

TOM CULLIMORE'S EULOGY FOR DAVID PEACOCK, MEMBER OF L'ARCHE, EDINBURGH

David Peacock was autistic and non-verbal and lived much of his life in Gogarburn Hospital. But in 2009 he became a member of L'Arche Edinburgh, where people with and without learning disabilities live in community (and with whom our two parishes have a close relationship, not least with the annual Epiphany meal in St John's Hall). David lived in The Skein till his death in early March this year. There he met Tom Cullimore, son of St John's parishioners and music group members, Duncan and Eleanor. Tom's eulogy (below) was one of two at David's memorable funeral on Tuesday 8 April at St James Episcopal Church.

I arrived as a live in assistant at The Skein in 2015 [*the first of the several houses that make up the Edinburgh L'Arche community*], and one of the first things the House Leader, Elaine, said to me during my induction was: 'David is always surprising us'. Out of everything I read and heard during these early days, this stood out because of the manner in which it was delivered. I had clearly arrived in a house which was proud of David, of what they had learned he was able to do since arriving in 2009, and most of all curious to see what was next for him. This line would echo through my own inducting of new assistants in the following years, not only because I knew the sentiment would be helpful to others, but because it helped to remind me of one of the most fascinating things about supporting David; given I knew he was going to surprise me, why was I always caught off guard when it happened?

In part I suspect this is because David was full of beautiful, autistic complexity. This was someone who told you so clearly how he wanted to be supported, all the while remaining totally silent. The Māori word for Autism – *taki wātanga* – literally translates as 'in his own time and space'. To be new to David's own particular time and space could be an uncertain experience, but once you tuned into it, you realised how much sense it made. Amongst other things he was a man of resourcefulness and practicality. You learned that there was a hole in his jumper because he brought you the tin with sewing supplies to fix it. On more than one occasion I learned that my shoelaces had come undone because David had started to tie them for me.

To know him up close was to know assumptions about disability are not just wrong, but boring and unimaginative. He had constantly defied expectations, not only of his ability to *do* – sharing mealtimes, or getting the bus, or mowing the lawn – but in forming meaningful relationships with those he lived with. Stories of his final days, in which he had been carrying a picture of himself and Sian [*another of the core members in The Skein*] in his back pocket, or how he lit up when Kirsty [*a third core member*]

came to visit him in hospital, tells you how deeply these relationships were felt, and how profound his loss is for the whole L'Arche community.

And then there's Jonathan [*The fourth core member in The Skein*]. It is hard to imagine a sharper contrast on your first day at the Skein, between David's caution and Jonathan immediately throwing his arms around you before he knows your name. Unsurprisingly, from 2009 onwards Jonathan led the way in revealing to the rest of us just how much David could appreciate this kind of affection. I'm assured this was not always a straightforward journey. But in the end, there were hugs, there was plenty of laughter, and - to me - the iconic symbol of David's defences being lowered and him extending his trust to you: a simple touching of foreheads. When David placed his head on yours it was delicate and deliberate and full of warmth. He was happy to share this moment of his life with you in the place where he was at home.



David's life at L'Arche extended well beyond the walls of the Skein. He was a valued member of the Leith School of Art, where he would delight tutors and assistants alike with an ever-expanding range of techniques and styles. He always retained a trademark abstract quality, but his repertoire of still life, mixed media and life drawing were testament to his ongoing ability to surprise and delight. In 2017 David exhibited here

and sold multiple paintings; in the years that followed a piece of David's art became easily the most requested leaving gift for any assistant moving on from The Skein.

David's weeks were full of variety. Between Leith School of Art and the L'Arche Art Club on a Monday, he would ride horses, attend music sessions, and deliver post around the community at the end of the week. His faith life was important, too; full of depth and mystery, whether visiting Brother 'John Halsey in Loanhead or worshipping here with St James. Swimming at Braidburn's heated pool was another of his great joys. Seeing David attend local L'Arche Community Gatherings offered a regular reminder of how comfortable he was in this bigger group, be it a simple evening of Advent Prayer, or the Maundy Thursday ritual of mutual feet washing.

These foundations set David up for all manner of events out of the ordinary. It's true that David brought a metronomic quality to life at the Skein; you knew it was 5 minutes to 6 without looking at the clock, because you could hear David's bedroom door open, ready to come and check on the progress that was being made for dinner. But one of the most important lessons David taught us over the years was that these routines, these rhythms he had honed over the years, were not restrictions on his day; they were a profound form of self-expression. And just as he stuck with them most of the time, he was perfectly able to set them to one side when the offer of something more novel came up. Among others, trips up to Inverness for the 40th Anniversary of its own L'Arche Community in 2015, or down to Canterbury for a L'Arche UK celebration in 2014 showed off David's adventurous side.

David travelled to Liverpool as part of the Edinburgh community's contingent for the L'Arche UK National Gathering in 2019, reflecting his belonging not only to this community, but to a wider L'Arche family too. It was a joy to see him so relaxed and so involved. After one particular workshop, 'Storytelling Through Collage', it was clear David had made quite the impression on anyone who had been attending with him. Over the course of the weekend I bumped into numerous people who had been in that same session, wanted to join the fan club, and above all else wanted to know more about David. To me this was evidence not only of his supreme artistic talent, but also of his quiet magnetism; a reminder of how powerfully he drew people in, of what he chose to share, and what he chose to hold back.

A year later David would sail through Covid lockdowns, which represented an unimaginable breakdown of the ordinary, and in another year still he would continue to defy expectations by rolling up his sleeve to get vaccinated, dismissing the last of our assumptions about what someone with his lived experience of hospital settings would tolerate.

In 2022 David, along with many members of the L'Arche community, would attend mine and Rachael's wedding at St Mark's Church in Portobello. When I arrived at the church David was the first person I saw. Most people were sat talking amongst themselves, while David was stood, hand resting on his watch, looking up at the church ceiling, and around at the various stained-glass windows. This was not an uncommon sight; he had a knack for stopping to observe things that the rest of us missed, be it in nature, in architecture or in galleries. About a year later, I was attending St Mark's as a member of the congregation, and my eyes were drawn to the nearest stained glass to where I was sat, not far from where David had been on our wedding day, and I noticed its display for the first time. Two figures stand side by side, leaning into each other with their heads gently touching.

At the foot of the stained glass is a line from the Book of Samuel: *'the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David'*. The passage, often attributed as one of the great Bible stories of friendship, goes on: *'and Jonathan loved him as his own soul'*.

I am exceptionally grateful to have known David. Grateful for the shoelaces he saw needed tying, grateful for the many souls that were knit with his, and grateful for the light from the stained glass through which he shone, with colour and magic.



David and Jonathan – St Mark's, Portobello