

EMERGING FROM DESPAIR



Despair



Emerging

Making music has always been my greatest joy. Since childhood I loved to sing, and I learned to play many instruments, especially piano, violin and organ. I just knew I would be a musician.

I was diagnosed with severe Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) while finishing my second music degree, performing and teaching part-time. Increasing deformity in my hands quickly affected my ability to play instruments, and the constant pain and exhaustion sometimes left me unable to do much at all. I coped through denial, and like many with chronic pain, I dissociated and disconnected from my body. None of the drugs prescribed ever provided any relief. Instead, my symptoms became worse and worse, and for a while feeling desperate, anxious, hopeless and sad became my normal condition. After my first hand reconstruction I finally realized I'd never play a musical instrument proficiently again.

But my heart was still full of artistic, creative energy, so when a friend introduced me to painting, I dove in and another door suddenly opened. I made thousands of life drawings. Somehow drawing others' bodies became a healing path to awareness and appreciation of my own. There's beauty, grace, and power all around me. By drawing or painting these qualities, I make them mine too.

Life has been kind to me. I don't see myself as a victim of RA. Loving care, Iyengar yoga, ten joint surgeries, and a new medication mean that I no longer live in constant pain. I'm an emerging artist in more ways than one: I'm coming into life more fully with every canvas I approach.

-Jennifer Mason