

GRATITUDE

The L'Arche Winnipeg Newsletter November 2024 Issue 94



50 years & BEYOND



Photos from our weekend at Camp Assiniboia



Maressa & Jesse shooting a bow & arrow

The Joy of Belonging – A Weekend Adventure at Camp Assiniboia



Erin Sawatzky
Community Events

This fall, our L'Arche community gathered for a one-of-a-kind weekend away. At the first weekend of its kind in over 40 years, our community members gathered at Camp Assiniboia - staying in cabins, connecting with nature, and enjoying a series of new and fun-filled activities!

The weekend kicked off with an afternoon hayride through the woods, spotting wildlife and visiting the farm. The fun didn't stop there - the evening brought cinnamon buns and songs around the campfire, and explorations of our weekend theme: the Joy of Belonging. Saturday started off

with crafts and activities in the lodge before we moved outside to try archery, cheering on our more adventurous members as they soared through the trees on a zipline! Many folks showed off their skills at the evening talent show - singing, juggling, dancing and playing piano, and ending the night off with a good old-fashioned dance party. We shared about our experiences together at our Sunday morning prayer service before heading back home.

For many of our assistants and core members, our time at camp was a drastic step away from our usual daily life together. But for

me - as someone who hasn't lived in a L'Arche home - getting to stay in cabins together and share life for the weekend felt like a step deeper into the L'Arche community than I'd experienced, giving me a deeper appreciation for what makes this community special.

The moments that stayed with me from the weekend weren't the big dramatic moments, but small vignettes of our community - Barbara coming forward to lead the group in "Jailhouse Rock" at the talent show; Gina singing Backstreet Boys on the wagon ride; two assistants working together to support Maressa to shoot a bow and arrow; Stacey teaching us the actions to songs around the campfire; Shelton's constant ukulele soundtrack during our outdoor activities; Michael and Margaret relentlessly cheering on LeeAnn as she inched her way up the ladder and off the zipline platform.

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Singing at the Sunday prayer service

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Although stepping out of our usual spaces and routines came with its fair share of challenges, the support amongst core members and assistants was so evident. As the weekend came to a close, I left with a deepened sense of belonging and appreciation for the people that make our community so vibrant.

Solidarity: A Network of Relationships



Julie Rempel

Spiritual Life

When I left the Asha Niketan L'Arche community in Kolkata India after spending 3 months there in 2001, I thought sadly to myself "I will probably never see these wonderful new friends again."

Thankfully, it turns out that I was wrong! I had to wait 11 years until I was finally able to meet up with someone from L'Arche Kolkata at a L'Arche retreat in France. How exciting it was to catch up and hear about everyone in the community! I recently came across a video on L'Arche International's website about L'Arche Kolkata's core member I knew named Bapi. Watching this video, I see that my friends (children when I knew them) have grown up. I learn that Bapi-da has died, and my heart goes out to these friends – this community. Although my time there was brief, my continued connections to this community keep surprising me.

The L'Arche Federation is expansive - 137 communities in 60 countries - and yet we are able to connect with each other across

I am so incredibly grateful to our assistants for your hard work in supporting our core members throughout the weekend; to our volunteers, activity leaders and camp committee for your support along the way, and to Camp Assiniboia for hosting us. As Michael said, "I'll tell you this much- we're going to have to do it again!"

this distance and difference. Our charter calls our federation "one and diverse": *"Each L'Arche community is a network of relationships, bonded to other communities across the global Federation...We are all, people with and without intellectual disabilities, engaged in the work of partnership, advocacy, and justice."*

Whether we express our solidarity through fundraising, in-person gatherings, or virtual assemblies, we are deeply connected to L'Arche communities in other countries by our shared experiences of struggle and hope. Our understanding and concern comes easily when we see other communities who are modeling inclusion with far fewer resources than we have in Canada.

Songwriter Bryan Moyer Suderman expresses this kind of mutual solidarity well: *"You're not alone, we are one body. You're not alone, we stand with you. You're not alone, your time of suffering is our suffering too, and I know the day is coming when we will be rejoicing anew."*

In August we rejoiced together as one body at our solidarity music fundraiser "This Is Me," where over 200 people gathered to celebrate and support L'Arche communities around the world. Together, we raised over \$4300



Juliette & Happiness on the wagon ride

while dancing and sharing songs about belonging, friendship, and mutual support.



Singing & dancing at "This Is Me"

Presented by Tricia Magsino Barnabe

Photo by Milmar Abella

This November we're gathering again as one body to rejoice the good news of God's presence and solidarity with us. Acting out the Christmas Nativity story is a tradition brought alive by L'Arche communities around the world, remembering God's promise of friendship and hope for our suffering world. By reflecting on the birth of Jesus as Emmanuel – "God with us" – we are comforted by God's solidarity with the human experience, and we are moved to stand in solidarity with our fellow L'Arche communities.

Join this unique and joyous event at 7:00 on Thursday November 28 at St. Boniface Cathedral to be part of this global solidarity movement. Also, the free-will offering goes to L'Arche Solidarity!

Long Life Outside Institution and in Community

By Kevin Rollason

Originally published in the Winnipeg Free Press' "Passages Newsletter" Sept. 29, 2024

When Ross Hawkins was born with Down syndrome in 1959, it was a time when families were encouraged to send their children with special needs to the Manitoba Developmental Centre in Portage la Prairie. Ross's mom refused. At least, she was able to for a time.

That's because, seven years after Ross was born, when his mother was sick, and looking after two teenagers, a younger child and Ross, she made the agonizing decision to admit him to the centre.

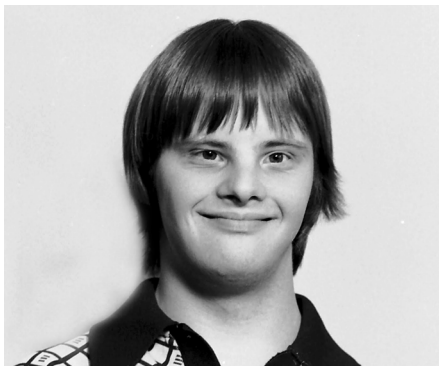
The facility, which has gone through several names during its 134 years of existence — all horrific, including the Home for Incurables and the Manitoba School for Mental Defectives — was, at the time, a place where people living with special needs were sent when they were young and only left when they died. But not Ross.

A decade after Ross arrived, a woman came to the cottage he was living in on the centre's grounds and took one of the other boys with her when she left. Ross didn't know where the boy went — he just knew he never came back. The next time the woman came, Ross was ready. He looked at her, pointed at his chest and said repeatedly, "Pick me." And she did.

That woman was Sister Marie and, as it turned out, she was visiting the centre because she

was opening a home for teenagers with intellectual disabilities as part of L'Arche Winnipeg.

After spending a decade in the facility where his mother never wanted him to be, Ross ended up spending 47 years enveloped in the care and love of L'Arche. He was also able to embrace and participate in the community in which he lived.



Ross at L'Arche in 1980

Ross, who died on Sept. 13, was proud to spend 27 years working at Palliser Furniture and went on to volunteer at both the Health Sciences Centre and Park Manor. He also enjoyed welcoming the customers who came to eat and drink at the L'Arche Tova Cafe.

Halloween was a special time for Ross. He wore costumes depicting Mrs. Doubtfire and Pope John Paul, but his most memorable character was Elsa from Frozen. He came out of the dressing room, threw up his arms and slid across the room with his cape billowing behind him. Only then did Ross turn to the store clerk and ask: "Where are the boobs?"

Ross even once dressed up as Star Trek captain Jean-Luc Picard. The assistants at L'Arche never knew whether it was because he wanted to be referred as "Captain" all day, or whether he just wanted to shave his head

bald like Picard and another family member.

A favourite saying was, "That's my name, don't wear it out," and his favourite attire was anything bearing a Winnipeg Jets logo. Ross loved musicals and movies with music — especially ones he could sing and dance to, including Annie and The Sound of Music.

For a person previously destined to stay within the confines of an institution, Ross got around, travelling to Disney World and Las Vegas. He even persuaded his family to book first-class tickets for three of the four legs of the journey to the Magic Kingdom and back.

Sadly, like many people living with Down syndrome, Ross was diagnosed with dementia earlier than most adults. As featured in a CTV Winnipeg news story back in 2022, his sister reached out to a woman giving away Winnipeg Jets keepsakes and, between the two of them, they created a memory box for him full of donated Jets-themed socks, duct tape, stickers and decorations.



Ross in Jets gear with his sister Barb

"Now that he's forgetting, or he's more... in the moment, I just want to be able to create all these memories for him," his sister Barb Cnockaert told CTV at the time. "He teaches me that I need to be open and enjoy the moment, not have expectations for tomorrow because we don't know."

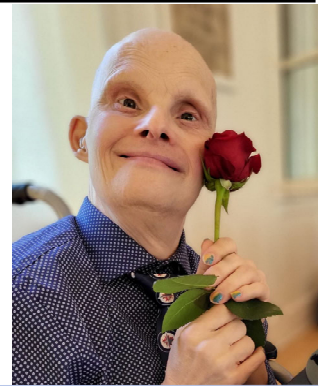
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Some years before he died, Ross told his family what he wanted his funeral to be like. "I want a big picture and a party!" And that's what likely happened during his funeral mass. As his family said in his obituary: "September 27 would have been his 65th birthday, so, birthday party it is!" And, somewhere, Ross is also celebrating something other than his birthday.

That's because the Manitoba Developmental Centre is now close to shutting its doors permanently. The province announced three years ago it was going to cease operations at the centre and there are now less than a handful of residents waiting to move to a group home.

Or as Ross might have said: "Them too!"



Reciprocating the Gift of L'Arche



Jubilee Dueck Thiessen

Communications & Fund Development Coordinator

Our L'Arche Winnipeg community talks a lot about our vision of mutual care between people with and without intellectual disabilities. You might find it easy to imagine what that means for our core members and Assistants who live and work together, but what does mutual care look between L'Arche and those of us who no longer live in L'Arche, or who never have? For Jamie and Adrian Besaw, becoming monthly donors was a way for them to participate in mutual care with L'Arche.

In the summer of 2001, Adrian was a live-in Assistant with Tom and Albert at Munroe house where he was impacted by the vulnerability and trust of core members whose emotions were often transparent and freely expressed. Their openness invited Adrian to meet them in that vulnerability, which was a healing experience for him. While society often teaches us to be guarded and careful, core members like Albert and Tom invited openness and boldness. He was inspired by how many of L'Arche Winnipeg's founding assistants were still very present in the community, loving the core



Adrian & Ross Maccoomb in 2001

members like family and investing so much of their lives in L'Arche.

15 years later, Jamie had her own experience of L'Arche family while living with Albert and Tom at Dayspring house. Her life continues to be shaped by the time she spent living with people of all different abilities, cultures and ages, experiencing a profound sense of belonging and family amongst that difference. This family dynamic was especially lively around mealtime when they'd remain at the dinner table for many hours after they'd finished eating, continuing to share stories and laughter for so long that Albert would often fall asleep at the dinner table.



Jamie & Albert Vinet in 2017

Jamie and Adrian's time in our community showed them that L'Arche isn't about serving people with disabilities — it's about

acknowledging "our mutual need for connection and transformation." For them, working at L'Arche was more than just a job, it was a calling — and a response to the invitation to be transformed by community life.

In a posture of reciprocity, Jamie and Adrian choose to donate monthly as an expression of gratitude for the gifts of interdependence, dignity, and relationship they both received during their time living in our community — and for the gift they know L'Arche continues to be for others.

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Editor: **Jubilee Dueck Thiessen**

L'Arche Winnipeg Inc.
118 Regent Avenue E.
Winnipeg MB, R2C 0C1

Phone: 204-237-0300

Fax: 204-237-0316

General E-mail:

office@larchewinnipeg.org

www.larchewinnipeg.org

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