

# **Stroke Odysseys, Pirate's Castle, Camden 12 week project with Elizabeth Mansfield and Louise Klarnett**

Case Study: P, White Cloud Floating High

*Shaky hands*

*Wobbly legs*

*Disorientated brow*

*Suspicious jaw*

*Frustrated Mouth*

*Tapping foot*

*Beautiful smile*

*Twinkly eyes*

12 weeks condensed.

Travelling through London in a taxi  
with no idea where you are going  
why you are going anywhere  
who will be there  
and without money in your hand or pocket to pay for the taxi...  
Confusing and scary.

P arrived.

and she was disorientated.

Too many new faces

too many words

too many requests to speak, make sounds or move her body



Holding a cup of coffee in her shaky hand without spilling it was more than enough to cope with.

Sitting in the circle, with her coat pulled tightly up and around her. She was reluctant, confused and cold.

*“I’m not doing it”*

*“It’s stupid”*

*“It’s crap”*

*“I can’t”*

*“Shut up”* to another, quite dominant participant in the group

She left at the end in a taxi.

But she returned. Week after week...

Suspicious, vulnerable, but with some recognition of our faces at least. She commented on her dirty nails. And that she’d not put her teeth in.



She wore grey tracksuit bottoms, a grey t-shirt. Shoes without socks.

She agreed to hold a percussion instrument.

We leapt to pass one to her.

Her tiny reply to our gentle, but consistent, creative invitations.

End of the session and her taxi was late. We chatted. Fully listening to what she had to say, without the need to attend to the other participants. She said she didn't know why she was 'sent' to us every week by her care home.

Through this talking and subsequent conversations, she remembered things about herself.

She used to dance.

To go to ballet.

She used to write poetry. I asked "*What was it about?*" "*About myself*"

She used to play the piano.

She was more than this stroke survivor in a care home, living alone, not able to recall if she'd had breakfast, lunch or dinner. She knew she'd been a social worker, for children, had grown up sons. Her question was "*Why me?*" Why anyone?

I led body warm ups to different music over the weeks. One week Dusty Springfield's Son of a Preacher Man. She started tapping her foot. I invited her to move a little more. She declined.

During a creative exploration, I asked her to hold a piece of elastic as we formed trios. She took it. I was delighted. And we began to slowly move together, in connection.



Later, whilst nursing her cup of coffee, I asked how it had felt to be dancing in connection with two others', she said she'd only been concerned with not letting go.

One afternoon P arrived looking a little less vulnerable. She was wearing jeans, trainers and had her teeth in, though had very wobbly legs.

She had mentioned that she had seizures as a result of her stroke. Her hands shook constantly, it took three of us to support her from the taxi into the space, all the while we used imagery to help her stay upright.

Her hand kept freezing in the shape of her coffee cup, which she was determined to sip from. We sat very close, either side of her to keep her

safe. Her head was drooping a little and there was something more than usual going on. We asked if she wanted to go home, but she said “*No. I want to stay with you*” A sign, we felt, that she felt part of the group and safe.

As we developed more material in response to conversation, image, object, song and movement, a sense of group cohesion slowly emerged. P began to contribute, a little.

She chose to voice a need along with others’ “*I NEED LOVE*”

Her response to an image, became a song, the title of which named of our sharing event: *White Cloud Floating High*.

During a session she recited the poem herself but refused to agree to recite it at the sharing, nominating me to speak it for her.



To our surprise and delight, in the moment, she said she wanted to stand, supported by me, in front of our invited audience and speak her own words. Beautiful smile, twinkly eyes.



P, our biggest challenge, our greatest success.

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