

# The Reality of Life at L'Arche

By Lauren Pais

When I share with people outside of our community about L'Arche and the work we do the response is often "God bless you for doing what you do" or "I don't know many people who would want to do what you do." These responses make me uncomfortable. They are a disservice to people with disabilities and also don't acknowledge how fully we live life at L'Arche. I don't feel that the life we live together is charity. **L'Arche is a gift to me just as it is to people with disabilities and it is a gift to society at large - a sign of hope, that living life radically and simply in relationship is possible and of value.**

In my early twenties my mother handed me a book that she thought I needed to read. The book was "Becoming Human" by Jean Vanier. My first reaction was of deep insult! I was born human; **I don't need to become human!** However a few years later, I found myself in a place in my life in which I was feeling less than human. I had taken a break from university and was working in an isolated office job. I felt depressed and alienated from myself and from the people around me.

I found my copy of "Becoming Human" and read it in one day. Vanier's message was something I was thirsting for in a time in my life when I felt that I had failed at keeping my life in order. I had a desire to embrace the weakness and vulnerability within myself and within



Lauren (Left) with housemate Delinda

others. I eventually returned to university and applied to a program called Intercordia that included a four month placement in a L'Arche community.

As part of the program I spent a year studying human development and it's related theories. And so I came to L'Arche armed with anthropological theories and determined to become fully human according to them. They included Jean Vanier's human anthropology - to become fully human as the liberation from fear; the ability to enter into meaningful relationships that surpass difference and the ability to act and love with a mature heart. Vanier proposes "**The Way of the Heart**" as the path towards freedom which is the freedom of love, compassion and truth ultimately rooted in God.

I was placed in Unity House. In those first months I fast realized that there is little clarity in living and working with people. There were times when I felt anger rising in me when in relationship with people with disabilities and assistants. The weakness, the anxiety, the insecurity, the lack of consciousness, the moodiness and the manipulation often caught me at times during the day when I could not give my full attention. And more deeply than that: the weakness I encountered often **called forth my own weakness and insecurity and anxiety.** When I was feeling this way, which was often, it



*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.*

## In This Issue:

The Reality of Life at L'Arche	1
From Denise's Desk	2
My Uncle Fred	3
Sisters	3
Upcoming Events	4
Art Together Appreciation	4

## Contact:

7401 Sussex Avenue  
Burnaby, BC  
V5J 3V6  
Tel. 604-435-9544  
Fax. 604-435-9560  
office@larchevancouver.org  
www.larchevancouver.org  
www.larchevancouver.wordpress.com

**Editor: Sig Stark**



*In the fall 2014 edition of this newsletter we printed part of a talk that Rev. Doug Graves gave on the occasion of L'Arche Greater Vancouver's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and L'Arche International's 50<sup>th</sup>. Earlier this year we called Doug's home to discuss our 2016 Community Retreat which he had agreed to lead when we learned of his sudden passing. We still can't quite believe he's gone.*

*As I think about Doug and all he meant to us I recall his words from our anniversary weekend. Doug referenced the Gospel Parable of the Great Banquet as it related it to our mission at L'Arche. Here are his words:*

First, in a society that increasingly values people by their status, their income, and their achievements, our community is a living reminder that real joy in life is seldom a result of status, income and achievements – at least worldly achievements - and more a result of the quality of our relationships with others and with God.

This is the point where I must thank my friends at Nazirah House – especially my oldest friends – Gwenda, Sue, Patrick and Ken – for all that you have taught me in this regard. You

have taught me what it really means to accept others, to love others, to be patient with others, and to be patient with oneself. You have taught me how to live with limits, and to find joy in them. You have truly been my teachers in the way of the heart, and I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am.

Secondly, in a world that is tearing itself apart because of differences – differences of race, of standard of living, of skin colour, of religion – our community is a vibrant example of how people with great differences can live together. In this, as in every L'Arche community, we see day in and day out people reaching out to each other in spite of profound differences – difference in language and race, of ability and disability, of religious tradition and cultural background, of belief and non-belief – people with enormous differences living and working together and creating something new and precious in the midst of all the difference.

And finally, in a world where we can't help but wonder about how ready the young people of our world might be for the difficult new world realities we who are older are leaving

*Continued on Page 4*

*Reality of Life at L'Arche Continued*

And yet it was clear to me that development of some sort was occurring. My housemates, the assistants and I were changing, growing, reacting off one another in complex relationships.

That summer the relationships were intense and at times unsatisfactory, but conversely there were also **moments of transcendent joy and grace**. I was privileged to witness an Umbrella dance by my friend Ilonka. It is a beautiful gift in my life when she is feeling well enough and happy enough to grace us with her dancing. There are the hours I have spent completing jigsaw puzzles with Delinda while crooning to Elvis soundtracks or writing notes in Lawrence's notebooks and teasing and being teased by my friend Linda. Development was taking place – my housemates and coworkers were not stagnating and for myself, my heart and understanding was radically changed by my experience. Despite the messiness and ambiguity some mysterious force kept us in cohesion and in relationship.

of those around me and myself to be completely unconscious. Had we held onto hurts we would have constrained each other in stagnant, fruitless relationships. As it was we were changed, perhaps only slightly, for having known each other. In the absence of mutuality, consciousness, belonging and maturity we could only turn to forgiveness to free ourselves and each other.

L'Arche places a great importance on the need for transcendence in one's work. This is a deeply prayerful community. As I work on my own faith, **I am constantly inspired by the deep faith of my friends in my house and in the community** that have sustained them through periods of doubt and difficulty.

There is so much transcendence in the beautiful city of Vancouver. I feel so privileged to live so close to the majesty of mountains and ocean. The sense of wonder, awe and contentment I draw from nature in BC is beyond description. The thought and feeling of transcendence

*The following note is from Melissa Jugdeo who used to work in our Emmaus Day Program and remains part of our community. When her Uncle Fred passed away she decided to honour him with a monthly donation. Here's why:*

I would like this ongoing donation to go towards the Emmaus Day Program recreation budget and Friday Lunch program in loving memory of my Uncle Fred Dunston. He was so touched by our core members and so proud of the community. My Uncle Fred loved preparing and sharing meals with his friends and loved ones and he loved to go out and spend time gardening, days at the beach, dancing, and laughing - he had such a beautiful contagious laugh. My Uncle Fred was so kind and welcoming to everyone he met because he genuinely cared about everyone. This spirit of welcome and acceptance is the same in L'Arche and in Emmaus. He loved visiting and meeting our core members and assistants from across the globe. He was so proud of the L'Arche Greater Vancouver community and told me often how great it is that I am part of this L'Arche family.

I feel blessed to have the opportunity to continue to honour my Uncle Fred by contributing to Emmaus so that their core people and assistants can continue to welcome and celebrate spreading joy to those they meet in the same way my Uncle Fred brought joy to others.



In Memory of Fred Dunston



Ellie (left) with her sister Linda who loves living at Unity House

## Sisters

Previous to moving into Unity House eleven years ago, my sister, Linda, lived with our parents, and I planned that she would one day live with my family in Nanaimo. When that time came, we agreed with others concerned with Linda's welfare that the independence, spiritual involvement and loving environment offered in a L'Arche home would be in her best interest. At Unity House Linda continues to bloom intellectually and spiritually through participating in the arts, sports, travelling, and spiritual companionship. She receives excellent health and personal care. I am so grateful for Linda's loving L'Arche family. Initially nervous in her transition to Unity House, when I visited Linda one month later, she flashed her wonderful smile and said, "How did you know I'd love it so much here?"

## Memorials and Tributes

**L'Arche Greater Vancouver gratefully acknowledges gifts received in memory or in honour of loved ones and friends.**

**In Memory:**

**In Honour:**

them, our community has for 40 years been welcoming young people from all over the world as assistants for periods of anywhere from six months to 2 years and beyond and has watched them slowly but surely become deeper, wiser, more patient, and more compassionate people. Then we have blessed them, said goodbye, and sent them out to live the rest of their lives in ways that can't help but make this a better world.

That's hundreds of young people touched by L'Arche Greater Vancouver, and in their turn touching the world... hundreds of young people helping in their way to restore streets to live in and inviting others to share in God's banquet of abundant life.



*I am so grateful that Doug left the gift of this message to us as a reminder of how our mission changes the world. We miss you Doug and can picture you participating in that great banquet.*

*Denise Hookett*

Community Leader/ Executive Director

Our Annual Benefit Concert will feature  
Christian Recording Artist  
and friend of L'Arche  
Michael Hart  
Friday, Nov. 25 7:30 p.m.  
First Lutheran Church  
5745 Wales Street. Vancouver BC

## Art Together Appreciation

We are grateful to everyone who attended our two Art Together shows and for everyone who made the shows possible. This year's theme "To Build" was creatively portrayed in the 17 paintings that were displayed at the opening at the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts in Burnaby on April 22, 2016 and at Park Place downtown Vancouver on June 9—23. Special thanks to our corporate sponsors:.

**GWL Realty Advisors Inc.**

**Vancity**

**Rexall** Health Solutions

**Thank you for supporting the work of L'Arche locally**

If you prefer to donate online go to: [www.larchevancouver.org](http://www.larchevancouver.org) and click "Donate Now"

### CONTACT:

DR.  MR.  MRS.  MS.  MISS  MR. AND MRS.

FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ INITIAL \_\_\_\_\_

LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

PROV. \_\_\_\_\_ POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_

TEL. HOME \_\_\_\_\_

TEL. WORK \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to become an Ark Builder by committing to a gift of \$500 or

### HERE IS MY GIFT OF:

\$500  \$250  \$100  \$50  Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Make this a monthly gift !**

### METHOD OF PAYMENT:

Visa  MasterCard  Cheque

NAME ON CARD \_\_\_\_\_

CARD NO. \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

EXPIRY DATE \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_