



Testimonials¹

Bill Collins

I visited Bill Collins shortly before his 85th birthday. He was becoming quite weak and had moved into a house that his L'Arche Vancouver community had adapted to function as a nursing home for three of its senior residents. Bill took pleasure in showing me his life-story photo album. Some pages elicited stories he would share: "That's Nelson Eddy – our cat. I ran over its tail with the lawn mower. Good that it wasn't a power mower or it would not have had any tail left!" Bill's friend, Craig Herren, an assistant in the Seniors' house, was making a video with Bill using stills from his album along with Bill's reminiscences. I sensed the pleasure and pride they shared in their project.

Bill died a few months one of his community to describe his death and end of life plan had helped. count:

"Bill died on Palm Sunday, ter. Some who mourned fort that Bill returned to day. He had some pain taken to hospital. He died den onset pneumonia. He go in the Sun Run that mor-evident a few days before Bill had participated annu-to support Parkinson's re-projects, making the short-chair in recent years.

"Bill was persuaded to prepare an end of life plan because he understood it would help others when he died. He did not like to talk about his death. He would politely change the subject or imply that someone else was going to die but not him!"

after my visit. I asked friends, Denise Haskett, how his having made an Here is part of her ac-

the Sunday before Eas-his passing took com-his God on this special that afternoon and was that evening from sud-had been registered to ning, although it was that he was not up to it. ally in this fund-raiser search and other good er course in his wheel-

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subject or imply that someone else was going to die but not him! However, when asked who he would like to give his things to, he lit up and was quite clear. 'My electric bed could go to Guy, a good friend who has lived many years with me in L'Arche. My wheelchair and walker can be given to whoever needs them. My stereo can go to a drop-in center for street people, whichever one wants it, and my CDs and tapes as well.' (Bill had a wonderful collection of classical music, which he loved.) He also wanted \$100 to go to his foster child in Zambia. Bill was always looking for ways to help and to give of what he had. This process of naming who would get what seemed to give Bill a lot of joy and peace. He had great clarity about his wishes.

For those planning his funeral, to be able to follow through on the wishes he had expressed in his plan was very helpful and consoling. For example, he wanted an open coffin so his friends could say goodbye to him, and he had named his pallbearers. Following his wishes was a way of really honouring this great and humble man."

* Part of this story appeared in the *United Church Observer* September 2002.

Cécile Aubé

Cecile Aubé, a 75-year-old woman, quietly became a leader in her L'Arche Ottawa community during the months she was dying of cancer. Says her friend and seniors' club leader Rebecca Happy, "Cecile's capacity to speak about death matter-of-factly and peacefully pushed the rest of us to grow. She was able to ask us questions that helped us think about death."

I saw the effects of Cecile's leadership in one of my friends, also a woman in her seventies, who had recently been told by her doctor that she had a heart condition. My friend had been completely unwilling to acknowledge this news, but when Cecile spoke with such naturalness about her terminal cancer, my friend, for the first time, talked about her condition and acknowledged that she was "a little bit scared." Cecile had a friend who had been on a respirator before she died, and she was clear she didn't want this sort of intervention. With assistance, she arranged a power of attorney and expressed her wishes for her care. She wanted to remain as

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active as possible, and with the help of those in her house and the seniors' club, she did so. In the months before she died she was able to contact and visit many of the people she had stayed in touch with over the years.

A few days before she died, Cecile asked for the Catholic prayers and anointing for the sick, inviting a few friends to be with her. Comments Rebecca, "She was a woman of faith, and she always seemed to find joy in just trying to be a good person and to love God and love her neighbour. She must have had pain, but when she complained about pain, it was in much the same way that she might complain if she had stubbed her toe. And she was gracious about receiving personal care from us. She was amazing!"

The day Cecile died; some of us from the seniors' club came to have lunch with her in her home. She wasn't feeling like eating and she was very tired, but she sat up with us. She talked about going to heaven. Afterwards, we helped her back to bed, and she passed away that afternoon."

For Reflection: Bill and Cecile made a success of their lives, living with good humour, dignity and generosity until the end. They are remembered for this, not for having disabilities.