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The Honourable David Crombie,
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Why Judith Snow deserves to be in the Hall of Fame - A ground level perspective from The Garden of Good and Evil, Savannah Ga.

One day John O'Brien came back from Canada with stories of this woman, a woman who had broken free of an extended care hospital, or more correctly had been sprung from an extended care hospital by a bunch of inclusion activists, college professor types and their friends. All of this was revolutionary in the early 1980's, at least around here. It was also an expression of the essence of what we were learning at Chatham Savannah Citizen Advocacy. Judith's story of private CITIZENS coming forward, aligning themselves with someone who was being marginalized because of prejudice toward disability and creating real change for the person, themselves and the larger community was our dream..... except now it was real. They were doing it.

Locally, people were going into nursing homes and extended care facilities but never leaving, except to be buried. College professor types in the Department of Education, Psychology etc were not interested in hearing about the budding integration movement. Hell, around here in the early 80's the word integration brought up conversations about school bussing, and how good the masters were back on the plantation.

At John's suggestion the Georgia Advocacy Office invited this mythical being to come to Atlanta, Savannah and Macon. Here in Savannah we prepared for our guest lecturer, or at least we thought we prepared. We reached out to our friends at St. Paul's Episcopal, at Aldersgate United Methodist and Trinity United Methodist, at First Presbyterian and at Christ Church. Social halls were booked, announcements printed, our board members all dutifully encouraged friends to attend, our friends at the TV stations and the newspaper were called. We were ready. Well sort of.

It's 3PM and we have a packed house in the social hall at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. A rented U Haul van pulls up. Hippies jump out. OK, college professor hippies get out. OK, social revolutionaries pile out. A pair of 2x6 planks are pulled out of the van, turned into a makeshift ramp, down this ramp comes Judith Snow and life will never be the same again. The social hall is buzzing with conversation, until Judith rolls in and things get very quiet. No one has ever seen anything like this roadshow before. YOU came from CANADA to talk with us about how to question, challenge and change systems? YOU came from CANADA to talk about the Bible, about the walls coming down? YOU came from Canada? Judith's 'simple' presence in the larger world, at least in the American South, was revolutionary, and undeniable.

Judith and her allies came to Savannah many times over the next 20 or so years. Closing my eyes and remembering some of that here's what emerges.... none of this is profound, but the impact was and continues to be.

1. A conversation with Judith that makes me realize that her politics are way left of mine, and that she is a lot smarter than me, and done more in her life than I have in mine. Now there's a good lesson for

a young whipper snapper who is still sorting through his own unconscious assumptions about himself and other people.

2. Judith, hungover as hell, after a full day and night of St. Patrick's Day partying (we have the 3rd largest celebration in the county), speaking at a breakfast we had arranged with legislators from around the state, in town for St. Patrick's Day. Most of the legislators were hung over too, so it all kind of worked. They got the message. Doctors can get it wrong. Terribly wrong. Life in an institution is soul sucking. It does not have to be this way. It can be different and 'ordinary' people can help make things different and better. It's 1980. It's Georgia, the state with the largest single institution in the USA. Doctors can get it wrong. Terribly wrong. Life in an institution is soul sucking. It does not have to be this way. It can be different and 'ordinary' people can help make things different and better.

3. My 20 something year old friend Kristin Russell scurrying around to build a bed frame out of 2/4's and cinder blocks for Judith. Judith and crew would be staying at Kristin's and making the Sentient Bean, the coffee shop she owned, home base for a week. Judith was the first person in a power wheelchair to ever be in the shop, much less to give lectures from the little stage in the evenings. And oh, let's not forget Judith organizing a laughing yoga class for Kristin and a bunch of local hipsters. All of this raised her status in hip Savannah, and gave the hipsters something to think about, that many of them have never forgotten.

4. Judith on the pulpit at Aldersgate United Methodist Church Packed with conservative, white, older parishioners. The sign outside said "March 15th: Judith Snow and the Joshua Committee - Breaking Down the Walls. They could have been a rock band. Hell, they were a rock band. And they rocked that church and those people that night. Hey wait a minute, she' not supposed to be able to do this. How can this be? How does she do it? If she can do it why can't other people do it? Wait a minute, maybe the world is not as I thought it was..... Wait a minute, maybe it's less about how the person moves their arms and legs and maybe it's more about how we choose to be moved as citizens and organize to move public policy.

5. Judith decided to come South to escape Toronto winters. Savannah, or more specifically Tybee Island, a small beach community 15 miles from Savannah would be the end point for this grand child of the electric acid kool aid test Keasy school bus trip. What I didn't know was that Judith would be appearing before Tybee City Council pleading and winning her case for a length of stay dispensation in the city's campground.... and they threw in the 'friend of Tybee discount'.

6. Judith lived for a couple of weeks in the parsonage attached to First Presbyterian Church. Some of the churches most active members were deeply involved in citizen advocacy, had met and learned from Judith on her previous trips to Savannah, and brokered the arrangement with Rev. Stephen Williams.

Reverend Williams has one speed, full speed. Stephen is known for running not walking as he moves from office, to social hall, to chapel. He is non- stop... Except when confronted by or with Judith. Stephen would be sprinting across the empty social hall and Judith would be sitting having a coffee, maybe reading. He would break stride to say high and see if 'everything is all right?' Well, Judith would say "it depends on what level you are speaking about" and then she would throw out some sort of spiritual question, conundrum, or declaration, which would literally stop Rev. Williams in his tracks and he would come to a full halt, be still, and be in that moment with Judith. Yes, that moment. The moment when you realize that you are in the presence of an unexpected teacher...

someone who is wise, experienced, yet hidden from your own mind as the bearer of insight and wisdom.

Judith's local reputation was first that of activist and public speaker, then author and artist. After watching her work the Tybee City Council maybe a little bit of a con artist (for the good of the people) as well and definitely that of a party girl. But for me, for people in Savannah, and people around the world Judith's highest purpose was that of being an unexpected teacher. If you meet one, it opens you up to the possibility of meeting another. And if you meet another and another unexpected teacher you begin to realize that the idea that knowledge, wisdom, insight comes packaged in little boxes called classrooms begins to melt away. And that is when you become free to be who you want to be. Judith did that. She freed people to become who they wanted to be.

As a footnote, -- One of Savannah's finest unexpected teachers is a man named Waddie Welcome. His story, the story of Mr. Welcome and his allies may be found in the award winning book ***Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community***. There would likely be no Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community story in Savannah if there had been no Judith in Savannah. The 'Judith of Judith' created context for local people to be able to imagine that something different and good could happen with and for Mr. Welcome. Mr. Crombie, send me your mailing address and I will send you a copy of the book. Without Judith, likely no Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community.

<https://www.aaid.org/docs/default-source/about-aaid/gomez-presidential-address.pdf?sfvrsn=2> - go to page 363 in Sharon Gomez's 2011-12 Presidential Address to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: ***Creating Inclusive Communities: Pathways to the Vision***. It highlights the lessons from Mr. Waddie Welcome. Without Judith, much of this would not even have been a dream.

Thanking you for the opportunity to share these rambling thoughts. It is an honor.

Tom Kohler
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May 14, 2021

Canadian Disability Hall of Fame
Selection Committee

The Honourable David Crombie

I could tell you many stories of my dear friend Judith Snow and list dozens of reasons why she should be installed in the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame! Judith was always someone who pushed the boundaries of what was possible for people - it is one of her gifts that I most admire.

In the early 1990's, I was working with Judith to develop and facilitate a circle of support around my friend Matt, who because of his autism, required significant support. I was working for Matt as his coordinator and Judith was volunteering her time and mentoring me.

Matt, myself and a group of friends were renting a house in Roncesvalles Village in Toronto and there was an opportunity to purchase the house we were living in. It seemed quite impossible to me but in her "go for it" way, Judith gave us the push we needed to take the chance. Our idea was to become homeowners and create a little "intentional community" that would mutually support us all.

Judith and I worked with the real estate agent and managed to buy a house worth \$250,000 with almost no down payment. We invited Matt and a couple other friends to share the house with us. We filled that house with good people, 2 of whom required 24-hour attendant care, 2 other people (for a total of 5, plus 2 attendants most of the time), a dog and 2 cats. It was a crazy idea and it worked beautifully.

This "outside the box" idea would not have worked without Judith 's involvement

That many people living together can be fraught with all kinds of interpersonal dynamics. Add an ever-changing cast of supporters coming and going 2 or 3 times a day. It was a recipe for chaos and discord.

Judith was the master of recognizing and nurturing peoples' gifts and a skilled facilitator for making things work.

For example, while I am terrible at routine and daily maintenance and cleaning, I am also good with projects and timelines and getting things done in a timely manner. So, Judith created a schedule for regular house cleaning that would be done by Judith and Matt and their supporters. I was going to be responsible for larger projects, like renovations and repairs, painting, and other upkeep. Judith managed to harness each of our gifts and create the circumstances that got things done in ways that we all made contribution. It was a one of her many superpowers.

Through that experience, I learned so much about people and how to work together to build community.

In the Company of Others

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Judith just wanted a life like everybody else. She used her skills of connection and persuasion to navigate her way to a life lived on her terms. Our little community lasted just under 2 years, ending when I met a woman from Michigan, moved to the USA and got married. Judith and one of our roommates, my good friend David, bought another house together. This time it was a little further north of downtown, with 2 apartments that they each lived in and sharing the costs and upkeep in a different way.

The house purchases were a perfect example of Judith's beliefs about contribution and giftedness. Her life was an embodiment of her beliefs that weren't specific to disabled people but for every person. She explored and lived those ideas everyday of her life. Once Judith met a new person, she would quickly begin noticing and teasing out the gifts that she recognized in them and look for ways to actualize those gifts in meaningful ways in our community.

Her supporters were another great example of how she worked with the idea of giftedness. While all her supporters were trained to do everything needed for her support, Judith was intentional in how she scheduled people based on their gifts. That way they got to do things that utilized those gifts and allowed them to shine and enjoy their work even more. People stayed forever! Judith is one of the few people I have known who had supporters who worked for her for years at a time. Many of them took "breaks" to explore other passions but they always returned to Judith and work they found rewarding and fulfilling.

Judith taught me plenty in the years that I worked with her and I carry many of those lessons and ideas with me today. I believe her greatest contribution was her love of people and her desire to help everyone seek and find their gifts so that they could share with the rest of the world. She pursued this passion with integrity and devotion; traveling the world and helping others see what is possible for those who have been marginalized by their "difference".

For me, it wasn't so much that Judith's work reframing disability and helping others to see people who experience disability in a new light. It was that she was helping everyone see themselves in a new light, regardless of their ability.

Judith's contributions to the disability community and the world are too many to count and I know that others have shared them in the letters of support.

The work she did in helping us all see assets and not deficits in people is one of her greatest contributions and worthy of her induction into the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame.

Respectfully Submitted

Sheldon Schwitek
Co-founder
In the Company of Others

