

Kathryn Speech at the art4ashes Exhibition – 7th November 2010

A long time ago, my mother died in my arms.
I held her as she took her last breath, 6662 days ago.
That's 18 years, 2 months and 27 days without her.

My elder sister took her ashes home so I made a little mosaic memorial plaque
and positioned it at the entrance to a quirky white garden that I planted for her.
I now had a Mum place.

Some time after, in a period of composure, my sister, in a decluttering moment,
scattered my Mum's ashes on her lovely dam.
A place where Mum had enjoyed a sense of peace, and tranquility
looking out across the reflected forest.

Last year that forest turned black.
Flames had come to the doorstep of my sister's home.
And life was changed again by fire.

She contemplated selling. I knew one good reason why she should stay.

Art4ashes has been a wonderful illuminated by Fire program
developed for those who wanted, like me, a tangible focal point to interact with.

For artistic people, love needs to be expressed out through their hands.

For the last eight months, I've had the pleasure of the company of some
beautifully sensitive people and I thank them sincerely for the journey together.

The illuminated by Fire managers
The illuminated by Fire artists
The art4ashes participants
Diane and her team at the Community and Learning Centre
And the people represented in my white sculptures.

I chose to make these sculptures, this body of work,
(and I've never seen this done before in mosaic)
that need each other to make a statement in unison.
Each is unique and together they make a whole, like voices in a choir.

The companionship, the understanding of loss, the effect of fire.
Each piece takes its place in the group, and side by side, asks the question "what if?"

What if in 1995, the workspace Albert and Jan Baczynski
had enjoyed for nearly 30 years went up in smoke and melting flame?

Then they'd have to start all over again.
Recover, try to heal, remodel themselves and try new options.
And they'd show the doubters what resilience in attitude really looks like!

I invite Albert to light a candle in fondest memory of 'can do'.

What if the Black Saturday raging wildfire transformed 14 homes, a church and a common to ash?

Then the residents would be faced with Day 1 of the rest of their lives.
To stay and rebuild – how big or how small and what style?
To sell and offer the space for another family's story.
To resprout and grow new branches of resilience.

I invite Maggie Supple, who lost two homes, to light 16 candles on behalf of her community.

What if we accept the fact that no one can confidently say that they will still be living tomorrow?

Then we start treasuring the time we do have with the people that we love.
We live in the present, we forgive and we move on.

I invite Nerida Melsmith to light four candles on behalf of her lost unborn grandchild,
an anonymous infant and teenager and Lee Vines, the wife of her friend, Peter.

What if the most important feature of your spouse's personality was his passion?

Then, if you were Anne Boyle, you'd make his sculpture reflect the endless red, rosy romance.

I invite Anne to celebrate her good times with Graham.

What if the sculpture of a tree could symbolise branches of episodes, roots of stability and a door to a faraway place?

Then Jane Stanley would have journeyed along many emotional roads, surveying her life's extensive meaning.

I invite Jane to celebrate her own personal growth.

What if the most courageous sibling in a family took on the challenge of telling their Mother's stories?

Then Mary Smith would devote months and months to sorting and making the images that represent all her chapters and stages.

I invite Mary to celebrate the complexity of her Mother's life.

What if death and cremation was simply an interesting area to ponder about?

Then Leonie Ludbey would enjoy the concept of collecting objects of sentimental value to display as a snapshot of her character.

I invite Leonie to celebrate all the things that intrigue her.

What if you could move the man from the mountain, but not the mountain from the man?

Then the glass loving son would represent his Mother by the alpine shape forever in their hearts.

I invite Ettore de Pilla to celebrate their Italian heritage.

What if a song about eternity and a fascination for sunsets were two special treasures a couple shared?

Then Val McClure would express the timelessness and colour in materials, especially collected from their country of birth.

I invite Val to celebrate the life and times of Iva from New Zealand.

What if your career path followed that enjoyed by your parents?

Then it would make sense for Lara le Reveur to remember her father fondly with form and face and fingers moulded with loving memories.

I invite Lara to celebrate seriously good creativity.

What if the opportunity of a mosaic adventure meant producing a gift from the heart and hands?

Then Kathleen's glue would not only be the kind that comes out of a tube, but family conversations and their anecdotal letters.

I invite Kathleen on behalf of her family to remember her nephew Stephen.

Kathleen also wrote the words to a moving tribute to the art4ashes program – a song called Wait for Tomorrow.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce talented local composer, Scott Cameron, who has responded so positively to the journey that we have all taken together.