

L'Arche USA Leader Formation October 2019 – Story Gathering

Centering Resources and Reflections

[Everything Is Waiting for You](#)

– poem by David Whyte

Listening

*My father could hear a little animal step,
or a moth in the dark against the screen,
and every far sound called the listening out
into places where the rest of us had never been.*

Tamera's Opus 3 minute video of performance poetry by Joshua Bennett; poem written to his deaf sister.

*More spoke to him from the soft wild night
than came to our porch for us on the wind;
we would watch him look up and his face go keen
till the walls of the world flared, widened.*

One of the remarkable qualities of the story is that it creates space. We can dwell in a story, walk around, find our own place. The story confronts but does not oppress; the story inspires but does not manipulate. The story invites us to an encounter, a dialogue, a mutual sharing. As long as we have stories to tell each other there is hope.

*My father heard so much that we still stand
inviting the quiet by turning the face,
waiting for a time when something in the night
will touch us too from that other place.*

- Henri Nouwen

- William Stafford

some people
when they hear
your story.
contract.
others
upon hearing
your story.
expand.
and
this is how
you
know. (nayyirah waheed)

Grabbing Hold with Enthusiasm

By Katie Guertin-Anderson, L'Arche Tahoma Hope Spiritual Life Director

We are made of stories. They connect us and unearth deep feelings within. Stories remind us that we are interwoven into each other's lives.

I grew up on a farm. As a kid, I traipsed around the fields near our home pretending to be a paleontologist looking for dinosaur bones, while my mom watched from the kitchen window. One day, as I searched for a new dig site, I came dangerously close to the electric fence that divided the property – the fence I *knew* I was forbidden to touch. With every step I made toward the fence, my mom saw my facial expression shift: from trepidation, to curiosity, to mischief and, finally, to defiance. She was stunned as she watched me make a final, impish look toward her before grabbing a fistful of fence and promptly falling backward after the shock rattled my body. My mom ran out the back door toward what she feared was my broken body. But before she'd even made it halfway there she saw me stand up, look back at her one more time with an urgency she'd not seen before, and *grab the fence again*, this time with both hands and an unmistakable grin across my face.

This is a core story that shaped my life. It helps me to make meaning out of many of my life experiences and to make sense of why I am the way I am. I'm curious about what is "off-limits" to me; I want to experience things for myself, rather than trust someone else's rules for me.

We all have stories like this, and when we tell our stories to one another, we not only make meaning for our own lives but also open the door for deeper connection with others. In a culture where busyness is valued over slow, steady days and texts and tweets are more important than sharing stories around the dinner table, we are all longing to know one another in ways that transcend the surface of our lives. We want to be connected more than to be separate; more together than alone. In order to "work toward a more human society" – our mission – we need to listen to each other.

Sue Mosteller spoke at L'Arche Daybreak when the community turned 50. She talked about Rosie, a core member. For years, Rosie screamed all the time. It was almost unbearable, because those who lived with Rosie wanted badly to support her, care for her, and love her. Rosie had been taught all her life that she was not beloved. She was treated as if her needs didn't matter. Sue realized that it would take a long time for Rosie to unlearn what she believed to be true about herself and instead to learn the truth of her belovedness. In time, Rosie taught hundreds of assistants about trust, vulnerability and courage. Rosie's story shook my bones. When I heard it, I felt like I'd grabbed hold of that forbidden electric fence of my childhood. I heard the truth of what it meant to be human. I felt a deep desire to expand my heart and life in new ways, which ultimately opened the door to finally being part of L'Arche.

Sharing our stories is not always easy, and listening to others' stories can be challenging, too. This work calls for courage, curiosity, patience and generosity. In a world that continues to push us further into the aloneness of our own homes and devices, the act of storytelling is an act of resistance to a culture that all too often divides us rather than unites us.

Blessing the Story

You might think
this blessing lives
in the story
that you can see,
that it has curled up
in a comfortable spot
on the surface
of the telling.

But this blessing lives
in the story beneath
the story.
It lives in the story
inside the story.
In the spaces
between.
In the edges,
the margins,
the mysterious gaps,
the enticing and
fertile emptiness.

This blessing
makes its home
within the layers.
This blessing is
doorway and portal,
passage and path.
It is more ancient
than imagining
and makes itself
ever new.

This blessing
is where the story
begins.

– Jan Richardson