People wanted art to be instantly eye-catching to lift their spirits, provide some distraction and to be a talking point to deflect from their worries and the monotony of the situation. Images that people felt were hopeful and inspiring included: stars, butterflies, birds, blue skies, angels, flowers and rainbows. Some people wanted images and sounds that were uplifting and positive that had a feel of magic and freedom.

Most felt materials used in the artwork were important for achieving this positive feel. As one carer said 'sculptures to me speak of a place of death.' Anything too cold and clinical was unpopular as it reminded them of more traditional healthcare settings.

People preferred materials that they felt embodied something that was living, breathing, organic and light reflecting such as willow, bamboo, wood, topiary, glass, ceramics, bronze, canvas, fabrics and tapestries.

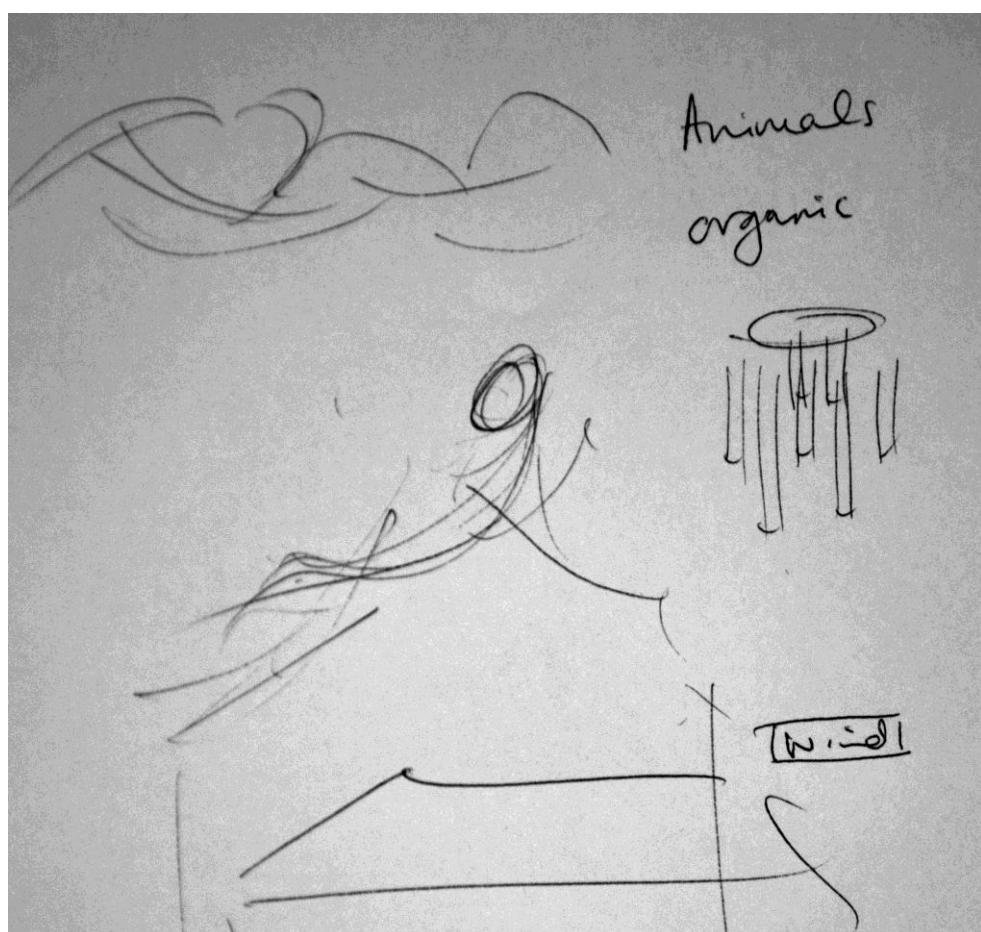
Artwork done in glass was felt to be particularly uplifting, colourful, eye-catching and unique with the light coming through adding to that sense of hope.

### 3. Bringing Nature Inside

*'I truly believe in walking in nature – there's something healing about it. That's what people miss when they're in the hospital. They miss the fresh air in their face.'*  
*Staff member.*

Nature was a strong inspiration for many people but the yearning to bring nature inside is especially strong within the Hospice as many patients can no longer go outdoors and they seek the peace of places they can no longer visit. Nature was seen as calm and relaxing but also invigorating.

The sea proved to be a very powerful recurring image as it was seen as spiritual and soothing, yet also uplifting and constantly changing, renewing itself. Water features, fountains and waterfalls were also felt to be relaxing and very pleasant to look at with the sound adding to this calming effect.



Images of outdoor scenes were popular such as: the sea, sun shining, countryside, hayfields, windmills, horses ploughing, galloping horses, dogs, cats, butterflies, daisies, roses or a spray of flowers.

It was felt that natural, organic materials used in artworks added to this sense of bringing nature inside and also appealed to all the senses. Specific suggestions included using collections of natural and found objects such as chestnuts in artwork.

**Butterflies & Birdsong**  
*by the Thursday Patients Group*

I wish I didn't have to be here.  
You want to feel as if you're walking into a house.  
Something welcoming, to feel 'God this is really nice'.  
Nothing cold and clinical.  
No stainless steel and glass.  
There's nothing worse than when  
you have to be somewhere that's not nice.

I lie and look at the ceiling during treatment  
and want something to look at other than the lights.

A canvas is more alive than paintings.  
A tapestry done for someone as a present.  
Butterflies, daisies, a spray of flowers, a robin,  
- nice things to keep your spirits up  
and make everybody cheerful; that helps too.

A painting of a fairy or an angel – magic.  
I love angels. I would pray to them.  
They make you feel good.

Pictures, cushions, colours, flowers  
bring all the wee senses in.  
A bedspread full of pink flowers.  
Something to touch, pet and stroke.  
You like a wee cuddle now and again.  
A fish tank, relaxing, the slowness, changing colours.  
A bird aviary for interaction and birdsong.

The whoosh of the sea coming in, water hitting.  
I love watching the waterfall, the trees either side;  
it's relaxing to sit at.

The garden is somewhere to sit and have a wee yarn,  
maybe have a wee party, or just have a laugh.  
Sometimes you don't want to be annoyed talking.

An open door. I love the door open -  
if you need a bit of help you can shout.

#### 4. Bringing a Sense of Home into the Hospice

*'I was six weeks in that one room in hospital and I just wanted to get home. There's nothing worse than when you have to be somewhere that's not nice.' Patient.*

'The Hospice works when touches are added to make it feel more like a home from home rather than a cold, clinical environment.' We asked the groups what was it in an artwork that could add to the touches of home away from home that people felt were so important in the Hospice?

Art that included local landscapes or photographs were judged to feel welcoming and were seen as a sign of something to be proud of and connected to. The familiar used in unfamiliar ways, for example Belfast sinks used as plant holders in the garden, it was felt, could add to this sense of home.



The patients in particular enjoyed having memories of happy times in the Hospice itself around them; this is why having their own artwork on display works so well for them. It also works as a symbol of their camaraderie and holds positive associations for them.

One suggestion was mosaic artwork made from the patients bringing in something that belonged to their mother or father. They explained to us that at home you're in control, in the Hospice you're not, therefore a sense of ownership of and connection to, the artwork was important for them.

An ability to have some control over the artwork was seen as an advantage – it was suggested that patients and visitors could interact with the artwork in some way, for example by having an interactive flatscreen where images of the patients' current work could be shown and rotated.

## **5. Engaging, Changing Artwork that Breaks the Monotony**

*'Something other than the hand sanitiser poster to read'. Carer*

Life in the Hospice can be monotonous and repetitive. Often during and after treatment patients are confined to one spot, looking at the same wall or ceiling for an hour or more at a time. Likewise relatives and visitors spend long amounts of time in the same areas and yearn for 'something other than the hand sanitiser poster to read'.

About half the visitors to the Hospice are children and teenagers. It was a commonly held view that the artwork needs to engage with and appeal to them as well as the adults.

The desire was expressed over and over for artwork that had layers and different dimensions to be explored to engage the observer. Examples given were: artwork with a narrative thread, artwork with a lot of detail in it so you see something different every time, or artwork with something to investigate to hold attention. It was felt that a piece of art where you have to 'work to work it out' is something that could be explored over a period of time.

It was suggested that artwork that was constantly changing in some way can provide a talking point for patients and families who are repeating the same experience day after day – for example "what's it doing today" or "what colour is it today?"

'The art should be as attention catching as it is eye catching. People want to be distracted by something beautiful.'



## Light

*By the Carers*

First impressions are lasting ones.  
It's not a question of give up hope all who enter here.  
We know why we're here – but we don't give up hope.  
There's a balance to be struck  
in giving people hope 'in spite of...'  
It's not about giving you a quick fix  
- but we will get through it.

The Scream or Banksy aren't right.  
The Mona Lisa's not going to cheer anybody up either.  
Something like Christ The Light of the World,  
or a painting like the poster for Lance Armstrong  
telling his positive story - it's eye-catching.  
I want something to read  
other than the hand sanitiser sign.  
And humour in the art,  
it takes you away from your worries.

Something you can enjoy, like a game.  
Something to interact with and relate to.  
Connections, stories.  
Sculptures to me speak of a place of death,  
graveyards, plus they're cold.  
But scenes in glass are so colourful,  
eye-catching, uplifting, unique  
and the light coming through  
leaves the glass lit up.

Tranquil music, calming colours,  
pale yellows, orange and pinks, warm like the sunset.  
Somewhere that doesn't smell funny.

The chapel should be silence and peace,  
feelings of love, compassion and hope.  
There's something about the space in a Hindu temple.  
A beautiful view out the window.

When I think of peace, I think of a waterfall  
and in behind there's a ledge  
with a bird singing his heart out.  
Lying on the sand on the beach  
listening to the waves,  
that is utopia for me.

A fountain in the garden is calming and peaceful  
with the lovely sound of the gurgling water  
and coloured pebbles and seashells,  
and the spectrum of light coming through like a rainbow.  
Or a glass rainbow with the light shining on it.  
A little stream running over stones.

## 6. A Multi-Sensory Experience

*'Something to touch, pet and stroke.' Patient*

The desire for a multi-sensory experience often fed into the desire to bring a feeling of home into the Hospice.

Sensory ideas included: seasonal smells, such as 'Christmassy scents' like apple and cinnamon, or calming like lavender, tactile items such as fluffy rugs, music and relaxing sounds such as water features and birdsong.

'An interactive wall filled with tactile things could help patients who have memory loss.' As one staff member said, "sometimes touch and feel can bring so much back." 'The items could change with the seasons.' Other suggestions for a tactile experience included having something along a handrail in the corridor so you can touch it as you walk along.



Following on from this idea came the concept of having all the artwork connected in some way to provide a continuing narrative journey through the Hospice. The art could be used to signpost and help orientate and situate both patients and their visitors. 'People need to know there is a way back out again and art could help them feel this.'

It was suggested that the art could be used to ease the patient's experiences even by something as simple as where it was positioned. For example art at different heights for wheelchair users or on the ceiling which would distract during treatment. Also allowing patients the option to change the colour through a piece of art in a particular area would affect their mood.

When it came to sound, people felt it was important to avoid anything on a loop as you can be in the same room for hours. Sound triggered by movement that changes with the amount of people in a room for example could provide a different atmosphere and experience.

## 7. The Importance of the Hospice Entrance Area

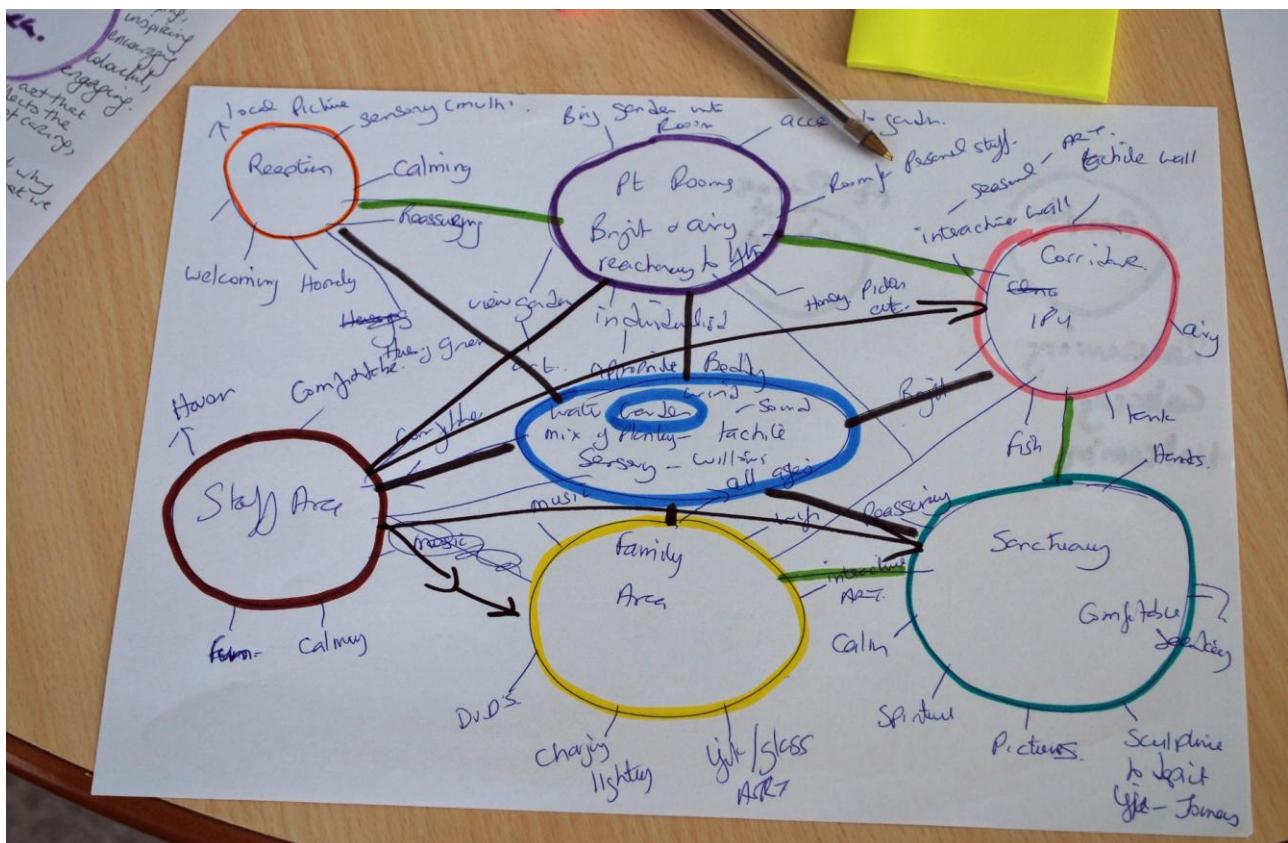
'I wish I didn't have to be here.' Patient

'It's not a question of give up hope all who enter here. We know why we're here – but we don't give up hope. There's a balance to be struck.' Carer

All the groups mentioned the entrance area as being very important as they saw it as being everyone's first contact with and first impression of the Hospice.

Everyone consulted felt that art could help the entrance feel welcoming. It could draw focus away from people's nerves on entering.' The atmosphere hits you as soon as you walk in and the worst atmosphere would be non personal, stainless steel and glass, cold and clinical with that awful hospital smell.' 'Art could be used to transform the atmosphere.'

Some felt it should 'literally draw the eye away from the direction you're going – look up, look anywhere but down that corridor'.



## 8. The Importance of the Garden

*'I put the world to rights in the garden' Staff member.*

As already mentioned, the connection with the natural world is especially important for patients who can no longer enjoy the outdoors and the garden can act as an accessible sanctuary for them and their visitors. However it acts also an oasis and welcome place of escape for the staff too.

Art that encompasses water features, water sculptures, waterfalls and streams was felt to be both restful and invigorating. One of the patients mentioned an outdoor sculpture which integrated a water feature they had seen somewhere that they had really enjoyed looking at, describing it as a large metal sphere with water constantly cascading down around it, 'moving, light and mesmerising.' Another described the rockery and water feature her late husband had made in their garden and suggested using elements of that for a garden sculpture.

Glass rainbows, changing lighting, having things hanging from trees and a sculpture to capture the movement or sound of the wind, possibly using the idea of a windmill, were some suggestions for art in the garden area.

Additionally mentioned were: a gazebo to get out of the sun, plants in old Victorian chimney pots, Belfast sinks and old boots and a feeder for the birds so you can hear the birdsong

There was also an idea for a garden of the senses for the visually impaired, which included aromatic and sensual smells and a tactile experience. Reflecting the changing of seasons to the patients through the garden in some way was also seen as something very positive.



## **Differences Between the Groups**

There were some differences between the groups as to what they placed importance on.

The patients wanted something that would help ease the visiting experience for their families just as much as to ease their own experience.

Carers were keen to have humour in the art to take them away from their worries.

Staff were more aware of practicalities such as having fabric that is ladder length so it can be kept clean, and not having art work that can be lifted because some patients with dementia might move it. They were also more concerned about art that enhanced the patients experience rather than their own experience.

For residents this was a place they'd never been to so there was a nervousness on approaching the Hospice and a need to destigmatise it. They wanted a sense of openness and of not being locked in. 'As the fence is what holds the building, is there a way to have a beautifully designed fence and gates especially at the entrance?' 'Could the fence or gates itself be a work of art?' Making the entrance and the area around the entrance bright, cheery, welcoming and approachable they felt might reduce residents nerves and serve to enhance the area in general.

## **Additional Factors**

It became clear during the consultation that there are many practicalities that would have to be taken into account by commissioned artists, for example issues of hygiene and art that is suitable and safe for patients with dementia. When these arose people accepted the need to factor in these issues.

The nature of consultation means asking people for their consideration, opinion and input, which can raise a number of expectations about the final outcomes. We were careful to explain the reasons why we were there and the limitations of what was likely to be possible in terms of the integrated public art project. Wherever relevant we made people aware of the tender and commissioning process and tried to balance their hopes and desires with what might end up happening.

We were asking the groups to engage in imaginative activities, which as they got involved and invested in the process, naturally spilled over into areas which at times were more akin to interior design or landscaping as opposed to 'pure' public art. We did our best to reinforce the concept that their ideas would be used to give the artists a feel for the kinds of things they wanted to see within the public art in different areas but not in terms of the architectural design, decor or landscaping of the Hospice as that was not within our remit.

## **Symbols of Hope**

*By the Staff*

Food for the soul.  
Soothing, spiritual.  
Symbols of hope, new beginnings.  
Hands of friendship or caring hands.  
It has to be meaningful.

It's hard to put your foot  
through that door for the first time  
and wondering have I made the right decision.  
It's your worst nightmare you're facing.  
People are so heavy in their thoughts  
it will be good to distract them,  
to lift them from their heaviness.

Calm and welcoming, setting the scene,  
a healing colour.  
Welcoming art like local landscapes or photographs,  
being proud of where we're from.  
Bridges like Carrick-a -rede and scenes of history  
are nice to look at while you're waiting.  
A local scene made in glass  
so the light comes in from behind.  
It's absolutely stunning.

Nurturing, caring, warm, comforting,  
softness, faithful, loyal, touch, comfort.  
Homely, comfortable, nice, bright, fresh.  
Reassuring, friendship.  
Stars are very hopeful.

The sea gives me energy as it's constantly changing  
but yet it can make me feel really calm.  
A nice sculpture in water.  
A natural flow like waves.  
Water is very spiritual.

The dining area should be relaxing.  
Art rotating after a period of time  
– that would be brilliant.  
You'd go to see what was there.  
It's good for people to make contact with art.  
It can be an icebreaker.

The radio would sometimes do your head in.  
Open the windows and hear the birds  
or have soft classical music,  
that changes with your mood.

I truly believe in walking in nature  
– there's something healing about it.  
That's what people miss when they're in hospital.  
They miss the fresh air in their face.  
A mother with her children in the garden,  
listening to their laughter.

Birds and water trickling.  
Space to sit for a close, quiet chat.  
I put the world to rights in the garden.  
You just get in your own head.  
It's therapeutic when you're weeding.  
The smell of the cut grass.  
Sometimes touch and feel can bring so much back.