



Winter 2016

My L'Arche Journey

By Jennifer Rodriguez

I have a long history with L'Arche Greater Vancouver. Currently I'm a live-in assistant in Unity House but **my journey in L'Arche actually started before I was born.**

In 1987 a young women named Anne left her home in New Brunswick to come to Vancouver on invitation of her brother, Zoel who was the Director of this beautiful community at that time. Anne was hoping to start a career in human services, particularly working alongside people with special needs. She was nervous to leave home but Zoel's invitation was perfect timing. He asked her to give it six months and, if she wasn't happy, she was free to return home. She hesitantly left for the big city certain that she would be home in six months.

When she arrived she immediately felt the love and the joy that surrounded this community. She adored the core members and got along great with her fellow assistants. **What she didn't expect was to fall in love.** Within two weeks she met a young Costa-Rican man named Roy and everything changed. Six months turned into a year, and a year turned into two. They married in 1989 and core members who are still in this community today, attended their wedding. With Anne's family in New Brunswick and Roy's in Costa-Rica L'Arche become their family. Eventually Anne and Roy started a family and I am the middle of their three children.



Jennifer (right) on the road with Linda and Arthur

My parents are still happily married and live just a ten minute walk from the community. Although they have moved on into different workplaces, they still remain good friends with people here.

Growing up in **L'Arche is a gift that shaped my life.** As a child, I didn't think anything of it; the community was my extended family. In fact the grandparents I grew up with were people my parents met through the L'Arche. There was Rose and Jim Brown, Chris Janus, and Helen and William Riel. These people had somewhat adopted my parents and therefore had adopted me and my siblings as their grandchildren. **Not a conventional family but it was mine none the less.**

One of my greatest memories growing up in the community involves one of the core members, Sue Allen. She would play with me during community gatherings and sometimes watch us while our mom was working in Creation House or Emmaus. The thing I find amazing now is, that as a child, I didn't even realize Sue as a person with Down Syndrome. Sue was just one of my friends that played with me. That is something I find truly beautiful. It's beautiful because her disability didn't change the fact **that I viewed her as not only a friend, but also as someone with authority.** If Sue would tell me not to do something, I wouldn't dare do it.

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Jennifer as a toddler and her Mom at a coffeehouse

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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My L'Arche Journey Continued

Being raised around people with special needs **taught me that no matter how different we are or what abilities we possess, we all have our strengths and weaknesses, and we all have something to learn from each other.**

I am so lucky to have grown up in this beautiful L'Arche family. At a certain age, I came less to L'Arche. Even through that awkward teenage phase I still felt connected to people here.

In July 2012, at 19 years old, I headed east to become a live-in assistant in the L'Arche Montreal Community. Like my mother, I planned to stay for six months. I stayed for two years. **Those years have so far been the most formative years of my adult life.** Even though I knew what kind of job I was getting into, I definitely didn't know the challenges I would have to face, not only on a work level but also on a personal level. I reached limits that I didn't even know I had. Overcoming those challenges and recognizing those limits helped me grow and mature. When people ask me if I'm in college or university, I always say "yes", I'm studying at L'Arche University. **L'Arche teaches you things you would never get in a university class.** But what's even better, is that **you learn**

through living. You live **mutuality and respect, compassion and forgiveness.** You learn your boundaries and limits, as well as those of others. My time in L'Arche Montreal, and to be more exact, **my time spent with the core members, taught me how to be more human.**

After those two wonderful years, I came home. I came back to this community and asked if they needed help. I became a support worker spending time in a few of the homes as well as the Emmaus Centre. I also had another job with the Vancouver School Board which took up most of my time. However something was missing. I felt like my time as a live-in assistant wasn't over. I was being called back.

So here I am, back in the L'Arche community that welcomed me as a child. So far my experience as an assistant has been amazing. It is interesting to care for people who literally held me in their arms when I was a baby, but then I also realize how beautiful that it is. I love the people here and I'm excited to see how that love will grow. I haven't figured out yet if L'Arche is my life calling, it very well may be. However, I know for a fact that **I will always have L'Arche in my life because L'Arche is in my blood.**

From Denise's Desk



A few months ago I had the privilege of going on a silent retreat. During that nourishing time, I had a strong sense of the hand of God, both in my life, and in the life of this community. I spent time walking the labyrinth and realized I could only see a few steps ahead. I could not see the way to the center, the final destination. It was only by slowly walking, taking each turn as it came, that I finally got there. I pondered the road that is before us at L'Arche as we work on plans for much needed accessible housing, and expansion of our services. As well we continue to plan and respond to the increasing needs of people in our community. During the retreat I was given these words from scripture which will be our community's 2017 theme verse:

This is what the Lord says:
Stand at the crossroads and look;
Ask for the ancient paths
Ask where the good way is and walk in it,
And you will find rest for your souls.

Jeremiah 6:16 NIV

The action words, **STAND, LOOK, ASK, WALK**, in this passage will guide us in the journey ahead. I offer these thoughts as we set out:

STAND at the crossroads and LOOK. We will pause, and take stock paying attention to where we have been, and where we are in this present moment. We will look forward to the path before us. We will take into account and learn from the lessons and blessings of the journey to this point. We will seek to be travellers who journey wisely, planning, moving, towards our destination, trusting in Providence.

ASK for the ancient paths. We will seek and consult trustworthy advisors, others who have knowledge and expertise. We will ask those who have been on similar journeys for their wisdom. We will ask God to guide us every step of the way.

ASK where the good way is. In a spirit of discernment we will ask and pray for the best way forward. We will draw on the rich history of our founding story. The ancient paths are prescribed, owned, and blessed by God.

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Praying for Syria

A few months ago a story on the 11 o'clock news about bombings in Syria caught Ken's attention. He knew there was a L'Arche community in Syria and immediately became concerned for their welfare. He wrote to his friends Hollee and Zoel who are former L'Arche Vancouver assistants, and now represent L'Arche nationally and internationally, to see if they knew about the situation in Syria. Through Zoel Ken was able to connect with Ghada, L'Arche Al Safina's Community Leader. In his email Ken introduced himself and his reason for writing.

"How's your country doing? How are the people living in L'Arche Syria? I want you to be safe. Someday, I want you guys to move to a different place, somewhere safe."

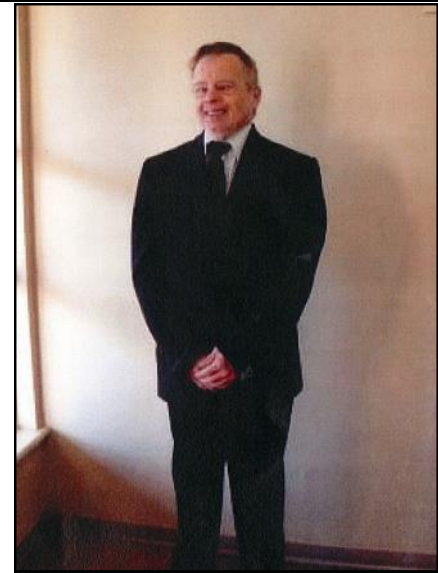
A few days later Ghada replied and assured him that they were indeed safe.

"...The Damascus community goes well. We have a lot of difficulties but in Damascus where the community is situated... there is no bombing. Our community helps a lot of people who have left their homes because of bombing and who are in camps in Damascus. These are people who need food and friendship and we try to help them."

She also added that she would tell the rest of the community that they have a friend in Vancouver who is concerned and is praying for them.

We often think there's nothing we can do when we watch the news. Ken's simple act of kindness reminds us that that we can make a difference.

Ken continues to pray for his friends in Syria.



Ken sent this photo of himself to L'Arche Syria. They replied with the photo below



Thank you ... Merci... ... شكراً

Denise's Desk continued

And **WALK** in it. We will take action and keep moving forward, trusting that God is walking with us.

What happens when we **STAND, LOOK, ASK, AND WALK**? We find **REST** for our souls. We find tranquility, satisfaction, peace and refreshment. This makes the journey worthwhile.

Thank you for being part of our journey. We look forward with hope to the road ahead.

Community Leader / Executive Director

Memorials and Tributes

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

In Memory:

Joyce Callaway	Rick Loughran
Olga Carter	Lorna McSherry
David Davies	Cana Mu
Gwenda Dunlop	Arleigh Slanina
Fred Dunston	

In Honour:

Philip Beeby



What's New

CONNECTIONS

HOSTED BY L'ARCHE GREATER VANCOUVER

EVERY SECOND FRIDAY OF THE MONTH
SEPTEMBER THROUGH DECEMBER
2016
- SEPT 9. OCT 14. NOV 11. DEC 9 -
7:00PM—8:30PM
L'ARCHE GREATER VANCOUVER
7401 SUSSEX AVE, BURNABY
FREE EVENT—PLEASE RSVP

A FUN EVENING FOR
YOUNG (AND YOUNG AT HEART)
ADULTS WITH AND WITHOUT
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.

BY SHARING, LAUGHTER,
GAMES AND OTHER ACTIVITIES,
WE HOPE TO CONNECT WITH
ONE ANOTHER AND BUILD
FRIENDSHIPS

TO RSVP AND FOR MORE INFO CONTACT:
ANNETTE KUHN
604-435-1544 EXT. 34
trainer@larchevancouver.org

www.larchevancouver.org

Connections will continue in the new year on every second Friday of the month .

Upcoming Events

Plan now to attend the opening of our 2017 Art Together Show on April 27, 2017 at the Amelia Douglas Gallery—700 Royal Ave New Westminster, BC V3M 1J2.

The show will run from April 27, 2017—June 10, 2017.



Funding Update

We are grateful to have been approved for funding from:

- Celtic Cross Foundation**—\$10,000 for Community Life Program
- St Mary's Health Foundation**—\$10,000 for supports for healthy living
- Project Advance (Archdiocese of Vancouver)** - \$5,000 for Community Life Program

Thank you for supporting the work of L'Arche locally

If you prefer to donate online go to: www.larchevancouver.org and click **“Donate Now”**

CONTACT:

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

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- I would like to become an Ark Builder by committing to a gift of \$500 or more a year.
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- I wish to remain **anonymous**

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Please make cheques payable to: *L'Arche Foundation of Greater Vancouver*
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