

The History of Our Family's Involvement with Art Therapy

I was born in Moscow on 18.09.1980 into a family that I would say is quite extraordinary. My father, Sergei Makarov, of blessed memory, was a children's book writer with a tremendous imagination, and my paternal and maternal grandparents were poets. My mother, Elena Makarova, a person of great inner freedom, is a writer and a graduate of the Moscow Surikovskaya monumental sculpture academy.

Unknowingly, she had already started working as an art therapist when she was twelve, while living in hospital dormitory and undergoing medical procedures for her back. In this hospital were many children even less fortunate than she was; whenever she received art materials from her parents, she would go and play with the bedridden children, modelling with them. She saw how much joy even a few moments of simple human contact could bring, not to mention the brief possibility of escaping from the outside world or just connecting it with one's inner world through art.

After a few years, Elena started working as an art teacher for children in a day care center. In the rigid Soviet regime of education that left no freedom to the child and dictated only one right way to do anything, she had succeeded despite the great odds arrayed against her. In the 1980s, some of her novels were published, followed by a trilogy of books that treated art as a bridge connecting adults and children, using play and imagination which children experience so naturally but adults tend to forget (some are even forced to forget).

Around 1988, Elena chanced upon drawings by children of the Terezin Ghetto; she immediately sensed that her life was about to change. Her intuition was correct.

Her research into the drawings led her to discover a teacher, a guide who, in the dark and hopeless world of Terezin, managed to bring moments of joy, creativity, and personal growth to these imprisoned children. Her name was Friedl Dicker Brandeis, a Viennese painter who had studied at the Weimar Bauhaus School in the 1920s under such teachers as Johannes Itten, Paul Klee, and Vassily Kandinsky.

While investigating Friedl's teaching methods and looking for evidence, Elena found some of Friedl's pupils, including Edith Kramer, who was fortunate to have managed to escape from Europe to America. Edith was a painter and one of the first founders of Art Therapy in the world. And here, at last, I'm coming to the point!

In the 1990s, our family moved to Israel, settling in Jerusalem. Elena was now involved in researching Friedl and in writing, doing exhibitions of Friedl and drawings of children all over the world. She hardly had any time for teaching now.

Many people who had read Elena's trilogy had made various important discoveries letters kept coming, thanking her and reporting that her books had changed their ways of seeing perspectives! At one point, Elena realized that adults also need to dedicate creative and productive time to themselves. She began leading workshops for adults around the world, employing methods used by Edith Kramer, Friedl, and Itten, combining them with her own method, and constantly developing this combination of methods.

In the summer of 1997, I went to Austria to spend my first month with Edith Kramer. Edith helped me to discover my real calling, that of a painter, without actually suggesting anything to me. Her mere presence and my being able to work side by side with her were more than enough. She was and still is a very important guide for me.

In 2008, Elena began teaching at the Lyceum Academy Art Therapy and Dance Therapy in Milan, directing an annual workshop for future art therapists as well as lay people from all over the world, including Italy, who gather for two days of intensive workshops.

In 2010, Elena asked me to be her assistant. Now I saw art therapy in action for the first time, and it immediately captivated me! From that day, art therapy became my second passion, and I started studying it to understand it better. I can no longer count how many workshops we have done all over the world.

In 2012, I moved to Italy, first to Venice and then to Padua. I began teaching art at the Lyceum Art and Dance Therapy Academy in 2014.