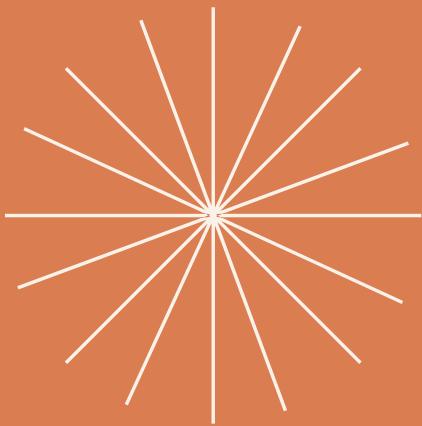




LOVE AND
RELATIONSHIPS
WITH A PHYSICAL
DIFFERENCE

CINDY RUTTER



WHAT'S INSIDE?

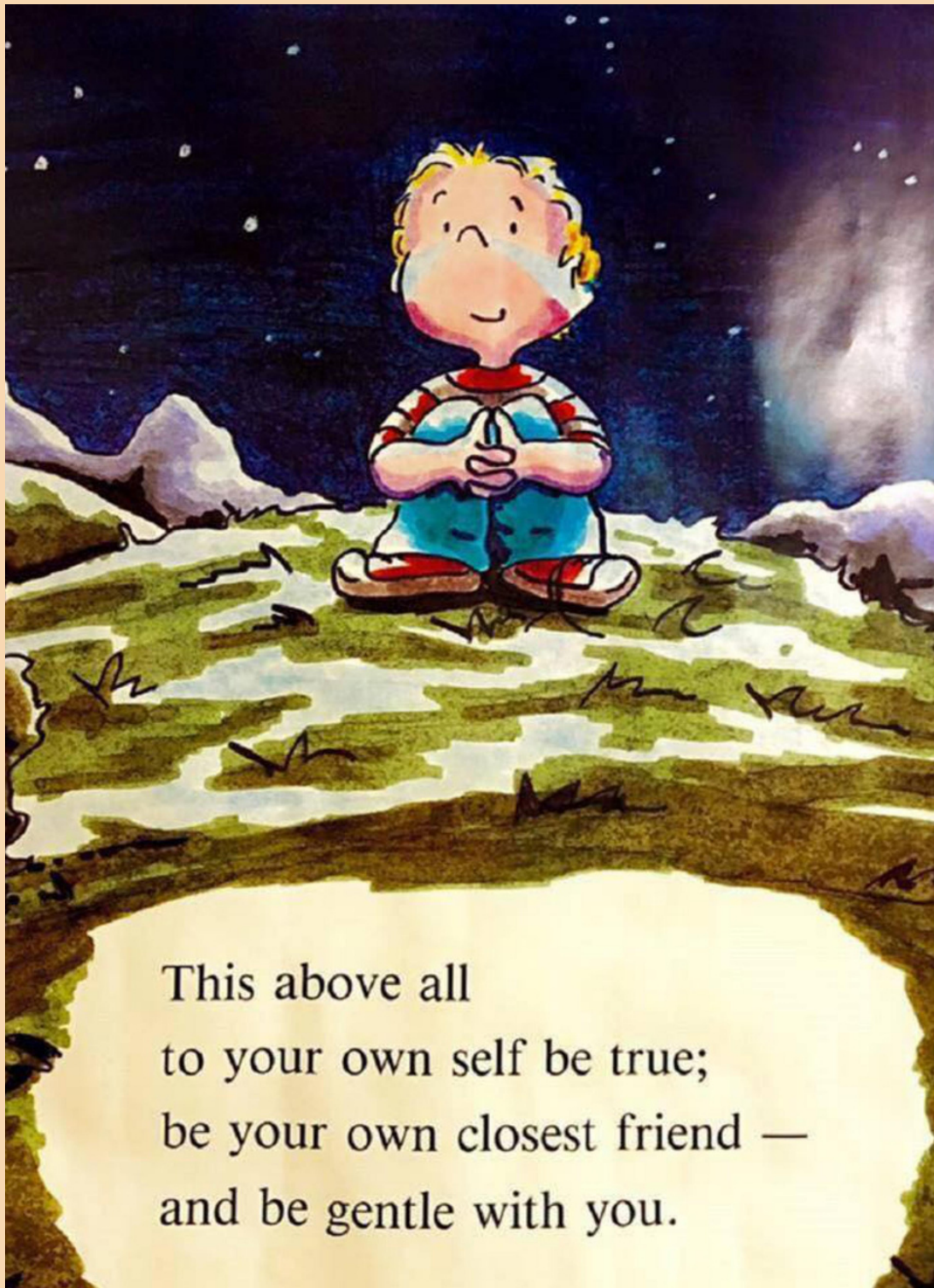
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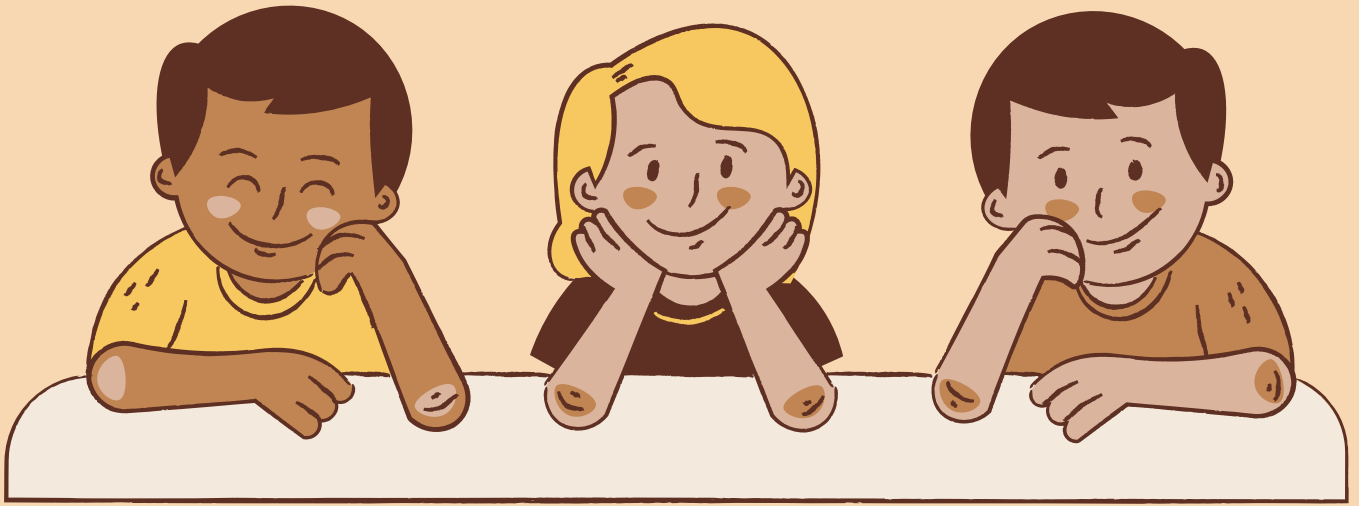


This above all
to your own self be true;
be your own closest friend —
and be gentle with you.

10 TIPS FOR LOVING YOUR BODY – NOW AND IN THE FUTURE!



1. Focus on what magnificent things your body allows you to do, rather than how it looks.
2. Keep an index card in your wallet or day planner with a list of 10 positive things about yourself, excluding physical attributes. Read it over when you get “fat head” (definition: thinking you are physically fat when you have a negative feeling). When this happens, say to yourself: “Fat is not a feeling. What emotion am I actually feeling underneath this?”
3. Wear clothes you like that feel comfortable, especially materials that feel luxurious against your skin.
4. Do the activities you love to do regardless of your scars—don’t stop doing what you love because of what you look like on the outside.
5. Hang out with others who aren’t obsessed with their looks, and what they eat. Spend time with people who focus more on enjoying the fabulous gift called life instead.
6. Remind yourself that you are beautiful exactly as you are because you are a child of the Creator/God/the Universe/_____ (fill in the blank).
7. Move your body in ways that leave you feeling strong, exhilarated, flexible and centered, and do it regularly.
8. Learn to tune in to your body: Eat when you are hungry. Rest when you are tired. Get out and move when your body needs it.
9. Stop reading fashion magazines and following movie stars, thinking they’ve got perfect lives. They don’t—some of them have eating disorders and other addictions.
10. Get a massage – It is not only therapeutic touch but can improve range of motion and sleep, and reduce anxiety.



HAPPINESS SELF TEST

1. Are you satisfied with your relationship with your family??

___ Yes. While no relatives are perfect, we're close, supportive and we love each other.

___ No. My family relationships aren't supportive, or actually cause significant stress.

2. Do you like what you do??

___ Yes, it fulfills me. Occasionally I get bored or frustrated with it, but usually enjoy what I do.

___ Not enough. I do it because it's necessary, but don't always love it, and it causes me significant stress.

3. Do you have personal goals for yourself, and live a life that reflects your values and spiritual beliefs?

___ Yes, I live a very well-examined life. I have some general goals and try to live my life according to my personal and spiritual beliefs.

___ I know I'm not living my ideal life and I don't have a clear strategy to better incorporate my personal and spiritual values into my everyday life. I just do what I have to do to get through the day.

4. Do you feel you have enough love in your life?

___ Yes

___ No

5. Do you consistently learn new things, expand your skill set and increase your knowledge base?

___ Yes, I learn something new every day, or least I feel I'm regularly developing new skills.

___ Rarely. I learn new things and develop myself at times, but I do feel stagnant in my personal growth. Life seems to have gotten in the way.

HAPPINESS SELF TEST

6. Are you comfortable with your financial situation?

_____ Yes, I'm generally secure, mostly live within my means, and rarely stress about money.

_____ Not really. My money situation is pretty uncomfortable and I stress about it pretty regularly.

7. How would you rate your self-esteem??

_____ My self-esteem is doing okay. I believe in my abilities, forgive myself easily and genuinely like who I am. I only occasionally suffer self-doubt or feel bad about past mistakes, and generally pull out of it easily.

_____ I know my self esteem could be higher; I don't believe in myself enough, compare myself to others, and beat myself up over past mistakes at times.

8. Do you regularly help others and feel the positive difference you make in the world?

___ Yes, I volunteer time or donate money to charity, or I practice acts of kindness often with those I love.

_____ I'm sometimes able to help others, but I wish I were doing more.

9. Does your home environment stress or soothe you?

___ My home is definitely my have. It's generally clean, organized, and relaxing.

___ I'm actually more stressed at home. I look around and see clutter and piles of things that need to be done, and feel on edge.

10. Are you able to express your creativity on a regular basis?

___ Yes, I have plenty of opportunities to express and expand my creativity in my daily life.

_____ My life is pretty lacking in creative expression.

HAPPINESS SELF TEST

11. Do you have at least a few supportive friends you can rely on?

___ Yes, I know that in good times and in bad, I have true friends who will support me.

___ Not really. I have people in my life, but nobody I can really count on to listen when I'm upset and share in my best moments.

12. How would you rate your overall health?

___ I am generally healthy.

___ I get sick more than I think I should. I'm not completely satisfied with my health.

13. Are you a part of a church, support group, club, or other group that provides you with a sense of community??

___ Yes, I have at least one group of peers that provides me with a sense of belonging and community on a regular basis.

___ No, I don't really have any type of group with which I feel I belong. I don't even work in a job with a strong sense of community.

14. Do you know and like your neighbors?

___ Yes, I know several of the people who live near me, and often stop and chat.

___ Not really. We're always so busy, we may say a quick hello, but I don't know many names of people who live near me.

15. Are you happy with the role children play in your life?

___ Yes

___ No

16. Do you have any hobbies or activities that you get to do on a regular basis that is just for fun?

___ Yes, I actively pursue several different interests, or deeply pursue one. When I'm low on time, I still dabble.

___ Occasionally I'll do something just for fun, but I don't get to play much in my life anymore, unless you count TV.



INTIMACY AFTER A BURN INJURY

Dear Ann,

This is a letter to you, to tell you how I feel. As you know I had some familiarity with burns when we first met. Your scars from the burns on your face and hands were quite visible; the ones on the rest of your body were not. Burns over two-thirds of one's body take a long time to heal. I saw the burns first, because they were there....just as when I meet a very tall or short person for the first time, I notice the most obvious features first. Then as I get to know someone, I learn more about their likes, dislikes, job, intelligence, fears, loves and dreams...so they grow, in my mind, to be a complete person. So, I grew to know and be attracted to you.

We were attracted to each other from the first, although you guarded yourself from letting me know you for a while. I'm the same way about my feelings. Perhaps most of us are. We fear rejection so we keep our distance until we are sure. And of course, there are no guarantees, so we eventually let down the battle defenses. At the party that night, we were feeling happy and went home together and got to know each other. We woke up feeling closer. It took a couple of years to learn a lot more about each other, since only in intimacy can you really let out a lot of feelings.

But, this letter is about burns, love, relationships and sex. Let me put it bluntly. You turned me on... the way you talked, moved and reacted to others and especially to me. One of the most attractive things about others is when they are attracted to us. I was attracted to you, physically at first and otherwise as I learned more about you. We meshed great physically. We could hold on to each other, or wrestle and tickle each other and love it.

I know you. Let me tell you about scars and how I feel about yours. I love their texture. I figure I'm lucky. Most people have one or two textures to touch on their partner. I have 10 or more. There is the soft smooth part below your hips, on your legs, which weren't burned. There is the soft, slightly rougher part on your thighs from whence came some of your grafts. There's the tough but smooth part under your arms, which wasn't released and so is still tight when you raise your arm. There's the checkerboard pattern on your grafted upper arms, which feels like I'm running my hand over goose bumps. There's the area on your shoulder, which didn't heal too well and is soft but has little hills and valleys. And there's the cheek bone area where the fat was left out and so the skin is closer to the bone. And, there are a dozen more. But I don't think about it quite the way I've described. I just think about each part as part of you. As the saying goes, we're the sum of our parts, good and bad.

If I had known you before the burn, knowing you would be a re-learning process. I'd have to change the new parts of you, in my mind. But if I knew you then as I know you now, the greatest part of you would be what you are.....honest, tender, sensual, caring and a great cook. If I would have known you only in a physical sense and not in a close emotional sense, then yes, I would have to re-learn^{PN} everything about you.

INTIMACY AFTER A BURN INJURY

But, this isn't only about burns. All the ads and stories and movies and television programs emphasize only the superficial: "Ooh, I'm two pounds overweight...." "Porcelana gets rid of those age spots..." "Which hands are mine and which are my daughter's?" Part of what the rock generation of the 60's and 70's and the punk rockers of the 80's were trying to say is, "Know me as a person, first, last and always." The punkers make their outward appearance so bizarre that people are forced to look at them as a person. Unfortunately, very few people can get past outward appearance. They say, "Hey there are so many normal looking kids. I don't think you are worth the effort." Well that's their problem. And it's part of our problem too.

The next part of this letter is about questions that go through your mind—some that you tell me about and some that you don't.

Myth#1: "Because I have scars, you hit on me because you thought others wouldn't want me. Others have hit upon me and tried to pick me up for that reason." Well, there are boys and men like that, but you and I were attracted to each other for the right reasons. The men and boys who go for "easy pickings" have a low opinion of themselves number one, and number two, they're not much as people.

Myth#2: "You like me, but you are only staying with me out of pity." Well, that might be part of some people's makeup, but what a waste that would be of my life and yours. Relationships based on pity are doomed.

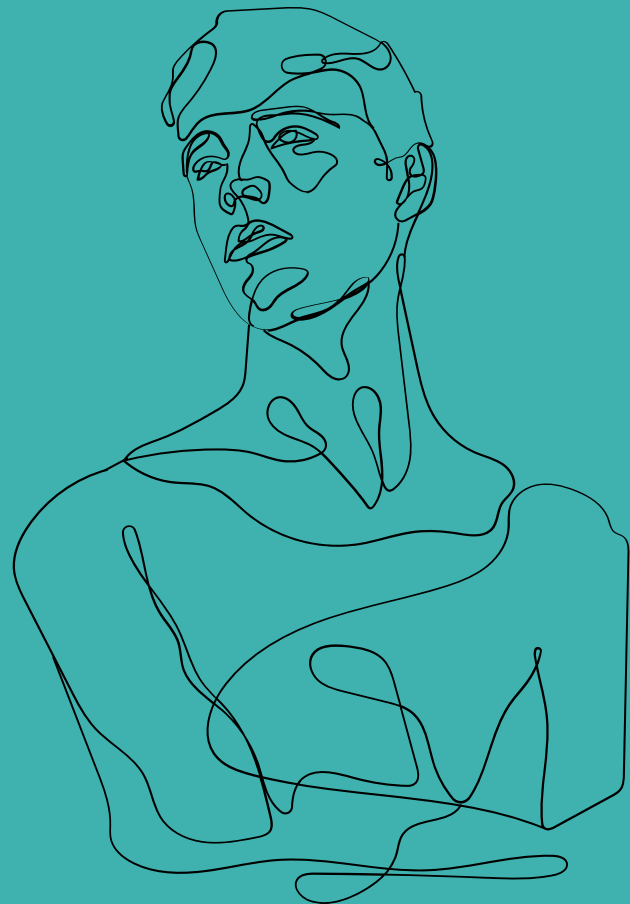
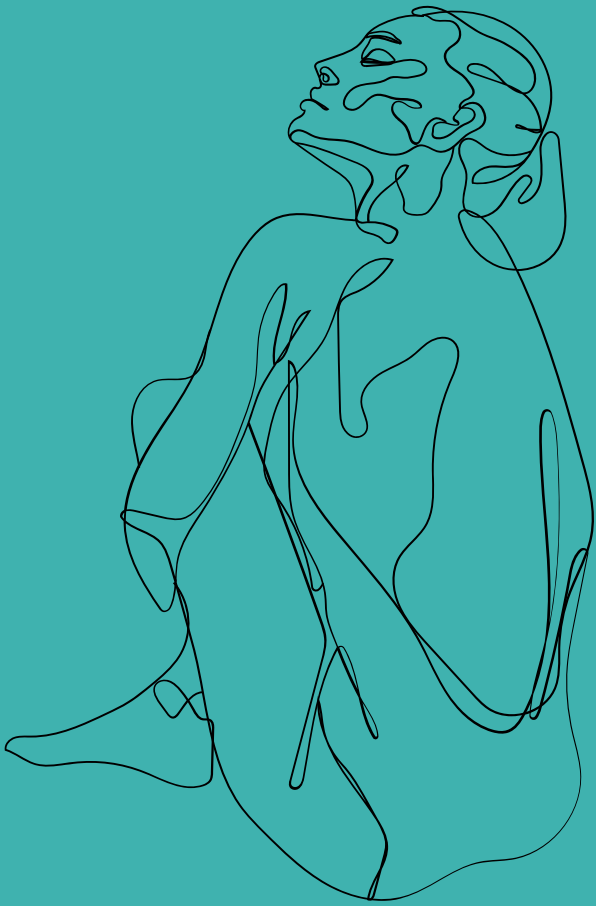
Myth#3: "When we love or argue or fight or enjoy, the burn plays a large part in what you say or do." Well, only in as much as you can't raise your arm to full extension (because of a tight band of tissue) to slug me, and because of how it makes you feel sometimes.

By and large, when we're together, I don't notice people staring unless they are obvious, and if so I just stare back at them. I know that most of their intentions are benign and not hateful, so it's only a sense of proportion and taste that I am trying to instill in them.

I fell in love with your scars, your shorter nose, your skin and your sense of life...your smiles, your frowns, your ups, your downs. They are all part of you and part of who you are. And I like and love who you are. This is not to say you are perfect, but nine out of ten ain't bad!

As to being unsure of our relationship, relationships are built from scratch, and the more we share together the stronger the relationship becomes. That's true for everyone. The burn doesn't have anything to do with the survival of our relationship. That's determined by how we care for each other.

Love always,
William





LEARN TO LOVE YOUR BODY

- 1. Recognize Your Special Qualities.** Make a list of all your positive qualities, not including your physical traits. Are you kind? Artistic? Honest? Good in business? Do you make people laugh? Post your list near the mirror or another place where you'll see it every day.
- 2. Put Your Body Back Together.** Most of us who feel bad about our bodies have dissected it into good and bad parts. "I hate my thighs and butt." " My butts okay, but my stomach is fat and my arms are flabby." "Reconnect with your body by appreciating how it all works to keep you going. Try stretching or yoga –the movements are great for getting in touch with the wonders of the human body.
- 3. Remember The Kid Inside You.** Give yourself permission not to be perfect. Inside all of us is the kid we used to be– the kid who didn't have to be perfect and worry about everything. Remember, that kid, and give yourself a break! Place a photo of yourself as a child in your bedroom or at your desk at work, so you can see it each day and remember to nurture yourself and laugh a little.
- 4. Treat Yourself To Body Pleasures.** One step toward being kind to your body is to indulge yourself. Get a massage, take a long, hot bath, and use lotions that smell good, or treat yourself to a manicure or pedicure.
- 5. Speak Positively.** Pay attention to what you say to yourself. It's amazing how often we put ourselves down throughout the day–it's time to stop! Each time you catch yourself making negative comments, fight back immediately complimenting yourself.
- 6. See the World Realistically.** It's common to compare ourselves to people in magazines or movies, but this can make you feel self-conscious. If you want to compare yourself to others, look at the real people around you. They come in different shapes and sizes–and none of them are airbrushed or highlighted.
- 7. Be Active.** Movement and exercise can make you and your body feel terrific! Not only does exercise help boost your mood it wakes up your muscles, making you feel more alive and connected to your body.
- 8. Thrive!** Living well will help you feel better about who you are and how you look. Try to make your personal and professional lives fulfilling. You are a unique, amazing person–don't forget it! A healthy, happy life can be yours!



PERSONAL QUIZ



1. If I have free time or am planning a vacation, I:

- a. certainly prefers to use it to spend time with my partner or friend.
 - b. do things on my own rather than with my partner or friends.
 - c. can't imagine doing anything without my closest partner or friend.
 - d. feel I should go with my partner or friend because I'm expected to.
-

2. When I get angry with my partner or friend I react by:

- a. leaving or walking out rather than talking about it.
 - b. expressing how I feel as honestly and clearly as I can.
 - c. regretting that I ever got into the relationship at all.
 - d. becoming afraid that he or she will leave me.
-

3. If I have an important financial or career decision to make, I would:

- a. decides on my own without consulting my partner or friend.
 - b. rely entirely on my partner or friend to make it for me.
 - c. consult with my partner or friend for help and advice.
 - d. ask my partner or friend but not take the advice very seriously.
-

4. I can best describe my relationship with my partner or friend as:

- a. so close that I can't imagine life without him or her.
 - b. very solid and a major part of my life right now.
 - c. satisfactory but not as important as other aspects of my life.
 - d. distant and not very satisfying but this does not concern me.
-

5. When something good happens to me, my reaction is to:

- a. celebrate on my own by rewarding myself with something I like doing.
 - b. enjoy the way I feel and tell my partner or friend as soon as I can.
 - c. tell my partner or friend right away without even thinking about how I feel.
 - d. share the news with my partner or friend but not give this a priority.
-

6. The topics my partner or friend tend to talk about include:

- a. relatively superficial conversations that don't explore our feelings.
- b. deep emotional issues focusing on how much I need him or her.
- c. both practical and emotional aspects of our relationship.
- d. very few things that interest me, and as a result I don't pay much attention.

*be gentle
with you*

Content by Cindy Rutter.
Booklet by Victoria Vass.