

# **The Harcourt Herald September 2023**

The Harcourt United Church Community





## ***Harcourt Memorial United Church***

An Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Canada

We are a people of God called together and sent forth by Christ to... **Seek. Connect. Act.**

**Our Mission:** Inspired by the Spirit, we participate in Christian practices that strengthen us in the building of just, compassionate and non-violent relationships.

**Our Vision Statement:** To be an authentic community of spiritual growth and service.

**Our Core Values:** Risk... Respect... Responsibility... Vulnerability... Trust

**Our Purpose:** To welcome and strengthen in community all who wish to serve God and follow the way of Jesus

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## From the Editor's Desk – Marion Auger

After the great summer we had (and still have for a little longer), it is time again to think about the next set of the Harcourt Herald monthly issues. Many of you know that I spent the last two months in hospital with open-heart surgery. While the operation itself was successful, I suffered a series of

complications, keeping me longer at St. Mary's than I had ever dreamed possible. While I am definitely on the mend, I realize I will not ever be returning to "normal." As someone pointed out in one of the articles in this issue, I have to resign myself to forms of "Diminishment." I realize that I will not be able to do this Editor job for ever. Is there anyone who would like to work with the editorial team? You would be gratefully welcomed!

As for my stay at the hospital, I have nothing but praise for the staff – nurses, PSWs, doctors; they always stayed friendly, efficient, and cheerful. I have nothing to complain about except the shortage of staff: where is the money for the quality health care we need?

But what kept me going throughout were all the good wishes, prayers, food, a full session of energy recovery, my Harcourt family sent me.

And many of the cards included personal experiences. How important sharing is! Janet Gostonyi even send three cards. Thus this issue with its focus on medical challenges and deep spiritual insights.

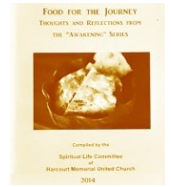


So, as we think about future issues of the Harcourt Herald, we are wondering what you, dear reader, would like to see the Herald focus on for the next little while. Drop me an email, give me a call, write me a note, talk to me at the Harcourt Cafe... We would like feedback from you about your expectations of the Harcourt Herald over the next year or so.



## Food for the Journey - The Blessing of Diminishment

Bill Chapman for the Spiritual Life Committee



Often I hear my voice, in my head or even in conversation, confess to frustration, annoyance or grief because something else in my being has ceased to function at my level of expectation or desire. Joints that aren't flexible, muscles that ache when I do unexpected tasks, ears that don't hear with the acuity I expect ...the list is endless. And when I get together with friends our dominant conversation focuses on what's not working and how long it takes to get it repaired! Do you know how long it takes, the waiting hours for cataracts or knees or hips or...

Then in the middle of all that something within my soul yells STOP!

Listen to yourself.

Hear what you are saying.

I live in a First world country where life expectancy far exceeds the 3 score and ten that I expected as a young man. I live in a country with free health care, good physicians and surgeons and my complaint is not that I won't get care but that I may have to wait. Granted, for some, the waiting is filled with pain, with fear, with very real limitations. But where in the midst of all this do I take time, in my diminished state, to practice gratitude. To listen for the voice of the spirit saying "hear me in the midst". Where do I pause and say "thank you to the spirit of life and love" who gave me all these years of activity, work, delight, family and fun that wore out the body I inhabit? Where do I pause and reflect on all that my body has been enabled to do, to appreciate it has earned its limitation. Where can I wear my diminished self with pride in being a "good and faithful servant" that offered myself "in service, which is my acceptable worship".

Five years ago I had the first of 4 surgeries on my eyes. I have 50% vision in one eye and diminished vision in the other. Four years ago I stopped driving because I realized what I was missing, what I couldn't see and although I am legally allowed to drive I have forced myself to not drive for fear of hurting someone else.

Diminishment.

Limitation.

Yet in not driving I have been overwhelmed with the love and generosity of others who drive for me. In not driving I have come to delight in walking and re-experiencing the gift of nature. In not driving I am learning humbleness and developing a non-competing attitude to

those who can and do drive. In losing quality of vision I have learned so much about myself and learned to lean on and trust the Spirit in so many ways. (In not driving I have also learned to be a better passenger.)

There is a point in all our lives where we will live with Diminishment.

The Diminishment can become our identity or it can become something the Spirit can use to create a new, wiser, gentler and more loving identity. Then Diminishment becomes a stripping away of the unessential parts of self that allows us to shine through with new clarity.



## The Colour of Friends - Judi Morris

More Voices hymn 138 Lyrics – first verse, reads:

*My love colours outside the lines,  
Exploring paths that few could ever find  
And takes me into places where I've never been before  
And opens doors to worlds outside the lines*

My life, I have come to realize, is speckled from the souls and spirits of so many people. These abundant and diverse flecks mingle in distinct ways with **my** soul and **my** spirit. They brighten, influence, and nourish me with their colouring outside the lines.

The influence of those as close to me as my skin is abundant and clear; however the obscure, less involved and even somewhat fleeting, contribute albeit at times perspicaciously. At what point have they slipped into our lives? A hairdresser maybe, someone you interact

with on a committee, or maybe a neighbour. They slip in and shed their prism to a degree unnoticed; that is until you are faced with a possibility of losing them.

They contribute to who we are and our sense of purpose. Their radiance lights up the corners of our lives through the roles they play. Their significance is subtle and unsuspecting.

Several friends have suffered serious health issues this spring. They were not close as my skin, yet it became apparent the loss of them would affect things I say and do every day. The loss of these friends would impart huge changes in my life that cannot be replaced in any way. The corners of my life they colour and brighten are of necessary and extreme importance to me and who I am.



Thoughts of their loss filled me with angst and brought me to a place where I began to realize how many unsuspecting people play these significant roles.

One such person is Marion Auger. I always liked and enjoyed Marion. She attended Women's Christmas several times and what a hoot. We enacted a play. Marion took the role of a Cailleach. Memories of her scrambling around in my front room hunched over with a shawl on her back still brings me tears of laughter. She encompassed all of us with yellow that day – happiness and good times. When surrounded by yellow we feel optimistic because the brain actually releases more serotonin when around this color.

Marion often attended the 9:00 a.m. service. She once asked me to write about a Christmas experience for the Herald. "No Pressure," she said, "Only if you are willing." I realized that became her Mantra.

Somewhere along the way I wrote again and she asked if I would be interested in helping with the Herald. The mantra again. "No Pressure. Only if you are willing."

With only stolen moments available to me, I agreed to do what I could and expressed my interest to interview Sandy Middleton, whom I saw as the Bird Man of Harcourt.

You will have noticed the interviews have become a monthly contribution since then.

Marion's direction and encouragement kept me at it. She has a way of impressing me with her remarkable ideas and guiding me while allowing my own creativity and ideas to flourish. Her influence in her approach to people has had a positive, orange effect on me. Orange is a bold invigorating color. It suggests strength, endurance and success. It represents enthusiasm, encouragement and determination.

Marion has gone through a heart operation of a most serious nature. I felt confident she would sail through it; I don't know why I thought that. She did not. Each day called for prayers to become more serious and intentional. Green, which represents new growth, hope, life, and harmony flowed into my corners and to Spirit.

The thought of her disappearing from my life shattered my core. It was at that point I realized how much Marion coloured my life. She had showered me with blue - I explored paths I never found in myself and she took me places with my writing where I have never been. Purple came - creativity, wisdom, and dignity. Marion has opened doors outside the lines for me, that until now have been closed.

To me, Marion is a prism unto herself. It gave me cause and pause to review other friendships that bear remarkable importance and value and I have taken for granted. So many people; so many colours.

It took Marion's illness to awaken me to how much all friendships, close and distant, contribute a beautiful array of colour into corners of our lives.

My life colours outside the lines.

## **My Story of Seeing Marion in the Hospital – Nicholas Auger**

*(Nikki is my 11 year old grandson. He visited me twice in the hospital. For the Harcourt Herald, I asked him to write his impressions of his visits. On his first visit, he read me a funny story he had written for and about me and the nurses in the hospital. - Ed)*



In this short paragraph I will tell you about what was going on in my head when Marion, my grandmother, was in the hospital.



As I first walked into the hospital, I was very worried for my grandmother. I had heard the stories from my father about the wires hooking her up to machines, and tubes pumping stuff into her, so I expected the worst.

But as I entered Omi's room to give her the short story I had written down for her, I was slightly relieved as I saw her improving state. As I was creating my story, I had feared that she wouldn't like it that much, but as I read it to her, she was smiling the whole time, she even laughed a bit! I was delighted until I remembered that I was in a hospital and remembered that Omi had had heart surgery a couple of weeks back.

As I left the hospital that day, I was happy that she would live another day and that she would eventually recover.

The second day that I went to the hospital I saw that there were less wires and tubes than the first time, Omi seemed in better shape, and we were in a different room. She still wasn't able to get up yet, but I knew that that time was coming.

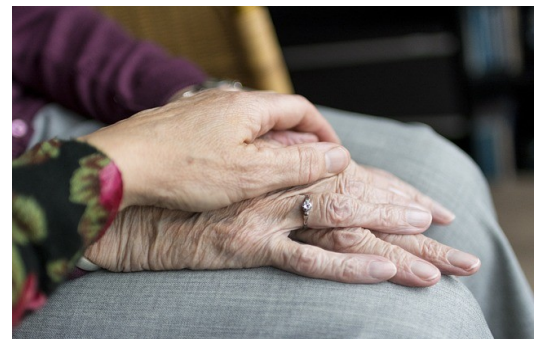
As this story went on, I learned a valuable detail in life: never give up on your loved ones, encourage them and always hope for the best no matter what discouragement they are feeling, push them to keep living, even if only a little bit longer.

## **Providing Support to Those with Medical Challenges - Lorraine Holding**

Medical challenges? My experiences have been to support others while they lived through their challenges.

When my Mom had her stroke in 2010, her most significant challenge was aphasia – loss of most of her ability to speak, read and write. Moving to a retirement home, after living in only two farm homes during her 90 years, was a huge change. Dealing with her frustration was difficult during my visits. I learned to depend on others to be company for her, and retirement home staff to provide daily care. We welcomed opportunities to sit in the facility's courtyard filled with flower beds, and to

share a banana or cookie for an afternoon break. Our rather one-sided conversations were punctuated with her facial expressions (smiles and frowns) or hand gestures. I certainly could tell when she liked or disliked a staff person or meal. During her four years in this situation, I



was fortunate to be on the executive of the Guelph/Wellington Stroke Recovery Chapter (with several Harcourt friends) and gained a better understanding of the brain and effects of stroke.

Three years ago, one of my closest friends developed significant medical issues that proved too much to overcome. Her final two months were spent in hospital during our first winter lockdown. She always expressed her appreciation for the medical team, even when extra procedures were needed. Our telephone chats kept us linked when visiting was not possible.



How have I grown through offering my support and care? Never in my life did I lean towards being a nurse or other medical professional. However, I have learned that being a supportive caregiver to my Mom, and supportive friend to others, includes ordinary small gestures. It also includes being an attentive listener, whether by watching for signals or hearing a weakening voice. Becoming more familiar with medical jargon is a given.

Most of all, I've learned that personal contact is important when others are navigating medical challenges. Keeping in touch with, and depending on updates from, other care providers contribute to my own well-being. Of course, my faith and spiritual practice to worship weekly with others always keep me grounded for whatever challenges come my way.

## **The gift of time and affection - Ann Middleton**

It is many years since I had breast cancer. Close to 25 years since the first bout and 20 since the second. These were difficult times. I remember the fear and the waiting, the effect this illness had on our family. But the things that stick with me most are the kindnesses.

The first time round, there was a critical shortage of radiation facilities and technicians in southern Ontario. I had the choice of going to Buffalo or Thunder Bay for my five weeks of daily treatment. It puzzles me still why I chose to go 1500 kms away when I could have received treatment a couple of hours down the QEW. Misplaced patriotism perhaps. Anyway I found myself in Thunder Bay in November and December of 1999. I stayed at a motel on the Trans Canada Highway along with other men and women from around the province receiving treatment. We did not bond. In spite of having email and a phone, I was lonely. I hated eating my meals solo, but I seemed incapable of reaching out to others in the same boat.

A very few days after I arrived, I received a piece of mail. Inside the envelope was a card with a beautiful photograph on the front. The card had no writing or message, but an unaddressed envelope and sheet of paper fluttered out when I opened it. I understood that I could send this card to someone else. The small sheet of white writing paper, perhaps torn from a notepad, had handwriting covering both sides. It was a message from the wife of one of Sandy's work colleagues. Susan was a busy social worker with family responsibilities, but she wrote me a message and enclosed one of Steve's beautiful cards every day for the next many weeks. One day there was no mail for me and I was shattered. The next day, to my relief and delight, Canada Post delivered two envelopes. Those letters were a ray of sunshine in the dreary late fall days. They talked about ideas and life in general. They were sometimes funny and always sustaining.



When I returned home, Susan asked if she had perhaps gone “over the top” with all the mail. I told her how important those letters were. Since then, I have sent postcards through the mail and emails to friends and relatives undergoing medical traumas or close to the end of their lives.

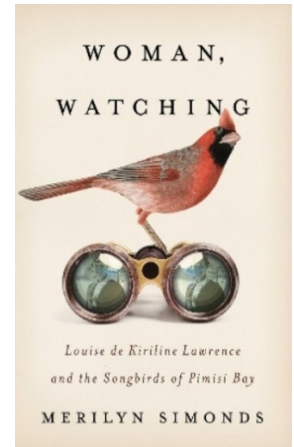
That was the first time I had breast cancer. The second time, the treatment was in Hamilton. I belonged to a walking group then. Every day for the five weeks of my treatment, one of the walkers drove me to Hamilton. It was November again, but the colours of fall lingered in the fields and forests of the farms along Highway 55 and the back lanes of southern Ontario. I took my friends for lunch if they had time on the way home. Like Susan, they gave me the gift of their time and their affection.

My memories of the treatment and angst of that time have mostly faded but the recollection of those kindnesses will be with me forever.

## Gratitude for the gifts at the door – thrillers to gingersnaps – Ann Middleton

In March, Sandy and I, and Moira, our daughter who lives in Guelph, got Covid within days of each other. Moira and I recovered quickly. Sandy's illness lingered on, eventually becoming pneumonia and stretching out for several more weeks.

During the first days when we couldn't get out at all, a friend did the drug store run for us, picking up prescriptions and Ensure when Sandy couldn't swallow. A friend dating back to university days rang the doorbell one morning, leaving several plastic bags and tubs on the step. By the time I opened the door, she was standing at a distance with her mask in place, offering to do the shopping. She had brought soup, some puzzles and the greatest gift of all – five books, most of them murder mysteries. I have fairly broad tastes in reading, but when life isn't going well, I always immerse myself in murder where things are either really grim or so ridiculous they make me laugh. Once Sandy was able to read, a neighbour offered him a copy of *Woman, Watching*, the riveting story of Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, a survivor of the chaos in Russia following World War I, nurse to the Dionne Quintuplets and internationally recognized student and recorder – for 45 years – of the many species of birds in her northern Ontario corner of the world.



As I recovered and Sandy got briefly better, then worse, landing in hospital, a shepherd's pie and a pad Thai arrived at the door. A friend brought gingersnaps, her grandmother's recipe, with a heart drawn on the bag. A choir member brought flowers. These gifts were so welcome, particularly when I was visiting Sandy at the hospital twice a day – in the morning to catch the doctor and have morning coffee around 10 (Timmies from the hospital) as we do at home, and in the afternoon for our daily tea time. I brought cookies and tea in a thermos from home. By evening, I didn't have much energy for cooking.

Our son and daughter came from Ottawa and Toronto and Moira in Guelph was a regular hospital visitor. When Sandy told one of the kids that he really missed toast and marmalade (the hospital provides very cakey gluten-free muffins for breakfast), our Ottawa son – here for the weekend – drove up to the hospital before breakfast with toast and marmalade. It's fortunate that Scots like their toast cold. After that, we kept a plastic container of toast in Sandy's room to go with the jar of Scotland's favourite spread. We also made sure he had bananas.



The mail box brought really silly get well cards that were a delight to read and a bright spot on the hospital window sill and later on the kitchen counter. And the affectionate email notes, phone calls and conversations with neighbours when I was out walking were a source of real support.



In those wretched few weeks, our spirits were constantly lifted by the kindness of friends, many of them part of our church community.

Thank you.

## Reflections from a hospital stay - Sandy Middleton

In March of this year, I became ill with Covid-19. Although Ann also tested positive, she quickly returned to full health. I, by contrast, suffered a severe infection with nasty side effects that lasted for more than two weeks. As I gradually recovered, I attempted to resume my regular routines, including my morning walk beside the river at Royal City Park.

Just when I thought I was getting back to normal, I returned home one morning feeling weak and very short of breath. As my breathing difficulties worsened, on the wise insistence of Ann and our daughter Moira, I eventually, and reluctantly, went by ambulance to the Emergency Department of the General General. Following a battery of tests, and a chest X-ray, I was admitted to the hospital. My stay lasted for 12 days during which I was treated for pneumonia, including removal of fluid from my lungs. As I lay in bed, I had much time to think about my predicament and what might be the outcome. Some of my thoughts I have recorded below.



### 1. Apprehension

When I went to the Emergency Department, it was with apprehension of what might lie ahead. From experience, I knew that passage through Emergency would likely be uncomfortable and slow, as the staff carried out the necessary diagnostic tests and a hospital bed was found. And that proved to be the case. I was admitted to hospital 30 hours after arrival. But before that, as I lay on my desperately uncomfortable gurney, I





tried to occupy my mind with what the medical implications of my condition might be. Fear of the unknown is not good for one's well-being. However, as is often my experience in particular settings, the words of hymns and anthems brought me hope and comfort. In this case two choir anthems came to mind. The first was *The Storm is Passing Over* with its refrain of "Have courage my soul and let us journey on." The second was *We Are Not Alone* with its repeated words of reassurance "We are not alone, God is with us." As I realized that things were no longer under my control, I found hope, and reassurance in these two anthems. So, it came as a great relief when a bed became available and I was wheeled up to a room on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor. In short order I fell asleep, comfortable at last, as I surrendered myself to the medical staff now in charge of my care.

## 2. Kindness

Despite my uncomfortable experience in Emergency, I was struck by the thoughtful kindness of the attendant nurse there, who did her best to ease my discomfort and help pass the time. She saw to it that I was warm, supplied with lots to drink, and engaged me in meaningful conversation. As I observed the busyness of the Emergency Department, I was struck by the difficult circumstances under which the staff were working – crowded windowless space, staff shortage, and never-ending demands on their time. Theirs is not an easy job and yet they did their best to provide care for their patients. The same can be said for the staff members who attended to my needs on the 7th floor. I never heard them complain. At all times I was treated with respect, sensitivity and gentleness. We hear much these days about the sad state of our health system. I, however, have nothing but praise for those dedicated people who, despite the obvious difficulties under which they work, carry out their responsibilities with such professionalism and thoughtful kindness.



## 3. Community



One of the great gifts of my time in hospital was the awareness that I gained of what it means to be in community. I was deeply touched and overwhelmed by the many thoughtful messages, cards, prayers, and visits that I received from family, long-time friends, and so many Harcourt folks, particularly those in the choir. One afternoon, as I was dozing quietly, I was startled by a voice that I did not recognize. As I looked around, there was no one in my room but, in clear tones I heard the voice say: "I am praying for you." What a blessing. At that moment I knew that I was not alone. I had a new appreciation of what it meant to be part of a supportive and caring community. And to

think, as with my health, I have taken it for granted for so long. As I looked around at my fellow patients, I wondered how many of them were as privileged, as was I, to share in community.

#### **4. Gratitude**

Finally, my hospital experience left me with a renewed sense of gratitude for so much. Each night, before I settled for sleep, I was grateful for music and my Sony CD player. That decades-old device, with its superb acoustics, let me relax into sleep, while either listening to the soaring beauty of choral church music, or the intimate beauty of instrumental chamber music. While I listened to the music that fed my soul, I offered thanks for the many gifts I had received during the day, difficult though the day may have been. I gave thanks for the healing gifts of my doctors, nurses, PSWs, and all the staff that make a hospital run smoothly. And, of course, I offered thanks for my gradually improving health.



But on a larger scale this practice reminded me that I had so much more for which to be thankful. Now, as I end each day, I offer a quiet “thank you” for the reassurance that I am not alone, and that God is with me. This renewed awareness helped carry me through the low times in hospital, as it permitted me to release my anxieties, while trusting that my well-being was in God’s hands, and that all would be well.

**So many blessings. Thanks be to God.**

#### **What I Learned This Summer - Andre Auger**

After the summer that Marion and I just had, it made sense to see the Editor choose a topic related to medical challenges and lessons learned.

As I reflect on this “lost summer,” I realize I learned much – some I learned grudgingly, some came as fleeting insights that I know are important, but have yet to sink in, and some are now ingrained and almost second nature.

I learned that I am able to “keep on keeping on.” As days in hospital turned into weeks and the trip back and forth to St Mary’s became a necessary drudgery, I realized that I was able to set aside all expectations about the day and just accept it as it was, without judging. What I would now characterize as a “nightmare” was eminently bearable at the time. That probably has some bearing on what we humans are capable to endure when we have to.

I also realized that the theology I had evolved over the years, in the comfort of my privileged middle-class life, proved remarkably resilient, as I tried to make sense of what was happening to us. Perhaps it's because I had long ago ditched the notion that God was "in charge" and "looking after me," in favour of an image of God as a much more generic loving force for growth and blossoming for all creation, in the midst of the obvious contingency and randomness and complex interaction of others' actions and of natural processes. Of course, God is always present, nudging the universe toward its perfection. But God deals with what is and does not contravene the laws of nature "supernaturally." So I did not need to find a reason why God would "allow" this medical situation to affect someone I loved so dearly. What "good" was this kind of God, then? I knew God was a Presence within, always available has "meaning-maker." That was enough to see me through.

I also realized that, while I no longer see "prayer" as trying to get God to do something God would not otherwise do, I remain convinced that prayer is a crucial part of the world God experiences, and God uses the intentional energy of our prayer to nudge the universe forward. It is useless to ask if our prayer is effective: that turns prayer into a means to a particular end we have in mind, and we always want to measure the efficacy of the means we use to the ends we want. I think we're being told that measuring efficacy of our prayer is none of our business. Our prayer is our contribution to a cosmic, not a local, dynamic.

Less pleasantly, I became aware of the many verses in both the Jewish and the Christian Testaments which talk about the "valley of death," the "vale of tears"... And I realized that, for most of my life, these were distant terms which I could hardly apply to my comfortable life. Finding myself now in it made me realize the pervasiveness of this life condition – the homeless, the addicted, those struggling with mental health issues, those displaced by war or economics or climate catastrophies. It made me realize that my personal theology might be useful to me, but of not much value to those who are constantly in the valley of death, since I had rarely had to face such cruel realities. It made me wonder if a theology coming out of a life of privilege has any universalizable value, outside its use to me... Just a humbling realization.

Most significantly, as I watched Marion struggle with the vicissitudes of her medical challenge, I became aware of the truth of Teilhard de Chardin's understanding of our role in evolution. We are created for growth. That is our natural bias. So, any form of diminishment is deeply troubling to us. Teilhard suggests a way that we might always be contributing to growth and blossoming, even when we might be experiencing diminishment.

We grow through what we do – "activities of growth," he would say – as well as by what happens to us – "passivities of growth," such as life's favourable circumstances. Similarly, we diminish through what we do – "activities of diminishment," like our bad habits, bad decisions,

sinfulness, etc. - and through what happens to us – “passivities of diminishment,” like what was happening to Marion, and, by extension, to me, and to all those in difficult circumstances. Teilhard would say that our life is governed by these four forces. To be faithful to our role in evolution (what he calls “Christogenesis,” or the building up of the Christ) we are called to

- increase our activities of growth,
- benefit from our passivities of growth,
- minimize our activities of diminishment (“avoid sin”), and
- find ways to transform our passivities of diminishment into activities of growth however and whenever we can.

Through these two months of trial, I watched us do this, in small ways, but nonetheless. It has convinced me that it is still possible to grow in the midst of diminishment. I don’t suggest it’s easy or obvious. And I don’t suggest that I know how to do it all the time. I am merely suggesting that it is a more hopeful way of coping with our declining years...

It is good to see Marion improve daily, but we all know “life is short, and we have never too much time to gladden the hearts of those who are travelling the dark journey with us. Oh be swift to love, make haste to be kind.” I am just grateful we can reach some “new normal,” and continue our journey together. And may I learn the strange art of converting “passivities of diminishment” into activities of growth.



## **“One of the Best Things...” - Barbara Peloso**

*(Barbara is a spiritual director who lives in Elora, and has for a long time been associated both with Loyola House and with the Guelph Ecumenical Week of Guided Prayer. She is also a close personal friend, and offered to write an article in response to my request. - Ed)*

At about 6:30pm on March 11, 2007, I was in a serious accident that changed my life forever. A car drove through a stop sign and T-boned my car. I had life threatening injuries: ruptured diaphragm, broken hips and multiple other fractures.

On one level this would appear to be one of the worst events of my life.

However, on another level this was one of the best things that has happened in my life. The mystery of grace!



Very early on, when I was not fully conscious, the words “Light shines in the darkness and the darkness can not dispel the Light.” came to me. This turned out to be the truth and depth of my experience. I knew that God was with me and it didn’t matter what happened.... in life or death I would be okay.

As this article indicates... it is life that I was given, but in many ways a changed one. I learned so much.

Here are some of the learnings from that time that stay with me to this day.

God is present in ALL of life and that Divine Presence changes everything!

I learned how strong I am as I worked hard at my recovery over many, many months. That sense of grace and confidence is still with me.

I discovered how much I am loved. Yes, God loves me, but I also learned how many people genuinely cared for me. That love and support was a surprising revelation to me. I truly didn’t know how much I was loved. I remain in gratitude and awe for this love to this day.

I confess that I don’t want to go through another accident. It was very hard and painful. And yet, I know that it was one of the best things that has happened to me. I learned so much that has remained with me to this day.



I am grateful everyday for the gifts of life, love, family and friends.



## The Fall – Marilyn Whiteley

It should have been a day of celebration. On April 6, 1994, I got off the Yonge Street subway at St. Clair Avenue carrying a heavy leather tote bag. In it were the two copies of the *Changing Roles of Women* manuscript that I was to deliver to Elizabeth Muir in the nearby United Church headquarters building where she worked. Later that day she would take the manuscript to the University of Toronto Press: the collection of essays that we had edited was finally ready for publication.

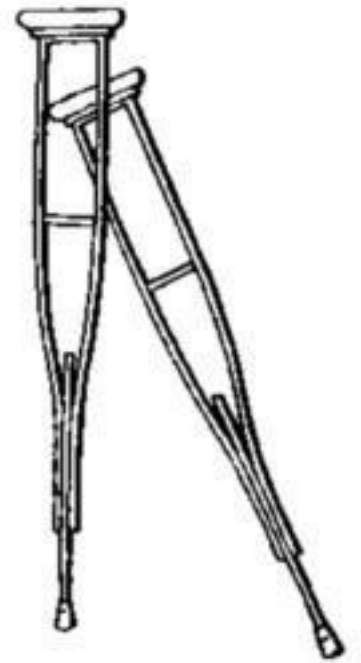
Snow had fallen the night before, and the sidewalk was slippery. I fell and yelped when sharp pain stabbed my left knee. Passersby gathered around as I lay in the snow, and the security guard came out of the federal building beside me. He carried a walkie-talkie, and he shouted into it over and over: "It's a lady, a quite old lady." I was only fifty-seven! Immediately I recognized the literal meaning of "adding insult to injury."

An ambulance took me to Sunnybrook Hospital. There I received medication to ease my pain and was hooked up to a heart monitor; then a staff member pushed my displaced knee cap back into place. After Hugh arrived from Guelph, the staff applied a Zimmer splint to keep my leg straight, provided me with a pair of wooden crutches, and gave me a brief lesson on how to use them.

After two weeks at home, I visited a Guelph orthopaedist as I had been told at Sunnybrook to do. He quickly observed that my patella was again dislocated, and he booked me for surgery that same evening. The next day I was released from hospital with the instructions to keep my leg straight, with the help of the Zimmer splint, for the next six weeks.

As a member of an OXFAM Canada committee, Hugh had made two visits to an OXFAM project in Namibia in southwest Africa. I had gone with him and had enjoyed my time in that fascinating country. Now, soon after I was released from the hospital, he was to go again. Alas, there was no way that I could go this time. Hugh travelled alone to visit the project, while I moped as I recovered from the surgery.

After Hugh returned from Namibia, he offered me what I thought of as a consolation prize: he was going to attend a meeting in Paris. Did I want to go with him? What woman would turn down a trip to Paris? But I did. I had learned about an interesting Methodist history conference in Rome that was at the same time as Hugh's meeting; I had been to France but never to Italy. Could we go to Rome and then have Hugh go on to his meeting in Paris? That



was what we arranged, though I was still clomping around on crutches even after I was released from the Zimmer splint. And so we set forth for Rome.

Arriving in Italy, we took the train to Ravenna. That turned out to be a wise choice, because the city had fascinating sights but was small enough not to be overwhelming. Then we took the train to Rome and checked into the hotel from which participants in my conference would be picked up to go to my meeting's venue in two days. After our evening meal, we learned how to use the metro and rode to the Coliseum stop. There was the Coliseum, illuminated by floodlights, looming up across the street! For a while we sat in wonder on a low wall, and then we returned to the hotel.



Hugh left very early the next morning to travel by train for Paris, and then I was on my own. After breakfast, I went up to the hotel's pleasant rooftop terrace and considered spending the day there. But after all, I was in Rome! I could not miss this opportunity. Suddenly I felt ready to tackle the challenge of sightseeing. Back I went to the Coliseum metro stop. From there I clomped my way to the Forum and then to the Coliseum. Next I went on a city sightseeing tour bus. I saw the sights at all its stops except for the one near the Victor Emmanuel monument. Instead of climbing all those steps, I stayed below and enjoyed a cool drink in the shade: the day was so hot that even natives were complaining.

By the end of the day, I still had not seen my highest priority destination, so the next morning I bravely set forth for the Sistine Chapel. I took the metro to the station nearest the chapel, paid the entrance fee, and then, along with the untold hordes, threaded my way along the labyrinthine route to the chapel. By the time I reached the it, I was exhausted, but I stood amazed near one side of the room as I surveyed the marvel. Before long, a woman approached me and motioned to the bench along the wall. She led me there and watched to make sure that I got a seat the moment that one of her family members stood up. Relief swept over me as I sat, rested, and studied the frescoes with awe.

This was a completely unexpected gift, but what if ... When enough energy had seeped back into me, I picked my way through the crowd to the other side, to see the paintings under which I had been seated. And yes—again someone came up to me and saw that I received a place on the bench. Finally, when I had breathed in the wonder of it all, I clomped my way to the exit. There I treated myself to a taxi ride back to the hotel. I checked out and waited with others for the bus that would take us out of the city to the conference centre.

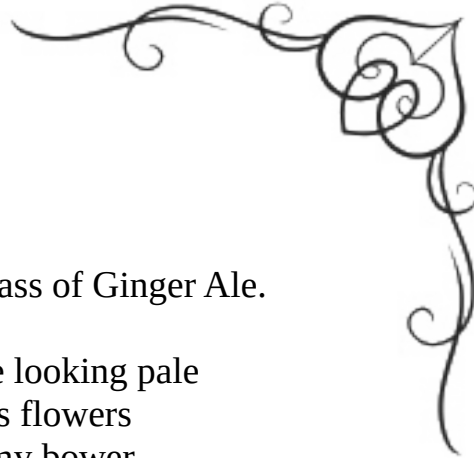
I found the conference engrossing, and when it was over, Hugh and I travelled to Venice and to Florence before returning briefly to Rome and then flying home. The trip itself had been wonderful, but there was a bonus: *I had done it*, despite my injured knee and my crutches! I discovered that I had more strength and spunk and gumption than I had realized, and that in itself was a great gift.



## The Rapture of Being Alive: Lisa Beattie



Lisa Beattie: for the Harcourt Herald



## **ILLNESSES - Arlene Davies-Fuhr**

Illness forces my body to rest, catch its breath  
Loll in pyjamas as I play Scrabble or Chess  
Listen to You Tubes, consume glass after glass of Ginger Ale.

Not one to stop, sickness jams on the brakes, leaves me looking pale  
Encourages me to lie on my swing, notice hibiscus flowers  
Savour the stillness, robin and cardinal in my bower  
Soup, crackers, and jello excite my palate at dinner hour.

Essentially there are so many positives to not feeling well  
Silly it takes an infection to make me relax, simply dwell.

## **An Interview with Harcourt's New Chair of Council, Kent Hoeg – Judi Morris**

I took an opportunity to meet up with Kent Hoeg, Chair of Harcourt's Council, on Zoom. While Kent has a lot to share about the state of our affairs, you will also read how easy he is to get along with and on committees. Kent speaks, without sugar-coating the current needs of Harcourt. If your thoughts have ever taken you to consider volunteering for anything at Harcourt and are unsure, Kent is there to help you: help find a place for you and see that you have the support you need.

Judi: I always begin with asking ...what brought you and Heather, to Harcourt?

Kent: Prior to Harcourt, Heather and I were living and working in Stratford. The company I was working for was closing its Canadian operations, so I had the choice of going and working in the head office in Michigan or finding another job. I chose to find another job. Good Fortune. I was able to land a position at U of G. and started there in July of 2007. I did commute from Stratford for the first year while our youngest son finished grade 13. We purchased a home in Guelph in May of 2008. We were very active in our Stratford church, so it was a no-brainer to find a church within Guelph.

Judi: Was it a United Church in Stratford?

Kent: Yes, it was. Heather started to look at the United churches in Guelph. She attended a few... I will say, and I don't know why I find this humorous, but I do. At the first church she sat in somebody else's proverbial seat and they asked her to move.

Judi: (with a laugh) Oh no!

Kent: (laughing). Yeah. Needless to say, that wasn't Harcourt. But when she did go to Harcourt, she was very happy with the service, so the next Sunday I attended and really liked the service. Back then there was children's time at the front and we liked that. We also strongly believed that a church should be affirming. The church in Stratford was, and we wanted a church that was very community focused. We felt that Harcourt absolutely met this. It was friendly in the sense that I remember John Phelps. He shook our hands the first time and remembered our names the next week. We tried a few churches and Harcourt was absolutely the one we felt the strongest connection to.

Judi: So. You are not a native of Guelph. You are an import.

Kent: I am an import. I was born in Grimsby, Ontario. I was the first generation Canadian. My brothers and parents were born in Denmark. By the time I was about nine months, we actually moved back to Denmark. I lived there until I was about 5 years old. My parents moved back to Canada....Vancouver...then about a year later they moved back to Grimsby. There was still one more trip back to Vancouver, and living in St. Catherine's, but for the most part, I always felt Grimsby was my home town that I grew up with. I should tell you that probably by the time I was 18, my parents had moved 20 times.

Judi: (with a dropped jaw) 20!....wow...wow.

Kent: 20. On their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, they hit their 25<sup>th</sup> move. A lot of the moves were within Grimsby itself. My father was a carpenter and painter and he would fix up a home and paint it then we would move to another place. It did introduce challenges as a kid. We lived in Vancouver twice....it does make an impression on you. I have no sentimental value in many things because we moved so often, we cleaned up and threw out stuff. So, I don't have a great attachment to many things.

Judi: That's interesting.... Now I would like to ask you, what would you like us to know about Kent?

Kent: I can think of a few things if you want to know about Kent the person. First and foremost – family. That means more to me than anything. We are close to our children. One lives in



Toronto, and one in Waterloo. They are both married without children. And my parents moved from Grimsby to Guelph about twelve years ago just so they could be close to us.

Judi: (with a grin). How many times have they moved in Guelph?

Kent: Ha Ha! Only once. I think by the time my Dad hit his mid-seventies he had enough. Definitely family is near and dear to me and important to myself. The other thing you might like to know about me is I am an eternal optimist. Very little takes me down, I don't often get depressed; if I have a little down time, I bounce back extremely quickly. So...I am an eternal optimist.

Judi: What do you attribute that to?

Kent: I don't know exactly what I would attribute that to. You know, I had a good childhood. There were no problems in the childhood. I wouldn't say my parents were eternal optimists... they were fine. I've just always been an optimist. Things don't get me down. I'm a happy kind of guy.

Not the opposite, but the one thing I really am, is extremely introverted when it comes to social gatherings and that I do attribute to moving all the time.

If I am on council or speaking in front of the congregation, if I'm doing coffee hour, that's all fine. I have no issues being in front of a crowd and speaking, but you put me in a social situation like even coffee hour, it's very uncomfortable.

Travelling is another thing you should know about Kent. I absolutely love to travel. Heather and I usually go on a couple trips a year. I would retire except I need the money to keep travelling.

If I could just say one more thing about that. As council chair, my nature, because I am an optimist, I am very much a go with the flow person, I trust people implicitly. The first time I meet somebody, I will trust them until they burn the trust. But I start off with complete trust. I let committees do what they need to do. Good is good enough. I don't need perfection. I don't nit pick on things. In general, if the messaging is good...I am happy with it.

Judi: Can you tell us about your family? I ask this, aware you and Heather are no strangers to tragedy and loss and I don't know how you wish to share. I do know, The Harcourt Community prayed deeply for and with you.

Kent: I can share a few things. As I said before, Family is the most important aspect of my being. I support my wife, Heather, my kids, my parents in every way I can. They know they can always count on me and they of course reciprocate with fantastic love and support.

It has been some tough years...David, our son died in October 2020. You may not know my Father died in February of 2022 and last month my Mother has just been diagnosed with cancer. So, yes there have been some tough times but I am a strong person. I do somewhat stay

strong for those around me. For Heather and so on. But again, I also don't dwell on the past very much. I always move forward and say good things are around the corner.

Judi: Can you tell us about your family and tell us a bit about David?

Kent: Sure. Let's start with David.... the youngest. He was the athlete of the family. He was the one who tried to please his parents the most. He was very much family oriented. After grade thirteen he stayed living with us and went to the University of Guelph, not wanting to move far away. At some point in his career, he was doing well enough at work he was able to move out, got an apartment, and things were looking pretty good. I do not want to go into too much detail about his death but let's say, mental health issues started to cause problems. He became very anxious around people/things. He found it hard to cope which took him in a downhill pattern. While his death is immeasurably tough, I love to reminisce about his loving nature and all the many, many good times we had.

Our middle child, a daughter, is Lisa. Lisa is incredibly bright and incredibly, I call it resourceful. She went to university. She has one diploma and two degrees in the sciences. I couldn't tell you what she does ... she uses computers to analyze DNA. She works at Mount Sinai in the lab. She is married to a gender-neutral individual – lovely person. Even though I told you it was important that our church was affirming, we didn't know our daughter was part of that community until much later. She had no trouble telling us and we certainly were happy that she found someone and she is now married to that individual.

Our Oldest son, is, again very bright. Very early on, he got a good job at Adobe. He was a software engineer, then he moved into management, then became a director and up the ranks. After some time, he said, "that was fantastic but I want to do other things." He did a couple of other ventures, all in computer science and currently he's director of a company based out of Germany. I will call it an Adobe competitor. He has staff all round the world. He's done very well for himself. He also is married to his childhood sweetheart, like I am. Heather and I went to the same high school in Grimsby and started going out in High school. We have been together forty-three years, married forty.

Judi: You are still working full time. Are you still at the University?

Kent: I am still at the University. I work in their central IT. So, I'm a computer guy. I've been in management long before the University. When I joined them, there was management positions available. Right now, I run the University's project management office so all IT projects come through my group. I am also responsible for what we call business operations at central IT. That would be the HR aspect, the finance aspect, the communications aspect, even culture for all of central IT.

Judi: I'm smiling because that's all the gifts you offer Harcourt.

Kent: (laughing). Well I hope I leverage my skill.

Judi: What feeds your spirit? (*After everything he has told us - we know what to expect.*)

Kent: When you say that, the very thing that comes to my mind is, family. If you said, come on Kent, stretch yourself, I would say community outreach. I don't think I do enough right now while I'm working full time and very heavily involved in Harcourt. I certainly do contribute financially to Chalmers, Food4Kids and Stepping Stone. A lot of my thinking goes around people who have food insecurities, housing challenges, and of course mental challenges. So there is no doubt when I do retire, I will find ways in which I can do outreach.

Judi: Is there any particular song/hymn that uplifts you? To me there has to be... you are an exceedingly, impressive calm person and I want to know, what makes that happen?

Kent: First of all, while I love listening to the church music, you won't find me singing it. I don't even sing when the congregation stands and sings, I do not. I listen. I can tell you the song I enjoy the most but I have not heard it at Harcourt. It was at my last two churches and it's, "Come in and Sit down." Come in and sit down, you are a part of the family.

Judi: Oh. I've heard that at Harcourt. ....quite a bit. Must have been before you came.

Kent: Have you? I absolutely love it. At some of my churches you could just shout out and request a song and that was the one I would request.

Judi: I'm going to tell Allison. I remember that hymn in the 9:00 a.m. service and the folk there were always quite engaged with it.

Harcourt keeps you pretty busy. Is there any time for hobbies?

Kent: With the exception of travel, I would say no. Heather would tell you that I am not allowed to retire until I find a hobby. The fact is Monday to Thursday If I'm not doing Harcourt work or University work, I am just vegging in front of the TV watching Netflix or Britbox. Heather and I enjoy murder mysteries. Since my parents moved to Guelph we have dinner with them every Friday night. Saturdays and Sunday we are visiting somebody or somebody is visiting us.

Judi: Not a lot of time for hobbies.....Now down to your Harcourt Hats, lets first just list them and attempt to learn about them one at a time and what you want us to know about each one.

Council Chair, and Finances.

Kent: Well finances....I used to be Chair of Finance. On council I was the Umbrella Counsellor for Stewardship, which meant I represented Finance and Stewardship. So I had ten or more years working with the Finance Committee, mostly Chair. It's not my current responsibility, however, because Heather is Envelope Secretary, I'm still involved with certain aspects of it. I do a lot of the reporting on the finances for Heather, I do the tax receipts. The Finance Committee may ask me for statistics and I do that.

Judi: That has to be a most difficult task in these times of Harcourt. Twenty years ago it would have been a different job than it is now.

Kent: Absolutely. Certainly, it's changed for Heather. Every week she used to have 30 – 40 envelopes to put into the system, now there might be five. Although e-transfers are now quite common, so these need to be accounted for.

Judi: What do you feel is the biggest hurdle Financially.

Kent: Declining membership... the aging population. When somebody leaves it's not getting replenished by somebody new coming into Harcourt. There are exceptions of course, but in general, more people leave than arrive.

And I think also, maybe it's different than before. I think pensions. Retirees are struggling more and more with their own financials. While we have a strong Manna group, not all can be strong contributors. They are young families. It is very very tough. I would say it's the greatest hurdle we have from a financial point of view. Sometimes you can compensate that with a lot of good volunteers and stewardship, but we really struggle on that aspect too.

Judi: Retirement cut our givings. That was why I started All Things Christmas. It grew every year. Janet Webster picked it up and ran with it. We became known in the city; however volunteer aging and burnout has shut it down. Ashley Kizis had suggested that we have outside people to run it. I hoped that would happen.

Kent: That's exactly it. Janet was superb at running All Things Christmas but when it was time for her to take a break, nobody stepped up. Our volunteers a getting less and less. It's tough. I do want to emphasise we do have many volunteers, and I admire them so. However, there's burnout and difficult to find replacements, especially at the leadership level. Look how long Lorraine was chair. I know many from Council would like to step down, if there were others who would take on the roles. We need a Council Vice Chair, we need an Umbrella Councillor for Stewardship, Heather has been Envelope Secretary for over ten years and could use a break. Marilyn Parr has been Treasurer for many years. The list goes on. We need to be realistic that we likely won't get the contributions or the volunteers that we did before.

Judi: You are also involved in GUM.

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Kent: Maybe we can take a step back first. You had asked what my responsibility was in council. I told you I trust people and tend to have a hands-off approach. I do let committees do what they do. I don't try to put my nose into all the goings on, I just try to assist whenever I can be of use. I'm not much of a pull person, always asking for updates. I am here for you if you need me.

At Council it's always busy. Lately it's the Community Hub and the Alcohol Use Policy that has taken our attention. This is a very sensitive matter. Alcohol use was approved by the congregation, but it certainly was not unanimous approval. My role as council chair as we are drafting the policy is to ensure that we are sensitive to those who oppose it. Regardless of my view, I believe I have a good way of putting both hats on and always try to also represent the views of those that do not agree.

Judi: As far as the alcohol goes, if it doesn't work out, you can always pull it back.

Kent: Absolutely. That's another thing about me, Kent Hoeg, there's never a final, "this is it," everything is fluid, everything can change. One day we think this is the direction and another day it's a different direction and that's all OK.

There is usually some activity going on in the moment that I have to spend a lot of time on. It's been the Community Hub Lately and also people leaving, like Casey's departure. And I give assistance to people trying to find grants. I participate in that as well. I spend much time on trying to move GUM forward.

Judi: Can we visit the Community Hub for a minute? Can you explain it?

Kent: I'll say two things about the Community Hub. The intent is to find community partners, and we use the word "partners," not renters. We want partners who will be so active in the building that ultimately if the building needs some renovation they would contribute. The challenge when you do partnerships because of Harcourt's core value, we would love to partner with community groups who have great outreach, but of course, they don't have money. It's a bit of a tricky situation. You want to find some good rentals, and we do, we have the Preschool, and we just signed a long-term lease with Montessori. Those are two very large rentals.

We want to move to stronger partnerships of some sort, whether that's Aboriginal support, LGBTQ support, housing support or whatever. I think we are still trying to find our way with that. We are still searching. We have spent a lot of money and a lot of time surveying the Guelph community.

Judi: What areas are Montessori going to occupy?

Kent: They will be taking over the Friendship Room, that will be their primary space.

Judi: How does that affect Manna on Sunday.



Kent: Since we have flexible seating, they have been using the Sanctuary and of course Manna makes great use of the outdoors and goes on field trips.

The regular service, we call the Music and Message service is at 9:45 and at 11:00, Manna comes in.

Judi: So people can do both then.

Kent: They absolutely can. This is one of those conversations where many people have not been pleased about those changes. We have had a couple people leave the church because of seating or service times.

We have the Thursday night gathering as well as the virtual Holy Listening Circle on Sunday's at 9:00.

GUM has been around for about ten years and has been more about conversation than anything. We are not going to survive as four churches, for the long term. We need to find ways to collaborate and ultimately integrate somehow. Because I am council chair, I attend GUM meetings and I have been trying to help with my leadership skills at GUM. I am trying to shift the paradigm. We are looking at a new structure for GUM. It's going to have a new mission... one church, multiple campuses. This is long term vision. We are exploring questions like do we need to have one M&P for every church or can you have one umbrella M&P. Or at least smaller M&P committees at each church.

I want us to explore things like instead of having ministers assigned to one church - they rotate. There are multiple ministers. My logic is that if our churches ever need to amalgamate, you are going to be comfortable with any of the ministers. I am trying to be realistic but also visionary about the future.

I mentioned the problem of getting volunteers. This could help. Can we share some of our passions?

Judi: That kind of answers my last question. What is your vision and hope for Harcourt?

Kent: Definitely on the GUM side, we need to be more active in GUM. As I said, right now it's just talking back and forth. We need to move to action. We are creating an Executive Group that is intended to start pushing the envelope of the areas of opportunity. I don't know what those areas will be (for example M&P, Worship, Finance, Rentals, Pastoral Care), we are writing things up and will meet in September.

Vision and Hope you say? We need to find ways to be sustainable even with declining membership. We have to be financially sustainable but also in volunteers. So how do we do that? How do we continue to do the good in the community? Which I think, Harcourt has been a strong vehicle for.

Judi: What else do you want membership to know?

Kent: I don't want to sugar coat our finances. They are pretty bad. We cannot continue to run in a deficit position. If we go the way we are, we will shut down in five years, maybe less. So, we have to have these conversations.

The happy note is the people of Harcourt have such commitment; they have such love. The support I got when I went through the times with our son was incredible, and that's one thing that will carry Harcourt forward is that dedication to others.

From an optimistic note, although we *are* financially struggling, with the dedication of Harcourt people and the commitment to their passions - we will find other ways to overcome.

Judi: Kent, I want to thank you for the time you have put in with me for this interview, but most of for all that you do for Harcourt. You wear so many hats. Hats many of us are not capable of wearing. We are most grateful for your leadership and that you look after so much for us.

### **Nurturing the Faith of Children – Marilyn Whiteley**

On June 4 1887, Nellie Goodeve and three other women from Guelph's Congregational Church held the first Sunday school in the Brooklyn area of Guelph, south of the Speed River. Eventually the Brooklyn Sunday school mission became Harcourt Memorial United Church, and throughout its history, the Christian nurture of children has remained an important focus. Changing times, however, have brought new understandings of how children learn and how best to nurture their faith. So while the commitment has remained the same, the ways of carrying it out have changed through the years.

The Brooklyn mission teachers had once been Sunday school students themselves, and so they taught the way that they had experienced Sunday school: the teacher stood before rows of children as she led them in singing, told them stories from the Bible, taught them to pray, and gave the children Bible verses to memorize.



As the school grew, it became more organized, with classes for various ages, and a superintendent to oversee

the work. (While the teachers were mainly female, the superintendent was always a man; Robert Harcourt served in that role for an amazing thirty years.) By 1959, the Harcourt Sunday school offered seven classes in the kindergarten and primary section, and six junior, intermediate, and senior classes. They attended the first part of the congregation's Sunday morning service of worship and then dispersed to go to their classes. The highlight of the year came one Sunday morning each spring as a group of young scholars passed through a white wooden gate, signifying their promotion to the next department of the school.

Change was in the air, however, and early in the 1960s, the United Church of Canada introduced the New Curriculum. It was a bold and creative venture, based on the biblical and theological teaching that was the basic education of ministers in theological schools but that had seldom been shared with the people in the pews. Many outside the denomination--and some within it—branded it as too liberal. Harcourt, however, was not disrupted by the New Curriculum as some congregations were. According to the 1964 annual report, "In September we took the big step and plunged into the use of the NEW CURRICULUM. At this time I think that we have had a fair trial throughout the church school, and both teachers and pupils are keenly interested."

But time passed and the New Curriculum became "old." Ten years after its adoption, Harcourt abandoned the New Curriculum, and each group of teachers could decide what materials could be used in a class. Soon the school began using an alternate curriculum furnished by the United Church. Then in 1985, the school began using the Joy curriculum. It was an ecumenical curriculum for which the United Church provided a supplementary insert.



By 1989, Harcourt made a change that affected not only the Sunday school, but the entire congregation. It adopted the Whole People of God curriculum. This was based on the cycle of lectionary readings that was already in use in the Sunday morning worship service. Therefore what children studied after they left for Sunday school was directly related to what the adults who remained in the sanctuary heard in the scripture lessons and sermons.

In 2001, the Sunday school made yet another transition, this time to the Bible Quest curriculum. Lessons were not based on the lectionary, but on individual Bible stories. Each story remained the focus for a number of weeks for students of all ages. The method of study carried the odd name WoRM, for "**W**orkshop **R**otation **M**odel." This meant that each class of children learned about the story in a different workshop each week. By the end of the unit,

children had used a variety of experiences including drama and computers, reflecting the variety of ways by which different people learn most effectively.

Over the years, the Sunday school had moved from one curriculum to another, but by 2014 the program was not doing well. There were too few children to justify the effort of the many volunteers required. But was a traditional Sunday school the best way to nurture the religious growth of children? Children's primary religious educators are the members of their own families.

So Harcourt embarked on a new venture: Manna. Its form is experiential and intergenerational. No longer are children sent away from their families into separate classes. Now, in Manna gatherings, families explore and learn and worship together, sometimes dividing into age-appropriate activities while often coming together as a group. And children—and their families—are learning and growing in a new way.

The ways of doing it change, but nurturing the faith of children remains a vital part of Harcourt's mission.

## A Final Act of Compassion -

Lisa Browning



I never wanted a Bernese Mountain Dog, especially one crossed with a Pyreneese. Although I have always been a dog-lover, I would have preferred a smaller breed, and one that shed less! I could easily fill a grocery bag full of dog hair on a daily basis when I brushed her ... and her 85-pound size had its own challenges at times. It was my (now ex) partner who chose the breed. And as I came to realize after I left, what he wanted, he got.

Not to say I didn't love Mandy, because I did. From the moment I first saw her in 2010, at the farm where she was born, and she nudged her way up to me and leaned against me, I knew that she and I would have an unbreakable bond. And we did.

When I had had enough of my ex-partner's abuse, I started the process of extricating myself from the relationship. One summer day in 2011, I came home to find him dragging Mandy across the back lawn by her collar. His reasoning ... she had peed in the "wrong spot" on the lawn. It was only when I yelled, loudly enough for the neighbours to hear, "Let go of that dog now!" that he released his hold on her. I knew, given the escalation of his abuse towards me, that his treatment of Mandy would no doubt follow the same pattern. So although he wanted to keep Mandy, she came with me when I left.

Mandy was so in tune to me that she always knew if I was struggling or upset, even if she wasn't right beside me. I lost count of the number of times when I was upstairs in my room, dealing with something emotional, and Mandy was downstairs. Every time, she immediately bounded up the stairs and stood beside me, staring intently into my eyes. She knew.

Around 2016 or so, Mandy started to lose weight, at a rather alarming rate. She was diagnosed with arthritis, which is common for large breed dogs, and especially Bernese Mountain Dogs. I chose to treat her with a combination of holistic and allopathic remedies, and she responded well for a couple of years.

Then her symptoms got worse. At first, I noticed that her back paws were turned under when she stood up, so that she would walk on her knuckles if I did not adjust them. I discovered that she had been misdiagnosed, and in fact she had degenerative myelopathy\*, a disease affecting the spinal cord, resulting in slowly progressive hind limb weakness and paralysis. It is similar to ALS in humans. In its early stages, the symptoms resemble those of arthritis, which often occurs secondary to hip dysplasia in large breed dogs, which makes the diagnosis challenging.

In addition to the "knuckling under," she showed all of the other early clinical signs:

- hindquarters appear to sway when standing still
- falls over easily when pushed from the side
- hind feet seem to scrape the ground when walking and sometimes the top surface of the feet become hairless and irritated from repeated trauma
- has difficulty getting up from a lying position

But she was not in pain. However, her symptoms were getting worse. When she started to lose bladder control, a friend told me, firmly but compassionately, that although she was not in physical pain, she was certainly not living the life she was meant to live. A life of dignity, that she most definitely deserved. My friend Susan, a Reiki master, had recently done Reiki on Mandy, and told me that Mandy was "ready to go" but that she was waiting for me to make the decision to let her go.



It was one of the most excruciating decisions I have ever had to make in my life. But once I knew, beyond a doubt, that it was the right decision, that excruciating pain lessened.

I found a vet that would come into my home, and I booked an appointment. Susan was there as well. From the moment the vet arrived, I knew I had made the right decision. She sat down on the floor with Mandy, stroking and talking to her. She was, during that time, confirming that Mandy was ready, that I had made the right call. She thoroughly explained the next steps to me, and asked me if I was ready to proceed. I said my final goodbyes to Mandy, and kissed her face.



The vet asked me to bring some food to distract Mandy, so I filled her “kong” with peanut butter, which she loved. While Mandy devoured the peanut butter, Susan did Reiki on both Mandy and me, and the vet administered a sedative. It took a while for the sedative to kick in, but gradually Mandy’s movements got slower, and she laid her head down on the floor and stared rather dreamily into my eyes. The drug to stop her heart was much more fast-acting, and within about a minute the vet told me gently, “She’s gone.”

We put Mandy’s body on the bed the vet had brought, and I helped her carry it to her car. Mandy’s ashes were returned to me about a week later, and I sprinkled them throughout my back gardens, where Mandy always loved to spend time. Those gardens have become even more sacred to me now.

I cannot say enough about how amazing this process was, from beginning to end. And although I continue to miss Mandy, and think about her every day, I know that I made the right decision. I had done this for Mandy, as a final act of compassion.

*\*information on degenerative myelopathy obtained from VCA Canada - [www.vcacanada.com](http://www.vcacanada.com)*



## Life Events:

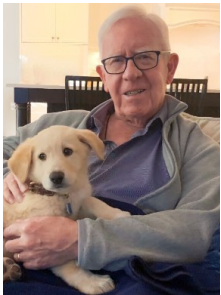
## Passages



**Allan James, 10 November 1934 – 30 May, 2023**



**Barbara Jane Buck, passed away April 12, 2023**



**Christopher W. Lehman, April 22, 1943 – June 4, 2023**  
Spouse of Gaylyn McLean, Voluntary Associate Minister at Harcourt.



**Mary Lou Potter, passed away May 31, 2023**

