

REMEMBERING JOOLZ McLAY

Fearless, fiery and funny

Funny: Joolz and I shared joy in humour. Latterly it was very dark and shot through with shadows. But whether absurd, witty or biting, Joolz had the gift of putting unlikely ideas together and making a point with a laugh attached.

Fiercy: there was always a real warmth in her attention. An intensity in her focus and concentration you could bask in. Her earlier work with fire sculpting never really left her. On becoming an art therapist she switched, mostly, from lighting actual fires to igniting ideas. With the tinder box of a book, a film or a song, incandescent sparks would fly from theory, experiences and conversations.

Fearless: she trod lightly in the mind fields, staring down difficulty. Joolz could inhabit the liminal spaces, was graceful in those betwixt and between places, courageous in the twilight, in the time 'entre chien et loup'. She loved fierce creatures and was not afraid of them.

We met at interview when we both applied to train at Sheffield in 1992. The almost instant rapport strengthened and developed alongside our transition into art therapists. Geography and our personal journeys dictated that much of our friendship since has been a correspondence on paper. She had that rare quality now: the capacity to converse and be present in a letter, in the written word. I treasure her correspondence for the clarity of her voice.

In late 2006, after she had been diagnosed, we met up and the idea of developing a paper she had written caught light between us. The outcome was her book, 'Love, Desire and Teen Spirit: Reflections on the Dynamic Force of Adolescent Eros'. The writing and editing process ran alongside the course of her illness. I was relieved she lived long enough to finish it and that I was able to put copies of the published books into her hands at the end of December 2008.



Joolz

She had defied the medics by living, in her own words, well past her 'sell by date'!

Joolz died, at home, in Sheffield on 27 January 2009 and her last letter to me, as lucid and strong as ever, arrived in that morning's post.

I am honoured to have helped ensure that her voice will live on.

As the Sufi mystic, Rumi, said, '...a candle is made to become entirely flame.' Even when the candle has gone out, we will not forget what we saw by its light.

Karen Huckvale

David MacLagan

One of the things that made Joolz such a special person was something I only gradually became aware of: she lived in a world of real magic, but it was a thoroughly modern magic that included Elvis Presley along with North American Indian shamanism. This was why there was really no such thing as coincidence for her, and also why something of this world, which she only ever transmitted by example, gave my encounters with her an extra, unspoken, dimension. Thank you Joolz, and whatever powers you were in touch with.

Michael Daniels

Joolz McLay trained as an art therapist in the early 1990s and began working for Community Health Sheffield with children and young people in 1995, soon after she had qualified, and at a time when the CAMHS service in Sheffield was very small. Joolz was the first art therapist to be employed by the service and it is doubtless partly a consequence of her professionalism and clinical skill that art therapy quickly gained a reputation amongst other mental health professionals as being an effective and appropriate way of engaging with children and young people, and why it has subsequently become a firmly established and well respected profession within Sheffield CAMHS.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to have worked closely with Joolz between that time and her eventual retirement through ill health in September 2007, saw her early enthusiasm develop into a consummate professionalism, and she became that rare thing amongst clinicians, someone who was at ease with and had a natural curiosity for theoretical ideas, whilst retaining a natural ease with her clients, someone who was able to help them consider difficult thoughts about themselves, whilst remaining down to earth and emotionally attuned to their own perspective on their lives. From discussions with her it was clear that she saw her clinical work as a natural testing ground for some of the theory that underpins art therapy practice, and she was able to develop a good working balance between the two - her clinical work brought theory to life, and having made ideas come alive she used them to re-inform and re-invigorate her clinical practice.

In many ways Joolz's professional life was characterised by an ability to balance seemingly conflicting elements in her work; she was freewheeling in her thinking, yet also controlled and meticulous in the planning and delivery of a clinical service; she was able to fulfil her role within professional

networks impeccably, yet she remained in touch with her instinctive empathy for and identification with the needs of children and young people in distress. It was a feature of Joolz's skill as a clinician that however involved and complex the agendas of adult professionals might become, she never lost sight of the individual child or young person that lay at the heart of it all.

Perhaps this was because, for Joolz, art therapy was not simply a job, a means of earning a living, but was a real vocation. It gave her a professional role, but also much more. It gave her a framework within which to explore her interest in the healing qualities of art making, and in the potential of human creativity in general. Joolz did not consider herself religious, but had a strong belief in the transpersonal, the possibility of spiritual experience that underlies our individual histories, and believed that transformative experience, whether in the context of psychotherapy or not, is available to anyone who has the courage to look inside themselves and trust in their own instinctive sense of what is needed. Consequently, despite the pressures of operating in a complex multi-disciplinary environment and with colleagues from other agencies, she was always able to hold the perspective of the child in mind, and was always a staunch advocate of their point of view.

This natural empathy received a fitting expression in her book, *Love, Desire and Teen Spirit*, which Joolz saw published by Insider Art shortly before her death. In it she explores the connection between therapist and client, and unflinchingly examines some of the taboos which surround this relationship; how does a therapist work with the intimacy that can develop within the contained space of a therapeutic relationship? How can this be acknowledged in a way which promotes the healing and wellbeing of the client?

Joolz's skill at engaging young people was partly because she understood that something of the child and adolescent remains within all adults.



Joolz

She understood this about herself too, an insight which was evident in her wit and sense of humour, which could be subversive and sharp in the face of what she saw as the self deception that sometimes characterises the adult world. This awareness perhaps also informed the playfulness which often came across in her work, (without ever detracting from its seriousness), and perhaps also in her wardrobe too, which was famously flamboyant. But it was also apparent in other ways too, for example in the scope of the references she could draw upon in conversation, which often owed as much to youth and popular culture as it did to academic study. One conversation ranged from the pre-Christian theology of stone circles to the Jungian archetype of the hero via the relative merits of early and late period Elvis, (early, in case you're wondering, no question). It's hard to imagine who else you might be able to have such a conversation with.

Joolz used her natural curiosity and intelligence to explore different ways in which art therapy might impact positively on the lives of children and young people in Sheffield. She developed an expertise in working with children who had experienced sexual abuse, despite the harrowing nature and feelings of hopelessness that can accompany such work. She explored the use of groups for teenage girls in a school setting, and most recently

pioneered a new model of clinical supervision for teachers working with children in distress. This last project, which she continued right up to the point when she stopped working, perhaps exemplified her ability to maintain focus on the needs of children and young people best. A group of teachers who found themselves being presented with disturbing drawings by a number of children asked for help, as they were unsure how to respond to these, and often found themselves overwhelmed by the subject matter. Joolz's response was typically embracing and helpful. Without any hint of professional territorialism she identified what the teachers needed, saw what would most help the children involved, and created something new to meet these needs as fully as possible. As a result she inspired confidence in the teachers and enabled them to provide a more containing presence to the children themselves.

I'm sure Joolz saw her life as part of a greater process, and in that way she would have been happy to have helped change come about by this kind of osmosis – helping someone in order to help someone else – Joolz's ego did not demand that she took centre stage in any of the work that she undertook. Her generosity towards others remained constant even after she had been forced to give up work, anyone who saw or spoke to her after this time will attest to how well her spirit allowed her to cope with her illness, but also allowed her to continue to take a real interest in other people and to offer a supportive word or gesture whenever she could.

Any early death must leave those who remain feeling that their own lives have been lessened, but in Joolz's case it has left not only her partner, her family, friends and colleagues to feel her absence, but it has also left the children and young people of Sheffield, whether they knew it or not, deprived of one of their most committed and unwavering supporters.

*Michael Daniels
On behalf of Sheffield CAMHS*

REMEMBERING JOOLZ McLAY

Susan Allaker

I first met Joolz when I began working in Sheffield CAMHS art therapy service in 1998. I immediately felt impressed and drawn to her. I have worked for the last ten and a half years in Bighton CAMHS team part of the Sheffield service and I viewed Joolz as the crucial member of our service, as being the first art therapist to be employed by the service and the pioneer who helped so greatly to shape the service as it is now.

Back in the late 90s our meetings were jointly with the adult service in a building called Argyll House. En route to those monthly meetings I always hoped Joolz would be attending as it was such a treat to see her. I looked forward to checking out her latest hair style, immaculate painted nails and always fantastic clothes that left me wondering where she had got her shoes, coat, bag etc from, rather than concentrating on the meeting agenda!

Yes, for me, Joolz was always a visual delight and I loved chatting charity shop clothes shopping with her! Joolz's image was always memorable but she was so much more.

Throughout the years I worked with Joolz she always led the way in helping us steer through the sometimes difficult and confusing world of the NHS.

Joolz set up the peer supervision meetings which still occur now. Joolz was the major force through the 'agenda for change' process. Whilst we all felt overwhelmed and lost with how to manage the banding procedure, Joolz was the one who helped guide us through it. She tirelessly worked in organising how to approach the problem and with her support and guidance I really feel the whole process was much less stressful than stories I heard from art therapy friends in other Trusts.



Joolz

Joolz was always thinking creatively about how we might manage our work more effectively, whilst ensuring a top class service for our clients. She was hugely dedicated to her work. Joolz had great skills as a writer exemplified so well in her book published last year by Insider Art: *Love, Desire and Teen Spirit*. She was hugely committed to training and played a very active role working on the Sheffield course. She inspired many people and was always encouraging and optimistic in her approach to her work or the work of others. She was very enthusiastic about creative reflection and encouraged people to grow learn and develop not just through the usual route of courses and study but through all the ways life can enrich and help develop our practice as therapists.

Joolz was the most professional and hard working therapist I have worked with, she was always so organised and equipped and seemed ready to meet any challenge that was thrown at us.

On a personal level though I did not know Joolz outside our work, I always regarded her as someone who was caring towards me and very generous in spirit. I spent the majority of 2007 off sick with a complex medical condition, and though what I was managing was

nothing compared to Joolz's diagnosis she would regularly write and wish me well, and most memorably sent me a wonderful 40th birthday card with tips for the next decade when I didn't even realise she knew the date of my birthday! That was how Joolz was totally selfless, she truly was the most giving person I have ever known.

Occasionally in life you meet someone who is unique and life changing, someone who has that special quality to make life feel like a wonderful adventure, someone who despite having to deal with the most difficult challenge of all, a life threatening illness, was able to deal with it with dignity and a huge strength of spirit. Someone who touched many people's lives and gave the best they could to all their clients. That someone was Joolz, and I will always remember her with huge admiration, and feel very grateful and privileged to have been her colleague.

Jo Garber

It is with deep sadness that I write these words for Joolz's obituary. She was my first supervisor, and her approach informs my practice and understanding on a daily basis. I owe her a huge debt of gratitude for her encouragement, attention and understanding, which helped me to develop as a practitioner. She was insightful, creative, imaginative, highly skilled and intuitive with a deep theoretical understanding, and gave generously of herself to the children and families in her care and to her colleagues.

Those of us who had the privilege to work with her were able to benefit from her very special qualities. She is very greatly missed. She taught us wisdom and laughter, and her spirit remains with us.

Diane Rees

I am an Art Therapist working in a CAMHS team in Sheffield. Joolz had a big part to play in this. I first met Joolz in 2003. She was introduced as our group's peer supervisor at Sheffield University. Initially, I was struck by her funky choice of clothes, hair dos, bags, bright nails, wry smile, and warmth. Then, as the group progressed, it was obvious that she possessed many more very special qualities that have stayed with me till this day and always will. Our confidence as new students was quite thin on the ground, but Joolz would always manage to make us feel as though we had done brilliantly. She would always see something, or more than one positive thing, that we had missed which gradually helped us to see our potential. We enjoyed a very nurturing group and our confidence grew.

Then I was really happy to find that one of my placements was going to be with Joolz at Flockton House. I can only say that there were many special moments where Joolz's observations, kindness, intuitiveness, not forgetting boundaries, taught me so much. By the time I left Flockton I believed that I was going to be a real Art Therapist! Because funds were very low when I was training, I was living in my camper van. Joolz really liked that. She told me that she once used to work with the circus. I found that fascinating.

I sent Joolz a card last year and told her how what she had taught me stays with me all the time. She sent me a lovely card in reply. She had a perfect way of putting things into words. She said: "I was so glad when I heard you were working in Sheffield again. I have lots of faith in you and know you have a lot to offer. I only hope that it is living up to your expectations and continues to be where your heart is at. I don't know where you are these days. I still think of you living in the van and maybe you still do!"

I will always have very fond memories of Joolz. She is greatly missed. She continues to inspire my work and my confidence and always will.



Joolz

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