

**JIM CHEEK**

# **MY EXPERIENCE OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL WRITING: BEFORE WORDS**

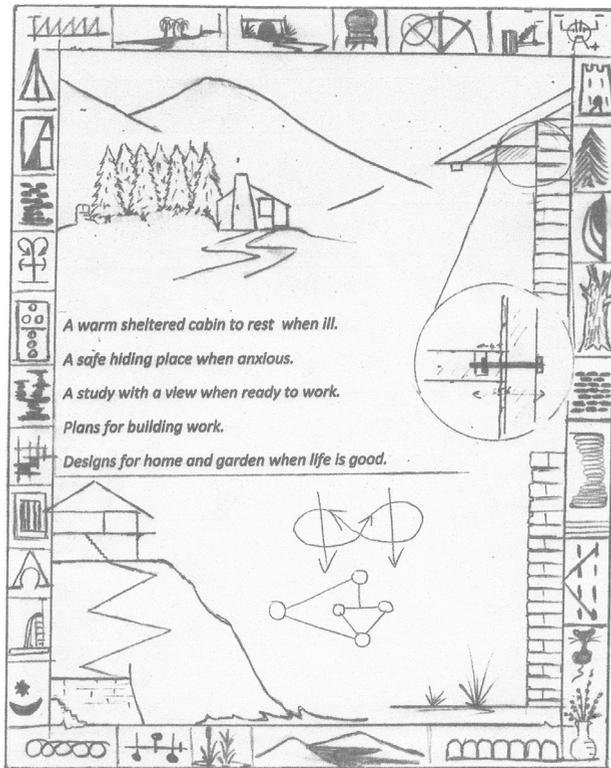
When things have gone seriously wrong, any reflective space is usually invaded by defence mechanisms. These we learn to trust in our own perverse ways.

In these circumstances we will resist writing, as it challenges these carefully crafted defences. Any new writing effort will require some special support and words are not necessarily the best way to start. There is always a gap between our words and the world. Sometimes there is a gulf.

Drawing can often offer some comforting opening ritual. Making the first non-threatening marks on the page makes a difference. Doing something — doing anything is the starting point. It is the geometry of journal-keeping that is so appealing. The play between pattern and sequence that is impossible to replicate on a screen.

My trust in language was eroded when I was a child. Recreating this trust was a long-term challenge. We need to reflect if we are to be self-directed and energised over time. Making friends with a personal journal was the first significant step. Words themselves were rarely the starting point. Doodles and drawings eased initial anxiety, smudged the pristine white pages and offered clues for basic questioning.

Arrows, brackets and any number of annotations cradled the words as they emerged, facilitating the play between pattern and sequence that is crucial to human problem-forming.



A personal journal can be trusted for what it is. In overwhelming anxiety and insecurity it can be relied on to hold almost anything and everything — from anxiety-holding doodles, through early organisational efforts, to flashes of deep insight. A journal offers a space that encourages new form by allowing formlessness. A space where feeling and thinking can be teased apart by the asking of simple paired questions. 'How am I feeling?'/ 'What am I thinking?'

The journal keeping started to make a noticeable difference. The sessions often ended with a moment's relaxation and an accepting smile. My first rule of journal writing became clear. Write until you smile and mark the moment.

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