



Saying Good-Bye, Remembering, Celebrating, Memorializing¹

Vignettes from Various L'Arche Communities

■ **Robina:** When Robina was hospitalized, she was never alone. We had a roster where friends and community members could sign up to visit. Each person who visited could add a note in the journal we kept by Robina's bed. This journal of Robina's last days is precious to us.

■ **Donald:** Donald died at home of Alzheimer disease. I was moved by the way some of his housemates responded. Marie-Claire usually withdrew when we gathered with a guitar to sing. On the day we knew Donald was dying, she stayed with us and asked that we sing for Donald "Country road, take me home to the place where I belong." The day after Donald died John kept looking into Donald's empty room. John himself has Alzheimer disease. When I inquired whether he wanted to say something, he began to sing "Amazing Grace." Alligators were special to Donald. The first Christmas after he died our house received a gift of an alligator tree decoration. Each year when we hang it on the tree we remember Donald, who was much loved by all of us.

■ **Helen:** After Helen died we planted a lilac bush, and we all held hands and remembered her and said a prayer. The bush reminds us of Helen, especially in the spring, when it blooms.

■ **Roy:** Roy was an exuberant man and he could swear as well as any sailor. At his funeral, we sang his favourite song, "Pop-Eye the Sailor Man," with great gusto and laughter, just as Roy himself used to sing it, except that our laughter was mingled with tears. It felt very right to sing "Pop-Eye." We knew Roy would have loved it!

■ **George:** The church was overflowing for George's funeral. A neighbour summed up the reason so many came to say farewell to this gruff, good man: "He never failed to say 'Hello' to me as he walked by."

1. **More than Inclusion** : Honouring the Contributions of People with Developmental Disabilities



■ **Peter:** We pass around a picture of Peter on the anniversary of his death. Each of us takes a moment with the picture. We may just look at it and remember Peter, or we may speak about him. Doing this gives us peace and builds our sense of togetherness.

■ **Larry:** We who had been with Larry when he died visited our L'Arche homes so that Larry's friends could hear the news firsthand and ask questions. At the visitation, we all shared memories of Larry. To tell these stories was deeply meaningful – a part of claiming for ourselves the gifts Larry had given us and integrating his loss. Some were short – “He gave me a kiss!” “He liked apple pie.” But every story represented a special pool of memory. The mix of serious and funny stories enabled us to laugh and to weep together and to arrive at a sense of celebration and gratitude for Larry's life.

■ When Mel's father died, his house hosted the shiva. On the anniversary of his father's death, Mel stands up in the synagogue and joins those saying Kaddish for loved ones.

■ When someone with a disability loses a family member, we make sure that one of us assistants is available to go with the person to the visitation and funeral. Sometimes others in the family may not want the person with a disability there, but they usually are happy when they realize we will come too. Our accompaniment takes the pressure off them, and it allows the person with a disability to be present for as long or as short a time as he or she wishes.

■ Someone arranged that each of the assistants and people with disabilities in Larry's house had a red rose to put in the casket or in a vase beside it. His special friend, Audrey, had a white rose.

■ We mark the anniversaries of deaths of our parents or people close to us, lighting a candle, mentioning their names when we have prayer after dinner, perhaps visiting the grave. Almost everybody wants to remember people who have loved them, even if it's hard.

■ Our community has a memorial wall with pictures of people in the community who have died. It gives others comfort to know that when they die they will not be forgotten because their pictures will also be on the wall. Each year on November 2nd, which is All Souls' Day in the Christian calendar, we bring pictures of parents and others who have died and we have a service of remembrance.

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