

Stories from the Sandbox

Reflections from children, teens and young
adults living with Cancer and Blood Disorders

Jennifer Gretzema, LLPC, NCC, CCLS
University of Michigan
C.S. Mott Children's Hospital

Cover Design by Aki Yao
Learning Design and Publishing, Medical School Information Services

Published by Michigan Publishing
University of Michigan Library

© 2016 The Regents of the University of Michigan

All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-60785-360-2 (paper)
ISBN 978-1-60785-363-3 (electronic)

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the patients, family members and caregivers dealing with Cancer and Blood Disorders.

May someone else's strength fortify you.

May your perseverance support someone else.

May we all find hope in our unity.

A portion of the proceeds from this book go to the Child and Family Life Department University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	i
Foreword.....	iii
Preface.....	v
1. Gabby.....	1
2. Jillian.....	11
3. Griffin.....	17
4. Justin.....	21
5. Anthony.....	25
6. Angeleena.....	29
7. Chloe.....	35
8. Maleah.....	39
9. Isaac.....	45
10. Juan.....	49
11. Braden.....	53
12. Daniel.....	57
13. Alaysia.....	61
14. Kailynn.....	65
15. Dalton.....	69
16. Zachary.....	73
17. Lauryn.....	77
18. Kassondra.....	81
19. Bronwyn.....	85
Afterword.....	89
Comments from Parents.....	91
About the Sand Tray Facilitator/Editor.....	93

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To each one of you who created your story in the sand:

I want to express my gratitude to you all. Thank you for sharing your stories, your lessons and your lives.

When we walk in the sand, our footprints leave an indelible impression.

May others find a strong foothold in the impressions you make.

May you feel carried by the extensions of support others lend.

Surrounding you in hope,
Jenni

FOREWORD

I have had the joy and honor of working with children, adolescents and young adults with cancer and blood disorders for almost two decades as a pediatric psychologist. Over these years, I have witnessed both the strength and struggle that youth go through as they bravely face their disease. Often times, their brave faces mask the internal struggles within and they need a safe way to tell their stories. The use of the sand tray and other types of play are excellent supplements to traditional talk therapies.

This book is a testament to the power of play in helping youth of all ages with cancer and blood disorders express their feelings about their experience. By working in the sand trays, their creators have new tools to tell their stories. Sand tray is a helpful way for youth to process their past and present medical experience, help them set goals, and to teach others about their needs. Sand tray is a window into the thoughts, feelings, and coping styles of youth struggling with illness and hospitalization. Importantly, as youth with chronic medical illnesses often experience pain and discomfort as part of their treatment, the ability to have positive tactile experiences can be a very healing process.

This book also shows the fact that the sand tray therapy appeals to all ages and to youth from different backgrounds and life experiences. I was both surprised and pleased to see how engaged many of our teenagers and young adult patients were with their creations. Sand tray is a very flexible tool, as it can be done individually, in a group or with an entire family. We saw youth creating sand trays in our child life activity room and in their hospital rooms while engaging other patients and family members in their creations. Sand tray is a very accessible tool; youth reading this book can create their own sand tray from toys and other supplies they can find around their house or hospital room. The great thing about sand tray is that there are no limits to your creativity!

In addition to the wonderful stories and lessons highlighted by the brave patients in this book, one has to credit the organizer of the book for her efforts. Jennifer is able to meld her many years of experience as a child life therapist and counselor to facilitate the sand tray sessions in this book so that patients and families have a safe and fun way to express their experience of their disease and treatment. She has presented these stories of hope and struggle in a way that honors these youth and highlights the importance of multidisciplinary psychosocial care for chronically ill youth. The fact that their stories will be held in this book for years to come is a wonderful legacy for Jennifer and all of these kids.

Kristin A. Kullgren, PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics
Director, Pediatric Psychology Inpatient Consultation Liaison
Program
University of Michigan School of Medicine

PREFACE

The images and stories that follow were created by patients and families living with Cancer and Blood Disorders.

Their expressions, created in the sand and conveyed through the written word, provide insight into what it is like to live with health challenges.

Sand tray therapy is a recognized therapeutic modality used with children and adults.

Situations and emotions can be challenging to relay verbally. Sand tray therapy provides a sacred space to process experiences using symbols instead of language. Sometimes meaning is further revealed through talking about a sand tray. Other times, it can remain a private expression that holds significance only to its creator. Both outcomes can be powerful.

This collection of photos and personal stories was compiled so that other patients, their families, and their friends can share the authors' journeys as we all continue to battle these difficult diseases.

In this book, each letter to the creator of a sand tray is signed with the closing, "surrounding you in hope." I would like to express my gratitude to the following people who have surrounded me in hope and support during the making of this book - my family (especially my nephew for his tech support), my supervisors and co-workers in the Child and Family Life Department at University of Michigan C. S. Mott Children's Hospital, the staff in Medical School Information Services/Learning Design & Publishing, and the patients and families at University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital.

Jennifer Gretzema

August, 2015

