



FALL 2010 NEWSLETTER

Lessons in Love

By *Christiane McInnes*

I come from a family of four siblings. There's me, the middle child; my younger brother Angus; my older sister Clare; and the eldest, Margaret, who is 6 years my senior and has a developmental disability.

From a very young age I understood that Margaret wasn't like everyone else. I understood that this meant our family was different from everyone else's. She had puzzling behaviour that looked and sounded strange to others. She moved with deliberate slowness in her everyday life, but could be quick as a leopard when she was angry. She would have one-way conversations with herself and happily sing tunes she made up herself to no one in particular. Margaret would giggle at the most inappropriate moments. She would hit, bite and punch when she worked herself into a fury. I knew all of this was unusual, but I was not yet embarrassed by it. That would come later.

I grew up much more quickly than one might anticipate for a 12 year old, but by that time I was already spending much of my after-school time looking after Margaret. My parents divorced when I was four. As soon as I was capable I began to absorb some of the responsibility of caring for my eldest sister. I would help her adjust the water temperature in the shower. I would encourage her to speed up when others were waiting to use the washroom. Margaret would ask me to tuck her in at night. After we drifted off to sleep, Margaret would start screaming. I would sleepily creep down the hall and into her room to calm her down while the rest of the family lay awake in their beds.

In those early years when I was interested in a playmate, Margaret was the most willing to agree to whatever game I decided we should play. It did not occur to me then, as it does now, that she wanted to be my friend.

Soon thereafter I began to get angry at Margaret. I began to forget that she loved me best. Instead I began to focus on what she couldn't do. My frustrations and early rise to maturity blinded me

into sheer embarrassment. Margaret was physically violent my entire childhood but I never once hit her back until about that time in my life. I was ashamed to invite my friends over. I was worried she would ruin my birthday party.

Through all of this she never once said anything purposefully hurtful towards me. She trusted me despite my rejection of her. I could not even bring myself to say "I love you" even when I knew she loved me dearly.

I moved away for university for an adventure, but also so that I could free myself from acting as both a sibling and a care provider. I spent my first year at university feeling inexplicable relief. For the first time in my life, the only person I had to worry about was myself. It was wonderful not to be needed, but at the same time very lonely. I would call home expressly to hear Margaret in the background.

It was also then that I began to feel desperate for her future. Margaret would never be able to live on her own, that much was clear. I worried for my parents who deserved the respite I was experiencing. I feared most selfishly the role that I might later provide to Margaret when my parents can no longer act as guardian. And then L'Arche came into our lives.

My parents learned about L'Arche through two decades of networking and one evening attended their Community Night, the weekly get together of the people who are a part of the L'Arche Ottawa community. Margaret began attending every week and after a year moved into a lovely L'Arche home called Wabana.



Christiane and her sister,

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Our Mission is to:

Make known the gifts of people with developmental disabilities, revealed through mutually transforming relationships.

Foster an environment in community that responds to the changing needs of our members, while being faithful to the core values of our founding story.

Engage in our diverse cultures, working together toward a more human society.

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From Denise's Desk:

The Gift of L'Arche

Recently I was asked to prepare a talk about The Gift of L'Arche for a local community service group. With a theme like that I could talk for hours – but alas, I only had 30 minutes. I decided to focus on three areas where L'Arche may offer a gift to the wider community. Here's an abbreviated version of the talk.

The Giftedness in Each of Us

One of our core values at L'Arche is the belief that every person, regardless of ability, gender, race or religion, has a God-given gift to share with the world. At L'Arche we take time to look for those gifts in each other, to celebrate them and give everyone an opportunity to use those gifts.

The Importance of Relationships

People with developmental disabilities can teach us a great deal about relationships because of the importance they place on relationships. They remind us of our need for one another, that we can be happier and stronger in each other's company. At L'Arche you can discover that someone who is non-verbal still has much to say and to teach us about being human. It is in the simplicity of being together and in the small gestures of friendship that our

hearts are touched and transformed.

Our Common Vulnerability

At L'Arche we honour what is often considered weakness. When there is fragility or vulnerability present, we need to slow down from our "doing" so that we can simply "be" with someone. L'Arche is a place where we can also be honest about our own weaknesses. We know that we will be accepted with our weaknesses. Our value does not come from the society's usual definitions; we are valuable simply because we "are".

It has been my joy to be part of discovering the gift of L'Arche for more than 20 years. I invite you to come and visit to experience L'Arche for yourself. I am particularly grateful to our friends and donors who make life at L'Arche possible. Thank you for your gifts to us.

Denise Haskett

Denise Haskett
Community Leader/Executive Director

Lessons In Love continued...

Continued from page 1...

When I flew to Ottawa the Christmas of my first year at UBC, I attended the L'Arche Ottawa Community Night. I walked in feeling totally unsure about everything, but especially about Margaret. I knew her well enough to know that crowds and noise made her terribly uncomfortable. I took one sweeping look about the hall and gathered this place would be too overwhelming for Margaret.

When I spotted her I was utterly flabbergasted. I'd never before seen her interact so openly with a group of people. I saw that she was unafraid to love others who were different from her. I took my seat beside her and when everyone had settled she announced quite happily that her sister from Vancouver had come to visit. I felt ashamed that I could not love the way she did. I felt ashamed that I had still never said "I love you."

Seeing Margaret that evening and later when I visited her at Wabana, made me realize how profoundly she had changed since becoming a part of the L'Arche Ottawa community. The relationships she had built with others made me realize how truly precious she is. Yes, she still had her quiet little songs, her strange noises, her tantrums, and her giggle fits, but she also had a welcoming smile and a place of belonging. L'Arche transformed my sister.

When I graduated from the University of BC and began my career in the not-for-profit sector, I was hired by L'Arche Greater Vancouver to work in Fund Development. I had never seriously considered working at L'Arche because I thought it "hit too close to home." But I wanted to become a fundraiser and I saw L'Arche as my opportunity. I had lots to learn about fundraising. I thought I had nothing to learn about relationships.

In the near two years I have been at L'Arche Greater Vancouver, I have learned some of the most profound lessons in forgiveness, love, mutuality and belonging. I watched people like me love and care for people like my sister. I saw people like my sister loving and caring for people like me. Everywhere I looked, I began seeing reflections of Margaret. Through these relationships, I saw someone God chose to love and cherish me.

L'Arche helps us see God in everyone. L'Arche showed me how to ask God to loosen my heart, to let it forgive and be forgiven. To say "I love you." I said earlier that L'Arche had transformed my sister. Actually, L'Arche has transformed me.



House Holidays 2010

A unique feature of living in a L'Arche home is that every year everyone goes on vacation together. Housemates plan where they will go and the activities in which they'll participate. Holidays are a chance to rest, build memories and experience something new. We are grateful to the people who offer their cabins or otherwise contribute towards the expenses of this summer tradition.

Bethel House

On the 9th of August, the Bethel House crew (Barbara, Paul, Kathleen, Eloise) flew to Calgary in the early morning. Everyone was extremely excited! A wonderful L'Arche guest house in Calgary, The Cenacle was open for us! As soon as we were settled, Heather (our former house leader), Pete and their dear sweet little new born baby came to visit us. We were all overjoyed with their visit! The rest of the week was relaxing, pleasant and memorable. One day, we walked all over Heritage Park and enjoyed a wonderful BBQ with Heather's family. At the end of our trip we joined L'Arche Calgary for prayer and discovered the marvelous Rocky Mountains. We flew back early Friday morning, full of great memories!



The Crossing

On a hot summer day in August, The Crossing embarked on an adventure. With our pilot Daniel assisted by our co-pilot Guy, we were led us across the ocean. We finally arrived at Brenda's house on Denman Island where we were greeted by Mia, the dog, and a warm dinner. The next two days were filled with swimming, tanning, hiking, walking, going out for coffee and ice cream, reading books, watching movies and the essentials: eating, praying and loving. We also enjoyed a day trip to "Hawaii" aka Tribune Bay in Hornby Island. While the two tired pilots enjoyed a coffee break, the rest of the crew hiked along the cliffs of Helliwell Provincial Park where they came across breathtaking views including an orca. This marked the end of the trip. The pleased travelers embarked again to go back across the ocean. We arrived back at Sardis Street full of happy memories and experiences.



Unity House

We left for Victoria early in the morning on August 10. We were able to stay at a very beautiful hotel located right downtown on Government Street because of a generous donation. Our first night in Victoria we went out for dinner at a seafood restaurant overlooking the harbor and enjoyed watching the sunset. Our second day in Victoria we went for a picnic at French Beach. In the evening we went to an Irish Pub and listened to folk music. After that we went for a walk around the BC Legislature Buildings. Every night the building is lit with thousands of bright lights. The last night in Victoria, we went to the box noodle restaurant. Food was one of the most exciting parts of the holiday. We can't wait for our next House Holiday.



Emily House

This year, as has been tradition for the last ten years, Emily House was generously invited to Ruby Lake for house holidays by Mary's parents. We left by ferry for the Sunshine Coast to meet up with Mary and her parents. We stayed for two nights at an amazing B&B in Egmont, overlooking North Lake. One highlight of the trip for Philip and Melina was the hot tub at the B&B. Another highlight of the trip was when we went swimming in Ruby Lake. No one wanted to leave the water and much fun was had splashing Yvonne & Philip who were relaxing on the dock. A fun highlight was when Philip decided he would marry Mrs. Hillhouse and that Mr. Hillhouse could marry Yae Eun. Many thanks to Mr. & Mrs. Hillhouse for making this holiday so special.



Nazirah House

This year we flew to Edmonton! The idea came earlier this year when Mariah, from L'Arche Edmonton, stayed at our house for a few days. When we told her that we were looking for a place to go for holidays, she invited us to stay at the rest house in her community! We arrived on Monday and relaxed for the rest of the day. The next day we ventured to the enormous West Edmonton Mall. We watched the sea lion show and spent an entire afternoon at Water World. It was great fun to go on slides together and brave the big wave pool. On Wednesday we spent the day at Fort Edmonton and took a tour of Edmonton from the 1800's to 1900's. After our long day of walking we enjoyed a BBQ. On Thursday we were invited to join L'Arche Edmonton them for lunch. Later we met our good friends Hollee and Grant for Dairy Queen blizzards and supper. We finished off the day at a café with live music, sipping some pop. We all had a lot of fun spending time together, exploring Edmonton, meeting old friends and making new ones.



Creation House

It's been a tradition for the whole team at Creation House along with our volunteers to go to the Sunshine Coast for their House Holiday. The day trip includes a ferry trip, lunch on the lawn at a friend's home and supper at Molly's Reach. This year we also added a surprise birthday celebration for Alex. Here we are at Davis Bay.





Tribute Giving

L'Arche Greater Vancouver gratefully acknowledges the gifts made in celebration of the following individuals:

Marvin Mazure

L'Arche Updates

The Emmaus Centre has been undergoing a complete renovation since the beginning of July. The renovation crew is in the final stages and everyone is looking forward to the new and improved Emmaus! We will be holding an Emmaus grand re-opening on **Monday, September 13 from 3:00-4:00 pm**. Come by for a tour around the new centre! Thank you to our sponsors, St. Mary's Health Foundation and Scotiabank who made this possible.

During the month of August, L'Arche Greater Vancouver partnered with **Ten Thousand Villages** on West Broadway. Mentioning "L'Arche" at the time of purchase automatically donated 10% of the purchase towards L'Arche! It was a great experience working with Kristen Reffle and staff at West Broadway's Ten Thousand Villages as well as the Ten Thousand Villages Head Office in Ontario. We appreciate all the support and look forward to working with them in the future.



The Art of Being Together

We are seeking the participation of emerging artists and sponsors for L'Arche's second annual **Art of Being Together**. The Art of Being Together is a juried exhibition of art inspired by the theme of community, sharing life, friendship and inclusiveness. Please see our website or contact: Amanda Wong at 604-435-9544 ext. 33 for more information.

Upcoming Events

Coffee Houses

Check our website for upcoming dates.

A L'Arche Christmas Concert

Featuring **Corpus Christi College Chamber Choir**

December 3, 2010

St. Margaret's Cedar Cottage Anglican Church

Admission by donation

The Second Annual Art of Being Together

Saturday March 5, 2011

National Nikkei Museum & Heritage Centre

Admission by donation - Minimum \$5

Ways to Support L'Arche

Purchase an Art Card. There are unique L'Arche Art Cards created by the Emmaus Day Program. Come by and pick from a great selection.

Sponsor a Special Event There are several opportunities a year for individual and corporate sponsorship.

Invite a L'Arche Speaker to come to your community, church or school group. We have a growing speaker's bureau that is eager to share the message of L'Arche.

Give through Payroll Deduction. Designate your United Way donation to L'Arche Greater Vancouver.

Contact us at **604-435-9544** for more information.

We invite you to share your copy of this newsletter.

Give online: www.larchevancouver.org and click "Donate"

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