

# Alia's Life Moved Many Spirits

By Trish Glennon

Alia's presence. It was her vocation. It was her gift for all of us and she offered it to us in so many ways. Her presence gathered us. She gathered us with her spirited presence. She gathered us in peaceful stillness. She gathered us in her darkest moments of suffering. Alia possessed a deep inner spirit and there were those special and insignificant things that would cause Alia's spirit to stir. Alia had a particular attentiveness for sound. She would catch hold of a sound and soon her whole being would erupt in her distinctive laugh.

Alia's laughter and the spirit it expressed drew us close to her. You couldn't help but be drawn to her in these moments. Alia's delight in sound, her laughter, gathered us in her presence to bear witness to joy, to its sound, to its power.

Alia delighted in the love of her family and in particular in her father's love. Alia had a special bond with her dad and it was beautiful to witness their relationship, their deep understanding of each other. Alia would become vibrant at just the sound of her father's voice, and Alia's father delighted in her presence.

Alia's presence, her spirit, was shaped, formed and nurtured throughout her life by her family. They

formed her in the gifts of welcome, connectedness, and unity. They surrounded Alia and gave her a special place at the center of their family. Their presence in her life was one of true faithfulness.

These gifts of celebration, of unity and connectedness, given to Alia from her family, shaped her vocation. Alia loved dance and movement and for many years Alia was part of the Spirit Movers. Her presence in the Spirit Movers allowed her gifts, her vocation, to move and to reach thousands. There was no greater stage than her presence at World Youth Day. There she was on stage, a Muslim woman, dancing in celebration with Christians, in front of the Pope, for hundreds of thousands of Christians. It was a prophetic gesture of unity — her presence, witnessed by thousands gathered from around the world.

Alia held a special place for Ellen Weinstein. Ellen, the Corner House's faithful Thursday night dinner guest, would always insist on sitting next to Alia. She knew of things important for Alia, but, most importantly, Ellen gave Alia her tender presence every week. If ever you are saddened or depressed at the state of the world, you can think about this one image:



Alia Qureshi and Ben Vaanholt opened the 25th Anniversary Gala "One Heart At A Time" in 1996 at the Winter Garden Theatre.

it took place every Thursday faithfully for over ten years — Ellen, a Jewish woman, next to her special friend, Alia, a Muslim woman, sharing a meal with a few Christians and sometimes a non-believer or two. It happened daily and weekly, Alia's presence — her vocation — mingling with and drawing out the vocation of those around her. †

Trish Glennon was an assistant and later a House Leader at the Corner House where Alia lived. She gave the eulogy at the memorial service for Alia on January 3rd at Dayspring.

## Alia and Pope John Paul II: A Dynamic Interfaith Duo



Alia Qureshi and the Spirit Movers performed for Pope John Paul II at World Youth Day in 2002.

There is a striking photograph of Alia with Pope John Paul II that hangs in the Dayspring. The picture was taken at the welcome ceremony for the Pope when he arrived in Toronto for World Youth Day in 2002. The Spirit Movers danced for their biggest audience ever on that occasion. There were several hundred thousand people there that day — and the global television audience numbered several hundred million! Alia's brother told a beautiful story of how some people, when they saw the photograph, had asked why Alia's image had been "Photo-Shopped" into the picture. Alia's brother explained that it was a real photo. He joked that the Pope had requested, "I want to have my picture taken with that woman!" †



This year's Community Weekend featured the theme "I'm Different, Just Like You." Warren Pot captured this group portrait of the gathering.

## Blessed Are Those Who Mourn *By Carl MacMillan*

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." These words from the Beatitudes of the New Testament are a foundational text for L'Arche. The Beatitudes are all paradoxical and countercultural. Mourning does not feel comfortable. It is painful, yet only when we dare to experience our grief can we reclaim a sense of peace and balance. For some of us at Daybreak, our mourning for Alia reawakened in us other losses that we had known in our lives. While we were often caught by surprise, it became an occasion to grieve again, or more deeply — to mourn with a freedom that had not been available to us before. It is grace to experience that when we are ready, our capacity to mourn is there, waiting for us to claim it.

Many of us went to the Qureshis'

mosque where we observed the Islamic tradition of the "Prayers for the Dead." Alia was beautifully wrapped in perfumed sheets and placed in a simple pine coffin, draped with a brilliant green cloth. There was a brief time when the coffin cover was pulled back so we could see Alia for one last time. One by one, we processed past and peered in. She smelled like a sweet forest and she looked exactly like herself, her long eyelashes more extravagant than ever. Alia's toothy smile was relaxed and open, as though she were ready to break into her deep, hearty laughter. It was not hard to imagine her in Paradise.

Alia has long been on my list of "super heroes." During our Assistants Weekend this winter we talked about the concept of super heroes, those people with extraor-

dinary abilities who can perform heroic feats. Spiderman and Superman are two examples of super heroes that spark the imagination of many people in our community. Our theme for the weekend was *Beyond the Imagination*. Dr. Pamela Cushing, a professor at King's College at the University of Western Ontario (and a former assistant), facilitated the weekend for us. Pamela has reflected very thoughtfully about the role of imagination in L'Arche, and in life. She helped us to recognize how important it is for each one of us to imagine possibilities — for ourselves and for our world. I came away from the weekend stronger in my belief that each of us has the capacity to be a truly human person, a truly heroic person in the everyday — even a super hero. Alia is a perfect example. †

## Community Notes



Ralf Schmitz, with Francis Maurice and Bill Van Buren, animated our Community Retreat Day.

**Wendy Lywood** received her Diploma in Spiritual Direction at Regis College at the Toronto School of Theology in November.

**Brenda Aburto** retired from the Development Office in December. Brenda continues to be active in L'Arche Daybreak as a volunteer at the Craft Studio.

**Colette Halferty** has returned to Daybreak and has assumed the role of Development Manager, as of January.

**Jean Vanier's** new book, *Our Life Together*, was released in November. It is available at Daybreak Books & Media.

**Father Frank Corless** died on February 3rd. Father Frank celebrated Mass many Wednesday mornings at Dayspring.

*A Meditation by Henri Nouwen*

## Dying Well

I am convinced that it is this joy — the joy of being the same as others, of belonging to one human family — that allows us to die well. I do not know how I or anyone else could be prepared to die if we were mainly concerned about the trophies we had collected during our best years. The great gift hidden in our dying is the gift of unity with all people. However different we are, we were all born powerless, and we all die powerless, and the little differences we live in between dwindle in the light of this enormous truth. Often this human truth is presented as a reason to be sad. It is not seldom called a “sobering truth”. Our great challenge is to discover this truth as a source of immense joy that will set us free to embrace our mortality with the awareness that we will make our passage to new life in solidarity with all the people of the earth.

A good death is a death in solidarity with others. To prepare ourselves for a good death, we must develop or deepen this sense of solidarity. If we live toward death as toward an event that separates us from people, death cannot be other than a sad and sorrowful event. But if we grow in awareness that our mortality, more than anything else, will lead us into solidarity with others, then death can become a celebration of our unity with the human race.

Instead of separating us from others, death can unite us with others; instead of being sorrowful, it can give rise to new joy. ✠

## Alia's Spirit Lives On

*By Colette Halferty*

Alia Qureshi came to L'Arche Daybreak in 1988 at the age of 15, at the same time as Tracy Westerby, Hsi-Fu Liu, Michael Barrett and Heather Goodchild. Together they co-founded the Corner House, Daybreak's first home for adolescents.

Alia was diagnosed with leukodystrophy, a condition which left her blind and unable to speak. She had not been expected to live beyond her adolescent years. However, through the power of love, community, friendship and care, Alia defied the medical prognosis that she would not live a long life. On the contrary, Alia has left a legacy of memories rich in inspiration. Her life was filled with friends, music, dance and laughter.

Alia brought a rich gift to the Daybreak community by sharing her Islamic traditions and faith with us. She led us to a new place of interfaith understanding as Alia's family became more intimately involved in the life of our community.

When Mr. Qureshi was asked for his thoughts about Alia performing for the Pope at the World Youth Day in Toronto, he said, “I would be honoured to have my daughter perform for the Roman Catholic Pope. This is my icon of how Muslim and Christian relations should be.”

At Alia's memorial service, Mr. Qureshi shared openly his love for his daughter and his deep appreciation for L'Arche. He



*Alia and her father had a special relationship.*

spoke of Alia as a great favour from God as she touched so many lives. He went so far as to say, “While my wife and I gave birth to Alia, L'Arche showed her how to live life.”

While we grieve her loss, Alia's spirit lives on as we continue to celebrate her memory at the Corner House, the Day Program and with the Spirit Movers.

Alia Qureshi died on Wednesday, December 19th, surrounded by her family and close friends from the community. In accordance with Islamic tradition, she was buried before sundown on the same day she died. A memorial service was held for Alia at the Dayspring on January 3rd. People gathered to pray and listen to some beautiful reflections about how Alia transformed so many hearts through her rich presence in our lives. ✠

**Warren Pot and Clara Frascetti** were welcomed as Intentional Members of L'Arche Daybreak on February 22nd at Dayspring. Clara arrived at Daybreak in the early 1990's and Warren came in the mid-1990's. Clara now works with Intercordia. She continues to give student retreats at the Dayspring. Warren is Daybreak's Assistants Coordinator.

**Ralf Schmitz** led this year's Community Retreat Day, *I'm Searching, Just Like You*, on February 12th. Ralf, who was once a Daybreak assistant, is a priest in Trier, Germany.

**Pamela Cushing, Ph.D.**, facilitated the Assistants Weekend with the theme *Beyond the Imagination*. Pamela, an anthropologist, wrote her doctoral dissertation on: *Shaping the Moral Imagination of Care Givers: Difference, Disability & Inequality in L'Arche*.



*Father Frank Corless died on February 3rd.*

### Community Wish List

New bath towels.....	\$50
New hand towels.....	\$40
Toaster oven.....	\$100
Shelves.....	\$200
Weeping Beech tree.....	\$250
Eastern Redbud tree.....	\$250
Dehumidifier.....	\$300
Vacuum cleaner.....	\$500
Tree shredder.....	\$2,000
Outdoor storage building.....	\$5,000
Grounds equipment.....	\$10,000
New windows.....	\$14,000
Wheelchair van.....	\$75,000

*For more information please call Colette Halferty at L'Arche Daybreak's Development Office (905) 884-3454, ext. 230.*

# Consider L'Arche Daybreak in Your Will



Brenda Aburto and Darryl Dickson enjoy holiday festivities at a community celebration.

As a registered charity, L'Arche Daybreak can accept gifts made through a will. Bequests can be in the form of an outright gift of cash, the proceeds of a life insurance policy, negotiable securities or a designated percentage of an overall estate or RRSP. Gifts made to a charity through a will can have significant tax benefits.

For most of us, the time when we have our greatest capacity to make a significant financial gift is through our estates. Your commitment and support for our community and its members can be expressed in a very meaningful way through a legacy. This type of support secures the long term stability of L'Arche Daybreak for future generations.

A properly drafted will is the way to make a statement on your values and provide an orderly and timely plan for the settlement of your estate. Making a will is not a subject most of us find easy to talk about. The topic is often put off to another day or ignored. Unfortunately, that is exactly what more than half of all Canadians do. Even among people who have already made estate plans, many do not have their wills professionally reviewed every three to five years. This is important to ensure that one's will reflects current tax and family law.

A will is a written document, properly dated, signed and witnessed, in which you detail how your financial assets and the things that you own are to be distributed after your death. With the advice of a lawyer, you can make plans that are in the best interest of you, your family, and the charities you would like to support.

Estate planning is important for everyone, not just the wealthy! In today's ever-changing tax and legal environment, a will is necessary for everyone — even those of modest means. Having an up-to-date estate plan with a valid will is essential to ensuring your wishes are carried out. If you die without a will, you may leave your heirs with unanticipated legal problems and tax burdens. What's more, your property may not be distributed as you intended.

If you have any questions about making a gift through your estate, please contact Colette Halferty at 905-884-3454 ext. 230 or email her at [chalferty@larchedaybreak.com](mailto:chalferty@larchedaybreak.com) ♣

## Registered Disability Savings Plan Brings Opportunity for Financial Security

The Registered Disability Savings Plan is similar to an RRSP, in that it is a planned financial program to provide security for people with disabilities as they grow older.

The Federal Government has declared that there are no restrictions on what the RDSP can be spent on. People with disabilities and their families will control the use of the funds. With the advent of the RDSP, provincial governments will be forced to change the asset limits for disability benefits so as to eliminate "claw-backs."

*Major points of interest are:*

- \$200,000 lifetime contribution limit.
- Contributions permitted by the individual, any family members or friends.

- No annual limits on contributions.
  - Contributions grow tax free.
  - No restrictions on when the funds can be used or for what purpose.
- How will this change people's lives?*
- The RDSP will have a significant impact on the future financial security of people with disabilities.
  - Families will have more options for securing the future for their relatives with disabilities.

People who qualify for the Disability Tax Credit will be eligible to open a RDSP. For more information on the Registered Disability Savings Plan, please go to the website: [www.plan.ca](http://www.plan.ca) ♣

### L'ARCHE DAYBREAK

The first and largest L'Arche community in North America, L'Arche Daybreak began in 1969 and now includes eight homes in Richmond Hill, as well as *The Woodery* wood-working shop, *The Craft Studio*, *Daybreak Books & Media* bookstore, and the *Dayspring* spiritual centre. L'Arche Daybreak's community of over 100 people is a dynamic example of how people of different intellectual capacity, social origin, religion, and culture can live together.

#### WORSHIP SERVICES

**Monday, Wednesday and Friday** mornings at 8:30 at Dayspring.

**Friday** evenings at 7:30 at Dayspring.

#### L'ARCHE

L'Arche is an international federation of over 130 communities where people with intellectual disabilities and those who care for them live, work and share life together. Canadian Jean Vanier founded L'Arche in France in 1964.

#### L'ARCHE MISSION STATEMENT

- *To make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities revealed through mutually transforming relationships.*
- *To engage in our diverse cultures, working together towards a more human society.*
- *To foster an environment in communities that is inspired by the core values of our founding story, and that responds to the changing needs of our members.*



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L'Arche Daybreak's Development Office  
11339 Yonge Street  
Richmond Hill, Ontario  
L4S 1L1 ~ Canada

Telephone: (905) 884-3454 ext. 230  
e-mail: [develop@larchedaybreak.com](mailto:develop@larchedaybreak.com)  
[www.larchedaybreak.com](http://www.larchedaybreak.com)

Editors: Colette Halferty  
Christine Gameson

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