

Summer 2021

BREAKING BARRIERS

everybody belongs ■ everybody serves

THEME: THE ARTS AND DISABILITY

The Holy Spirit has gifted some people with imagination and artistry that generate delight for all of us when it finds expression. In this issue, people with and without disabilities share their creative expression in poetry, story, song, and image.



 Cassandra Lokker

Quiet Place

by **Cassandra Lokker**

First Reformed Church, Baldwin WI

My pastor preached a sermon early in 2020 on Mark 1:29-34, adapted from Henri Nouwen's article, "Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry," in *Leadership* (Spring 1995). He focused on Jesus and his example—how Jesus spent time alone with the Father on numerous occasions, taking time to go to a quiet place early in the morning. After his times of solitude, Jesus would move back into community, calling his disciples and nurturing their relationship with him. Then, moving forward in his ministry, he would send them out in mission—two-by-two, connected in community to share the gospel.

A disciple's life begins with solitude and becoming rooted in personal relationship with Jesus, finding encouragement and participating in fellowship through community, and then being motivated to extend community into mission in order to invite others into relationship with Jesus. This journey begins with solitude and then circles back to solitude—a continuing cycle of connection with the Savior.

I wrote this song with a hymn-like structure with these core themes: solitude, community, and mission.

Quiet Place

© 2020 Words and Music by Cassandra Lokker

Come with Me to a quiet place.
Seek My presence, seek My face.
This sacred ground where two hearts meet—
Lay your burdens at My feet.
Leave your cares, your fears behind.
Be still and know, renew your mind.
Come away to a quiet place,
A quiet place with Me.

Come together and fill this place.
Extend a hand, a warm embrace.
This offering of praise you bring—
The words you pray, the songs you sing,
Join together with one voice.
Glorify My name, rejoice!
Come together and fill this place.
Come and worship Me.

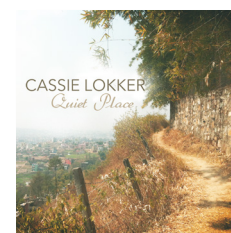
Go and be sent from this place,
Sharing love with tender grace.
Hear My call and count the cost.
Embrace the hurting and the lost.

I send you out by two, by three
To fish for men, to set them free.
Go and be sent from this place.
Come and follow Me.

Come with Me to a quiet place.
Seek My presence, seek My face.
This sacred ground where two

hearts meet—
Lay your burdens at My feet.
Leave your cares, your fears behind.
Be still and know, renew your mind.
Come away to a quiet place,
A quiet place with Me.

Cassie's song can be accessed here:
<http://bit.ly/quietplacelokker>



The Intersection of Faith, Creativity, and Disability

by **Becky Jones**


CRC Disability Concerns, Burlington ON

As a little girl, I was always so excited for the blank page on the back of the bulletin. Little did I know that it was intended for taking notes from the sermon, not a blank slate for drawing during the sermon. The church was even kind enough to provide little pencils for drawing, which some used for filling out the offering envelopes. I can't remember a time I wasn't drawing while listening to sermons. The act of creating allowed me to connect with my thoughts and feelings, and it still allows me to listen well and to think clearly.

Prior to my current work with the Christian Reformed Church, I worked in the arts. I spent years as an art therapist, working with people from different walks of life, helping them use their creativity to express themselves. I was able to work with families who had loved ones diagnosed with dementia. I worked in a respite care home for children who are medically fragile. I was part of specialty teams within schools that provided care to children who came with a wide variety of challenges that made it difficult for them to integrate in regular classrooms. I also spent a great deal of time working with families who have children with Down syndrome. While this represents a variety of amazing individuals, the common denominator for getting to know them was art.

As an art therapist, each person I worked with found a means for self-expression. For one man,



 A man admires "Visual Voice: Art Therapy in Our Community," a gallery show curated by Becky Jones.

little was known of his childhood or background when he entered a home for seniors. Through time working with him to make collages, I noticed he was drawn to pictures of rural settings. Ever so slowly, we as a care team started to piece together his history as this creative medium assisted him to remember and share with us.

Perhaps my biggest pleasure was allowing a larger audience to experience their creative expression. The Art Gallery of Burlington asked me to curate an exhibition, sharing the value of art therapy. "Visual Voice: Art Therapy in Our Community" allowed many of the people I had worked with through different organizations to share their artistic work in a public gallery. What a beautiful way to show how valued they are!

I am so thankful that I leaned in to wonder why God had given me a deep desire to create from a very young age. It has offered me the opportunity to connect with others and help them connect with the creativity that is within, while also giving them a new form of personal expression.



📷 Kyla Hewis (right)

Managing Anxiety through Art and Acting

by Kyla Hewis

The Meeting House Church, Burlington ON

Growing up in an artistic household, I always had art supplies readily available. I was always encouraged to draw, paint, or color. In university, I have seen how much this has influenced my life and how I can use art to deal with my anxiety.

Over the years, I have looked for different ways to distract myself when my anxiety flares up—like watching a movie, listening to music, reading a book—but these never keep me focused long enough. Yet, painting or simply coloring do keep me focused on one thing and distracted long enough to calm down. Art has also helped me express feelings when words couldn't.

Another art form that helps me is acting. The theatre community is open and accepting. I've learned how to open up and talk about my feelings before they become worse. Theatre gives people room to develop themselves and understand how

they are feeling. Acting has also given me a way to escape the stress of everyday life. I step on stage and become someone else for a while, giving me a break from the anxiety I might be feeling that day. Plus, many modern playwrights are not afraid to explore issues such as anxiety or depression. Through these plays, I have been able to see a representation of myself, connect with characters, and understand their struggles.

Playing characters has also helped me embrace parts of myself that I was hiding before. One particular character was Betty, an older woman and dog lover who had given up on the need to act as society deemed “normal.” She embraced her weird, kooky side. Through Betty, I saw that it was okay to be myself, and that others won't necessarily judge me in the ways I might think.

Studying theatre in a Christian context has shown me how theatre and my Christian faith are more closely linked than I realized. I'm learning to express my faith through theatre, appreciate the community's respect for one another, and show kindness and support as we grow in our skills and our faith. Theatre has helped me explore ways to bring the biblical story to life, which I can apply to my faith journey.

Art and theatre are helping me manage the anxieties of everyday life.



Upcoming themes

Fall 2021—Speech differences. People living with speech differences, such as stuttering and cerebral palsy that affects speech, face various challenges such as avoidance of interacting with others, not being allowed to finish their thoughts, and even assumptions others make about their intelligence. If you live with a speech difference, please tell us a story or give us your advice in no more than 400 words. Send your submission by **August 2**.

Winter 2021—Young people with disabilities. In Canada and the United States, about 13 percent of people ages 15–30 live with a disability. Are you one of them? By **September 27**, please tell us a story (up to 400 words) about living with a disability when nearly 90 percent of your peers do not.

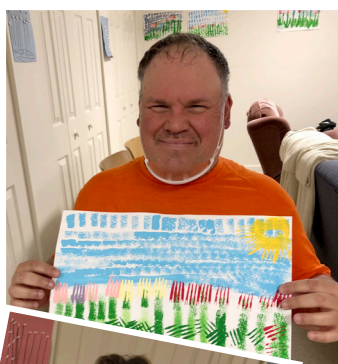
Email: mstephenson@crcna.org • tdeyoung@rca.org

Of Gardens, Lakes, and Whimsy

The Brothers and Sisters Homes in Holland, MI, provide caring, supportive, community-oriented, spiritually nourishing homes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Rose Redmond, the activity coordinator for Holland Deacons' Conference drop-in program, said residents have opportunities to do art on a daily basis. With permission, she shared these contributions from the artists.

- Caroline Carter's favorite activities are drawing and coloring. She loves to give her art to everyone she meets. One can't help but smile at her whimsical flowers and bright colors.
- Doug Kloosterman's hand is one of the first up when asked, "Who wants to do art?" Doug enjoyed using an unusual tool—a plastic fork—to paint this spring garden.

- Pat Oetman was with a group that saw birds on the water, and she thought they might be loons. Later Pat asked Nancy Rosie (who comes up with art ideas) if she would help her make a loon picture, and this is what they came up with.
- Katie Raak loves art and works on a project almost every day. She said that this tulip garden was made using flattened toilet paper tubes dipped in paint for the colorful petals.
- Laurie Slag has a great enthusiasm for art and is willing to try any new project. Here she arranged a mosaic of geometric shapes in many colors.



Top left, Caroline Carter; top right, Doug Kloosterman; bottom left, Pat Oetman; bottom middle, Katie Raak; bottom right, Laurie Slag

Awards and Past Issues

This newsletter and the Disability Concerns blog (network.crcna.org/disability), co-published by CRC and RCA Disability Concerns ministries, received three awards from the Associated Church Press recently for work done in 2020:

- For the Best in Class-Newsletter category, the Award of Excellence (first place) for *Breaking Barriers*.
- For the Reporting and Writing-Theme Issue category, the Award of Excellence (first place) for *Breaking Barriers*, Spring 2020, on visual impairment and blindness.
- In the blog category, the Award of Merit (second place) for the Disability Concerns blog on the Network.

In addition to this summer issue, find back issues of *Breaking Barriers* and editions in Español and in 한국어, plus a link for electronic subscriptions, at either the CRC website (www.crcna.org/disability) or RCA website (www.rca.org/disability).



 Ivan and Ruth Mulder

Pillowtalk: Poetic Responses to Adversity

by Ivan Mulder
Calvary CRC, Pella IA

My wife, Ruth Mulder, experienced disability challenges for 45 years after being stricken with transverse myelitis. She was awarded her crown of glory on December 21, 2019, at age 76.

Writing free verse poems during the first year following her death was cathartic. It helped me stay connected while adjusting to my new circumstances. These selections provide a glimpse into my wife's extraordinary response to adversity. Recently, my congregation showed [this video](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S1YUULIMbBjuj_i7DKnAjvu5fxmPrGNh/view) (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S1YUULIMbBjuj_i7DKnAjvu5fxmPrGNh/view) of me reading some of the poems I wrote.

The Recipe

I looked in a cookbook for a recipe today,
And I came across something unexpected.
You had tucked away a handwritten note,
Placing it as a marker for a favorite dish.
It made me wonder what you were feeling that
day,
Seemingly in search of encouragement from
Scripture:
"Behold, I am with you always" (Matthew
28:20),
"I will not leave you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5)
Finding assurances in God's constant presence,
You saved the "recipe" to savor a closer walk
with God.

Someday

The gift from a dear friend, a stamped pillow
that read:
"Someday everything will make perfect sense...
Someday."
It came at a time when life was especially
difficult—
An ambulance journey to the Mayo Clinic,
A second emergency tracheostomy,
To relieve acute respiratory distress.
Twenty surgeries within seven years,
To correct persistent tracheal stenosis,
Which often left you voiceless...
One stretch for two long years.
Did you complain? It wasn't your nature!
Thirty hyperbaric oxygen chamber treatments—
To provide healing and lasting reprieve.
Meanwhile, a bad fall and broken bones ended
your mobility,
Ten years in a power chair needing total help to
transfer.
Did you complain? It wasn't your nature!
God gave you the grace to endure the purpose
of his plan.
And finally, with a diagnosis of respiratory
failure—
You were ready for that "Someday."
Now, on the other side of suffering,
You are in heaven, where everything makes
perfect sense.

Three other poems can be found on the online version of this newsletter at either the CRC website (www.crcna.org/disability) or RCA website (www.rca.org/disability).

Creative Expressions

by Michèle Gyselinck
First CRC, Montreal QB

Two of the paintings are part of a triptych based on pictures of sunsets on Lake Superior taken by Mark Stephenson. There are three pictures, but I have not begun working on the third painting yet. As usual, and as is the case with most artists, we paint what is in our mind's eye, not necessarily what the actual landscape looks like. I do not work on paintings at night. I get too hyper and have a hard time settling down to get to sleep.

Golgotha, 2021

"Golgotha" represents the crosses after Jesus and the other convicts have died and been taken down. *Acrylic on Canvas*



Sunset over Lake Superior, 2021

"Sunset over Lake Superior" was inspired by a photograph of a sunset over that lake. *Acrylic on Canvas*



Editor's note

"Wait. You're Disabled!"



Early in my ministry, I led courses to help people discover and use their spiritual gifts. Utilizing various tools and soliciting feedback from others who knew them well, people often were surprised by the giftings that surfaced in this process of discernment. Sometimes they were eager to step into new roles. Sometimes they needed encouragement to take that next step. Sometimes others cast doubt on them for thinking they could do more than they had.

This issue of *Breaking Barriers* celebrates the artistic giftings of people with disabilities. If you're surprised that a woman who's blind can compose and sing beautiful music, or puzzled that someone diagnosed with schizophrenia can convert an account from the Gospels onto canvas, you're not alone, sadly. It's troubling how many people mistake "disability" for "lack of ability." This isn't a sense of awe when someone thinks, "I had no idea you could do that!" Instead, it's thinking less of a person and assuming, "You're disabled. How can you do that!"

People with disabilities learn to be agile as we adapt every single day to an ableist world that isn't designed or built with us in mind—and worse, doubts that we have something meaningful to contribute. The acute limitations some of us live with require imagination and creativity that often surprise able-bodied people who make assumptions or have grown accustomed to expecting less from people with disabilities. The fact is, we're quite adept at figuring out alternative ways of getting things done, often because we have to.

As this issue demonstrates, some people with disabilities are gifted with artistry that generates delight when it finds expression.

—Terry A. DeYoung



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