

DISABILITY NEWS

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 **UnitingCare**
South Australia

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from the Editor....

Greetings!

In this issue we look at the power of art and ritual to sustain and transform lives.

We read of Becky finding the will to live again through painting.

We read of people with an intellectual disability being embraced by the love of God through their commitment to receiving the Communion host.

I can also recall quiet and passive people with an intellectual disability becoming amazingly animated when a choir begins to sing or when a concert band starts to play.

It is all too easy to sum up or even dismiss a person with a disability on the basis of their physical or intellectual limitations. It's too easy to neglect their capacity to find life beyond that which limits them, to find healing through artistic expression, or spiritual nurture through the broken bread.

May we look beyond that which limits life to all the resources that enrich life abundantly.

Feel free to share this newsletter with others.

If you haven't already indicated, let me know if you would prefer to receive this electronically.

Email me (address above) the names of anyone who would like to be added to the mailing list.

Your feedback is always welcome.
Enjoy the read.

Rev Trevor Whitney

Disabilities Ministry Chaplain
UCA, Presbytery & Synod of SA
UnitingCare Commission

The Healing Power of Art - Becky's Story

Ian and Curly Corlett are the proud parents of Becky. Becky is 18 and they adopted her at birth. Becky was born with a major heart defect which needed surgery when she was 11 weeks old. She also missed out on a chromosome and has Down Syndrome, but her family say the compensations are enormous.

Last year while out walking with her Dad Becky had a stroke that left her paralysed down her right side. Her courage in responding to that was incredible. She recovered well physically but it left her with a lack of energy and some further speech impediment. Frustrating because she has a bit to say!

In July this year Becky was back in hospital at Adelaide's Flinders Medical Centre. It was discovered that she had suffered major heart damage. Your heart does its pumping routine about 65 times a minute. Becky's was on 18 and she was not expected to live. She did and was making a comeback when she had another major stroke. Within 48 hours her parents thought it was over; they had decided to give a *Do Not Resuscitate* order and were debating about the feeding tube through the nose as she could not swallow. The feeding tube went ahead and they had to have an X-ray to make sure it was in her stomach, not in her lungs.

On the way to the X-ray they went close to FMC's Promenade Art Gallery where a woman in a bridal dress was painting a huge mural while a man played classical music on a stringed instrument. With Becky's one working arm she pointed and was taken over for a look (Dad Ian plays the violin and Becky loves brides!).

The artist (also named Rebecca) turned, saw Becky, and had some sort of connection – and handed her the paintbrush. Becky, in her wheelchair, began to follow the contours on the mural seeming to put her life-threatening health problems aside as she became engaged in the artwork. Ian describes that moment as Becky deciding to live! They later discovered that the artist had not ever let anyone else paint in her work. After that Becky continued to

return to the Promenade Gallery to participate in the mural. Her heart function, arm movement and speech all improved markedly in the following week. *cont. p.2*

Disability Resource Website www.sa.uca.org.au/goto/disability

Available on the UCA SA website this site offers disability resources such as Reviews, Disability News newsletter (back copies), Kid's Books, Liturgy, Prayers, and Stories.

A resource for church & personal use.

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The Healing Power of Art, cont. from p.1

Becky's story was subsequently told on Adelaide's Channel 7 News and in the Southern Adelaide Health Service's monthly publication, Southern Health News (August 2007). Artist Rebecca Campbell was painting a 14 metre mural as a performance to cello as part of FMC's Arts in Health program. As part of the performance Rebecca wore a wedding dress complete with veil and a posy of colourful paintbrushes. Her performance attracted hundreds of curious patients, visitors and staff.

So what happened here? Why?

Arts in Health Coordinator at FMC, Sally Francis, said, "This experience highlights the importance of bringing art into hospitals. Becky had a life-changing experience. The ability of art to lift people's spirits can be invaluable to their health and wellbeing."

Dad Ian says, "Something deep and intrinsic happened that day, which is unexplainable and gave Becky the will to live." Both her parents say they have learned more about God and life from her than from any other source in their lives.

Who would you let wield a brush in your work of art?

Thanks to:

The Corlett family for giving permission to tell Becky's story
Corporate Communications - Southern Adelaide Health Service - for permission to print their photo
Rev Jeff May for sharing this story and allowing me to use his words
Marnie Agnew, KUCA News

Beatitudes from a Person with a Disability

*Blessed are you
who take time to listen
to difficult speech.*

*Blessed are you
who walk with us in public places
and ignore the stares of
strangers.*

*Blessed are you
who never bid us 'hurry up.'*

*Blessed are you
who stand beside us as we
enter new and untried ventures.*

*Blessed are you
who ask for our help,
for our greatest need
is to be needed.*

author unknown,
"That All May Worship," p.19
cited in "In the Shelter of Each Other,"
p.31



Photo courtesy
Southern Health
News. Used with
permission

Becky contributing to artist Rebecca Campbell's mural at the Flinders Medical Centre's Promenade Art Gallery

I regularly conduct a service of Holy Communion with the residents who live at the institution known as Highgate Park (formerly Julia Farr Services).

Most of the 30 or so residents who attend have some form of intellectual disability, and most attend the service in a wheelchair.

The service is conducted in the institution's chapel, an open space worship area which includes beautiful transparent murals hung across the floor to ceiling windows behind the Communion table.

After the service is over and the residents have been returned to their living areas I have often found myself reflecting on what these intellectually impaired people of faith actually derive from receiving the Communion host.

After all, many can't intellectually understand the Communion liturgy. Some literally cannot hear the words I speak.

But amidst this lack of intellectual understanding I see a community of faith that receives the soaked wafer to their lips with much resolve and intent.

How can this be? After all, some of them have such limited rational understanding of the sacrament.

- Perhaps it's the action of receiving the communion elements.

- Perhaps it's to do with the visual display of the broken bread and raised cup.

- Perhaps it's the idea of receiving the host amidst the chapel's liturgical furnishings and pictures.

- Perhaps it's something else I can't possibly comprehend.

I just don't know, and I never will, but I do know this, and that is that in the receiving of this sacrament these people are embraced by a God of mystery, beyond human understanding, who accepts and loves them just as they are.

Our intellects are a precious, God-given resource, but as we receive the freely offered Communion host may we too recognise the limits of our intellectual understanding, and embrace the God of mystery.

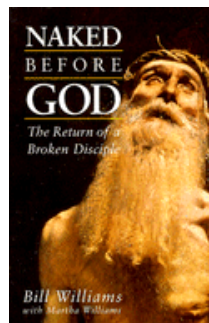
Trevor Whitney

Reviews Reviews Reviews

NAKED BEFORE GOD

The Return of a Broken Disciple

Bill Williams with Martha Williams



Morehouse Publishing
Harrisburg, 2001
paperback \$29.95

available online from Angus & Robertson bookstores
2nd hand copies from Amazon.com

Speaking through the mouth of Nathaniel, an imaginary disciple of Jesus, Williams writes as one who is in the end stages of living and dying with the suffocating effects of cystic fibrosis. Like Old Testament Job he wrestles wretchedly with intellectually unanswerable questions, such as how a loving God can allow such awful suffering. He takes on board the words of the abandoned Jesus, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" As his body falls apart we are graphically taken along on his search for healing, until we hear him utter words of reconciliation: *As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: the love of God is more powerful than death.*

This disability narrative, written in poetic prose, is at times harrowing to read, but is also utterly compelling for those prepared to engage with Williams' world of suffering and struggle with God. Whilst written in a confronting style Williams laces his narrative with a humour and grace that makes this book a joy to read.

Note: Williams died a few days after this book was published in 1998, aged 38.

Ministry in the midst of suffering

"If we disappear from your sight, it may be because our courage failed. We decided not to burden you, and ourselves, with our presence.

But I've been with people who are not made anxious by my brokenness, and I've seen the difference. It is, in fact, the best definition of ministry I have ever heard; I nearly wept (sic) when I heard it, it so defined what I needed. Engrave this upon your heart, if you wish to do good.

Ministry is a non-anxious presence.

You can tell such grace by its care, by its attentive ear, by its pace. When it reaches out to heal you, it is to give relief to you, not itself—and when it prays with you, it lets you declare your own burdens, rather than declaring what it finds burdensome about you."

Bill Williams

"Naked Before God", p.33

A LONG ROAD

Simi Linton

The Australian Financial Review, Sept.7, 2007

Review section, pp.1,2 & 8

On a spring day in 1971 American anti-war protester Simi Linton was involved in a shocking car accident that caused the deaths of her dear friend Carol, and her husband John. Simi injured her spine so badly that she was left paralysed and forever in a wheelchair. From that time forward she began to understand her body and how people would treat her differently because of her physically impaired state.

During her intensive rehabilitation she experiences sensitive and caring family, friends and nurses, as well as the superior, glib doctors, and the psychologist who subjects her to an utterly irrelevant IQ test. She goes from being a thoroughly independent person to one who requires everything done for her - telephones held to her ear, birthday presents bought on her behalf.

She notes the changes in her body, especially the conscious need to try to make parts of her lower body work again. Through painful therapy she gradually starts to feel some sensations return to her pelvis, genitals, knees, thighs, and the bottom of her feet.

Simi details the rounds of being doped up by painkillers, and "the numbing bleakness of hospital life." She describes the way a friend graphically confronts her with all the losses she has experienced. And she observes how she has gone from being regarded as "normal" to one who is viewed as atypical, and what she refers to as "underfooted."

And finally she describes being hungry to go back into a world that she knows will not treat her well.

This graphic and honest rehabilitation account challenges the reader to consider disability not only as something created through bodily damage, but also through social fear and prejudice.

Well worth a read.

I then said: "I'm OK, you know."

"What?" Delia said, letting out a gasp. "Oh yeah, sure, you're fine. John is dead. You're ... paralysed, you're in a ... wheelchair, what do you mean you're OK?"

Simi Linton

* Copies of this article are available from the editor at trevor@sa.uca.org.au

A Christmas Message

The Old Testament reading for Christmas day (Isa.62:6-12) has Yahweh proclaiming to the forlorn Jewish people that after years of living in a foreign land they are no longer to be thought of as exiles. They will be called, "The Holy People ... Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken (v.12)."

Jesus came to tell the people of his day and us that we too have been "sought out ... not forsaken." We are precious to God.

Yet the church lives today amidst peoples who are forsaken. The homeless, the abused, and many with disabilities, feel society's neglect.

As a people who can affirm at Christmas, as always, that we are not forsaken, may we reach out and truly embrace those who know neglect with genuine gestures of friendship.

kid's books

Moonbird

by Joyce Dunbar & Jane Ray

published by Random House

London, 2005

softcover \$17.95

available all good bookstores

Disability topic: **deafness**

Suitable for ages 5-12



Orla is a young boy who lives in a bubble of silence. He is deaf to the sounds of the earth. But the magical Moonbird teaches him

how to speak with his hands and listen with his eyes. A beautiful new world opens up to the joyful Orla. And eventually, through the help of the Moonbird's song, Orla's parents, the King and Queen, realize how blind and deaf they have been to all that their son could see and hear.

This beautifully written and illustrated fantasy story reminds us that those who are deaf can still speak with their hands and listen with their eyes.

