

71

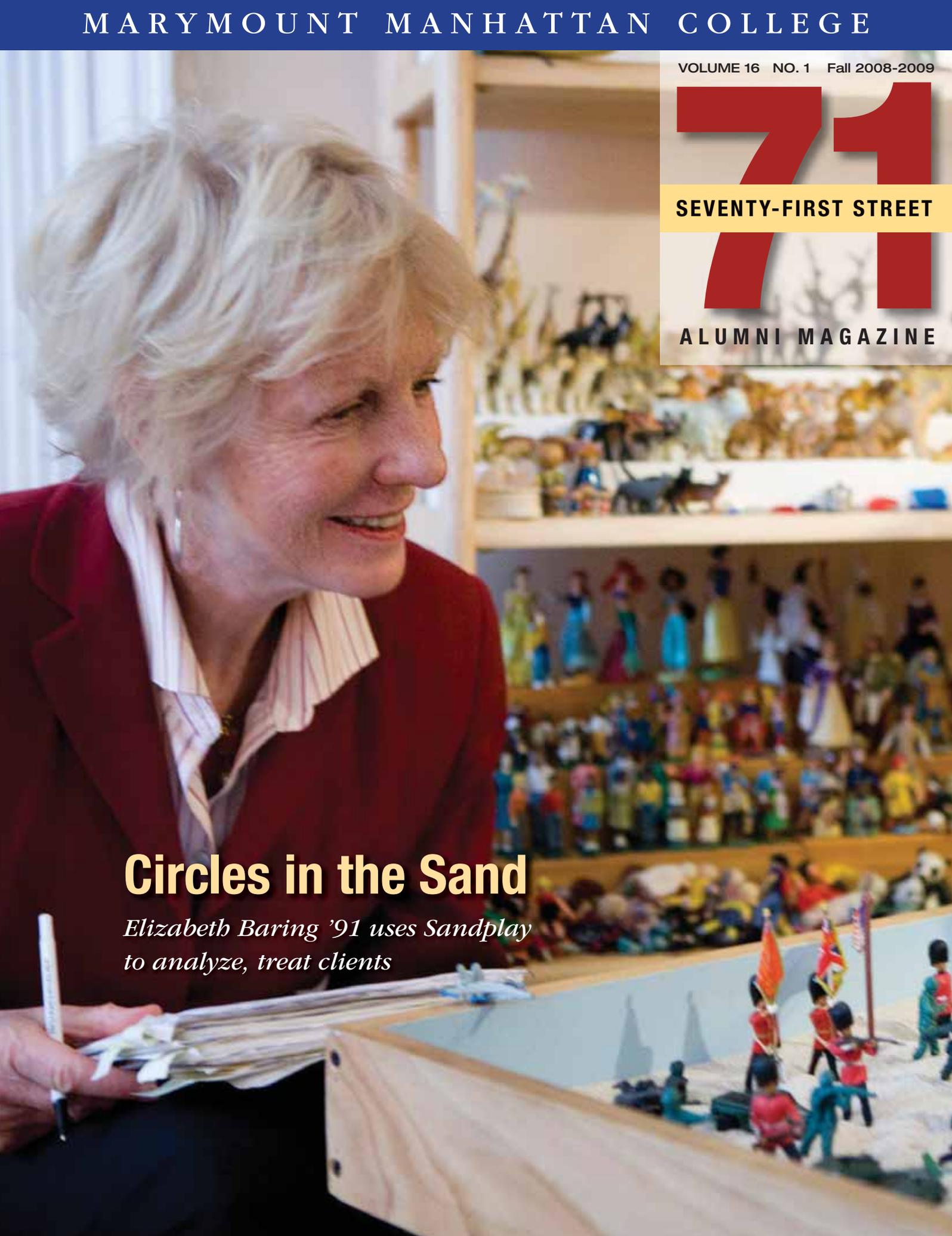
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71

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

Circles in the Sand

Elizabeth Baring '91 uses Sandplay to analyze, treat clients



Playing in the Sand More Than Just Making

*MMC Alumna Elizabeth Baring '91 Analyzes Clients
Using Sandplay to Open the Door to the Unconscious*

By Manny Romero

Elizabeth Baring's, LP, LCAT, office, located on the 8th floor at 1133 Broadway, appears to be like most doctors' offices. It has a couple of chairs in the waiting area, soft lighting, books and magazines, and a diverse collection of art and fixtures hanging on the walls. However, once patients enter Liz's room where she conducts her therapy sessions, patients are immediately transported into a world of imagination, creativity and tranquility.

Liz, a 1991 graduate of Marymount Manhattan College, is a psychotherapist whose private practice includes working with clients who enjoy getting their hands dirty with sand.

"It's an honor to do what I do," she says as she adjusts pillows on her arm chair. "As a therapist you are in a situation to help someone's life. I love what I do and I'm happy that Marymount Manhattan helped pave the way for my career."

Once a corporate wife, Liz was studying to become an

auctioneer for Sotheby's. Two significant events encouraged her to take a different career path – her divorce and her daughter Andrea, who was diagnosed with Williams Syndrome when she was a child.

"I remember thinking, 'What am I going to do?' It was a difficult and emotional time I remember," says Liz, who is the mother of three – Julian, now 33; Andrea, 32; and James, 24.

Liz researched to find out more about her daughter's diagnosis and how she could help assure that her daughter would have a normal and healthy life. In the process, Liz decided it was time to go back to school, eventually graduating as a member of the returning adult program at MMC.

"It took me about 10 years to get my degree," Liz jokes, "but I did it. I found my voice and found that I could do everything. I could go to school, be a mother and a student. It was empowering."



Sand Castles

Elizabeth Baring '91 uses Sandplay Therapy, a form of psychotherapy, when clients come to visit. Through Sandplay her clients are given the opportunity to choose from hundreds of tiny objects and miniature figures in order to create in a sand tray a picture of their inner "world."

"I couldn't have done it without Sister Joan Ronayne from the theology department," Liz adds. "She was a wonderful mentor."

After graduating from Marymount Manhattan, Liz earned her M.S. in Art Therapy from the College of New Rochelle, NY in 1993. In 2001 she became a psychoanalyst, when she earned her certification through the Training and Research Institute in Self Psychology, in New York.

It was during her academic years that Liz learned about Sandplay, a form of psychotherapy used with children as well as adults, for the purpose of healing through connection with the deep psyche.

Founded by Swiss therapist Dora M. Kalff (1904-1990), Sandplay is a process intended to facilitate the emotional healing and full personal development of adult, adolescent and child clients. The therapist fosters a safe and protected space for clients to express themselves that may sometimes

involve dreamwork, talk therapy or other art materials to touch the nonverbal forms of communication. Importantly, the client is given the opportunity to choose from hundreds of tiny objects and miniature figures in order to create in a sand tray a picture of their inner "world." The image or "scene" on the sand tray is then photographed as a visual record of the process.

Liz's office is home to hundreds of miniature figures that range from unicorns to military soldiers and from miniature objects like toasters to monuments like the Empire State Building.

"I have just about everything a person can use when they play in the sand tray," Liz says as she straightens a miniature fairy on one of her shelves. "It's a wonderful way for clients to express themselves."

Liz describes Sandplay as a very multidimensional process.

"Clients use their eyes, hands, body, mind and spirit

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—Elizabeth Baring '91

when they do Sandplay,” Liz says. “As the therapist, I simply observe without giving my client any direction or interpretation, and I only respond to the client’s comments. A “sacred space” is held allowing the individual to connect with deep psychic contents in his or her space and time. I do not analyze the photo at the time they are created. It is recommended to wait at least one year before reviewing the photo with the client. This gives the psyche time to integrate the work at a deep unconscious level.”

Liz moves toward her office door to meet Paolo, one of her younger clients who’s come for his session. The 12-year-old from New Jersey, has been visiting Liz since he was in kindergarten. Each session takes about 45 minutes and begins with a conversation about Paolo’s day at school.

“Paolo has the ability to engage in his process and tell a story,” Liz says. “His sense of humor is wonderful.”

Liz says the sessions with Paolo vary each time. Sometimes Liz and he will play a card game of Spit. Other times, they will just sit and talk about school, friends and the Mets.

“Everybody likes the Yankees. I am a Mets fan,” says Paolo, who is a fan of first baseman Carlos Delgado. “The first Mets game I went to was against the Mariners, and the Mets won. It was great.”

As the session continues, Paolo says he wants to be a video game designer.

“Have you ever played ‘World of Warcraft?’” he asks. “It’s great. You should play it because it’s a game of strategy with fantasy and magic.”

Paolo makes his way to the sand



“My clients teach me and enlighten me about things that sometimes I wouldn’t think about.”
—Elizabeth Baring '91

tray and begins to look at Liz’s collection of miniatures. The precocious teen grabs miniature military soldiers and begins to stage a battle in the sand tray. As he continues to gather miniatures, Liz quickly begins taking notes as she observes Paolo’s selection of miniatures, his facial expressions and the manner in which he places the figures in the sand tray.

“It’s fun to come here,” Paolo says. “It’s sort of like school, without the bad side – you know, homework. It’s sometimes disappointing because I want the sessions to continue longer.”

In a matter of minutes, Paolo’s battle scene is complete, as he adds a miniature jet to the array of figures in the sand.

“I’m done,” he tells Liz. “Yeah . . . I think I’m finished.”

Liz looks at the sand tray, makes some notes, and asks Paolo, “So who won? Is there a winner in your battle?”

Paolo says, “No. I really just wanted to play. It was fun.”

Liz says it’s interesting watching clients of all ages figure out which miniatures they will place in the sand tray.

“Boys enjoy playing with Cowboys and Indians, and cars or soldiers. It can be a real metaphor for their struggles,” she says. “Girls love to use unicorns and fairies, which in many cases is interpreted as fantasy and the wish and illusion that they will live happily ever after.”

Adults use buildings and people when they are in a session with Liz.

“It varies,” she says. “There are times that adult clients want to let loose and really play as a means of releasing stress or reconnecting with their childhood, but more often adults use miniatures that directly

reflect realistic situations and not so much in the fantasy world.”

Liz says the relationship she has with clients is a very different dynamic than that between a teacher and his or her pupil.

“My clients teach me and enlighten me about things that sometimes I wouldn’t think about,” she says. “It’s different with every client and it’s very rewarding to do the type of work that I do. I’m very happy to be able to work with clients like Paolo, because they teach me just as much about myself as I do about them.” 71



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