

TRANSFORMED BY WELCOME

By: Lura Southerland, L'Arche Spokane Director



I want to tell you a story of welcome.

I came to L'Arche Spokane in August of 1988. Just prior to that I had lived two years in a little Christian community of 3-4 other people who worked for the Catholic church in our little town. I was good friends with these people and had known them for about 4 years all together. I had gone to visit my parents for the weekend and had returned home. They were watching a movie together in our living room. I was excited to be back and came in the room with a big "I'm home!!" Nobody moved. "Hi, I'm back!" One person turned and said very unimpressed "Hey" and went back to the movie.

Fast forward to October of 1988. I had been in the house for 2 months and been asked to go to a House Leaders meeting in Tacoma. I was gone 4 or 5 days and returned to the house. At that time we lived in a big farmhouse, people again were watching TV. I came in the door with a simple "I'm back". Sean Doneen got off the



comfortable couch, left the program he was watching and ran; he didn't walk, he ran through 2 large rooms- to greet me at the door and welcome me home. He gave me a huge hug and he had a look on his face that I will never forget. He let me know he was thrilled to see me, I was part of the family and he had missed me while I was gone. I had known him for 2 months.

It has been 20 years since that day and Sean still gets up from whatever he is doing and greets me with a heartfelt "Hello Hadam!" (my maiden name was Adams). It took me 10 years or so to learn the lesson that Sean just knew. That is: when you enter a room or others enter your home put a smile on your face and let your body language and actions tell them that they are welcome and you are glad to see them.

Along the way I married a wonderful man who had 3 children already and I was now a stepmother. This is a difficult relationship in the best of circumstances, I am sad to

say that in the beginning they were an imposition to my time with their father who I was madly in love with and wanted to spend every waking moment with. Then I started to think about the Sean Doneen way of welcome. He hadn't known me long, he hadn't chosen me to come there and yet at a deep level he accepted and loved me and let it show in his face. I started to practice putting that look on my face when the kids came in the door. A look of "I accept you, I am glad you are here". Even if I wasn't feeling it I intentionally put that look on my face. It is amazing to me how that simple thing changed our relationship so much. They were happier to come and I started to feel glad they were there. From that place our relationship grew.

That moment with Sean and many moments since with him and with many others have contributed to my commitment to L'Arche and knowing that this is a place where we honor that kind of learning. I am so grateful to go to a place every day where scriptures are read and learning to love deeper is the goal and most of all we have such incredible teachers who live this message and show us how to do it too.

