

# The Scarsdale Inquirer

Founded in 1901

VOLUME 90, NUMBER 49

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2012

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

## SPEAK, MEMORY!

# Creating art with life stories

By DEBRA BANERJEE

**D**o you remember the pivotal point in your life when you became “you”? This “defining moment” was the kick-off of the first session of “Memory, Narrative, Image,” a program designed to stimulate discussion and creativity for older adults in an eight-session program at the Scarsdale Library. The program, which met on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to noon, ends with an exhibit of the artwork and refreshments in the Scott Room of the library on Sunday, Dec. 16, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.

“How did you become you? We all have that moment,” said teaching artist Diane Cherr. “We built from that.”

Artist Cherr and her teaching partner Mara Mills guided the 17 participants who began the program in exploring their memories and family histories, first as oral stories shared with each other. They shared the happy stories as well as the story of personal losses with each other.

Also inspired by talking about famous artists like Grandma Moses, Marc Chagall, Norman Rockwell, Joseph Cornell and others, the class used collage, mixed media and assemblage techniques to build and illustrate their narratives.

“Memory, Narrative, Image” is part of Creative Aging in New York State Libraries: A Regional Model with National Applicability, made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute



*“It’s a shared experience. It stresses socialization and forging friendships.”*

—SCARSDALE REFERENCE LIBRARIAN BOBBI KOKOT



INGRID CASERTA PHOTOS

Clockwise from top left: Mary Ghiozzi; teaching artists Diane Cherr and Mara Mills with Lydia Gallicano; Avis and Bob Wals.

of Museum and Library Services, with additional support from the Helen Andrus Benedict Foundation, and is administered in partnership with Westchester Library System, Lifetime Arts Inc. and American Library Association’s Public Programs Office. The Scarsdale Library was one of only 10 libraries in the Westchester County Library System to receive a grant. The program was also supplemented by funds from Friends of the Scarsdale Library.

Reference librarian Bobbi Kokot was the liaison to the program and “our support system,” said Mills.

“It’s a shared experience,” Kokot said of the program. “It stresses socialization and forging friendships.”

“Senior programming is often overlooked,” said library director Beth Bermel. “It’s great, very creative, a needed outlet.

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## SPEAK, MEMORY!

# Creating art with life stories

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We're happy to fill in any gaps between Scarsdale rec and At Home in Scarsdale Village."

Mills called the art "portraits of memory." "They make art, work on memory. The program brings people together to tell their stories. Their art is based on their own experiences."

The day the Inquirer visited, tables were strewn with bells, ribbons, feathers, sequins, colored paper, wire, sticks, stamps, stickers, everything imaginable to be used to tell a story.

Some of the participants had art backgrounds, others did not.

Mary Ghiozzi, a retired pre-K teacher and a 35-year resident of Scarsdale, said she signed up for the program "because I wanted to get in touch with my creative side." As a teacher she was always working with her students, but "this is the first time I've done a project for myself," she said.

Ghiozzi was working on a family tree for her daughter who just got married. "I was inspired by Norman Rockwell's family tree," Ghiozzi said. For her collage, Ghiozzi traced her and her husband's lineage back to Italy. The tree is a map of Italy. At the base of the tree are photos of Venice, "a special place" for the Ghiozzi family, she said. With Ghiozzi's daugh-

ter at the top of the tree, moving down through the branches on both sides are portraits Ghiozzi photocopied of parents and grandparents.

Avis Wals and her husband Robert were residents of Scarsdale for 32 years, on Fairview Road, before they moved to Rye Brook eight years ago.

"Scarsdale is in our blood even if we don't live here," Avis said. "Our grown-up son and daughter stood in the backyard and cried when we sold our house."

Avis, a registered dietician, worked as a food stylist for General Foods and was an expert "dollop" maker for magazines and TV commercials. She also taught a nutrition course at Scarsdale Adult School. Her memory box included General Food labels and tiny raisin boxes "for my children. I used to take raisins in the car to keep them quiet," she said.

Another piece Avis created was a collage based on a saying of her father's, "Don't live in a luckh!" (Yiddish for hole), meaning, don't buy a low-lying house that's going to take on water when it rains. The collage featured raindrops, an umbrella, a photo of her father and an old TV set (he liked to watch Jack Parr), and an Inquirer headline "Fairview Road cleared for flood basin."

Avis said she was "horrified"

to see the recent destruction of trees in George Field Park. "I went around with my kids in the stroller to raise money for those trees," she said.

Bob Wals, a retired marketing executive, was working on a memory box called "242 Street Road to the Future." In it was a subway map of Manhattan. "I lived here on the West Side," he pointed out. "My grandfather lived here on 155th Street. My father would take a subway up to visit. Four or five years later, my parents sent me to Horace Mann School — 242nd Street, the end of the subway line — the road to the future." Bob affixed to it the subway fares, a nickel, dime, a quarter, a token, and a penny for buying gum from a machine.

Another project he worked on was a collage about an old nemesis, Thomas E Dewey Jr., son of the former presidential candidate who ran against Truman. Dewey Jr., his superior officer in the army, was always after him and tried, but failed, to get him court-martialed. Like the famous headline that read "Dewey Defeats Truman," Bob as a joke received a T-shirt that said "Dewey Courtmartial Wals."

Fran Weinblatt of Eastchester was a former "promotional model." She worked as a perfume spritzer for 25 years "in all

the major department stores," she said. Her memory box is comprised of tiny perfume bottles. "I've got hundreds of them," she said. "I love doing crafts," she added.

The box is decoupage with paper cutouts of Victorian ladies. Weinblatt loves the "pomp and circumstance" of that era and lives in a Victorian house. "I was born in the wrong century," she said.

Helen Steinman of Edgemont was making a tribute to her son Michael out of a cigar box with photos and a card he wrote from 1972.

"This course has been fantastic," Steinman said. "This brings out whatever artistic talent you have."

Margo Schwartz of Scarsdale had a flash of inspiration by a cigar box with the word "Cuba" on it. She made a memory box of her cruise to Cuba that was cut short when Castro came to power. It included a very glam 1950s-era photo of Schwartz at a nightclub.

"This has been a phenomenal project for them," Cherr said. "They just took off. They have had such a great time. Everyone's given the same assignment. Everyone looks at it differently. They celebrate their lives, and the people in their lives. It's an honor to be part of it."