

Happy 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Rossbrook House! It is an absolute joy to celebrate you. I have a treasure chest of fond memories of you which I call upon so very often.

I began my Rossbrook House experience as a volunteer working the 5:00 pm to midnight shift on Friday nights. That's when I was won over by the attenders, the staff and the place itself. Stories echoed from within the walls.

One of the memories that touched me the most is a simple one of the staff coming up the front stairs and yelling out "van ride"!!! and the kids getting in for a ride around town and eventually a ride home. These young people were to become my mentors and friends giving voice to what I was sensing was held hallowed in the walls. Stories of challenge and strength, loss and possibility.

When a teaching position came available at Eagles' Circle school, I was thrilled to now be a part of the teaching team at this junior high school on site. My time here was beyond special. The relationships and bonds deepened and broadened. While I was there to teach, I was taught.

One of my favourite memories was being at our annual winter camp at Red Rock, Whiteshell. A group of us decided to walk on the frozen lake to a nearby island. It was, as you can imagine, a frigid night and it was also a starlit, silent, sacred night. When we looked up to see the stars, the Northern Lights began to dance for us. We became as still as the night and silently received this gift of awe together.

After many years of this richness, I joined Phil Chiappetta as Co Executive Director. Phil, with all of his many skills, experience and thoughtfulness and wisdom, helped to make this transition a smooth one for me. I can remember sitting in the office late in the afternoon on Fridays reflecting on our week, on life, on our learnings, on the challenges and our aspirations. It became a tradition very quickly. I cherished this time together and working together to always hold present the vision and mission of Rossbrook House.

No path is linear, and we too had our circuitous journeys as we grew into our new roles. What we experienced as we worked with staff, attenders and the wider community, was that the vision held us in union as did the beauty of the children and youth. No child is ever to be forgotten nor their needs dismissed. Their lives, experiences, challenges and strength guided us to enlarge the circle of support, commitment to advocacy and to offer the best of what was possible for their safety and growth,

I would like to acknowledge the team that helped us to notice the edges of what was needed and what was being called forth. They are Audrey Campbell, Kerry Miller, Tom Thompson and Warren Goulet.

The many years at Rossbrook House shaped me and opened me. No matter what life holds or where it takes me, my heart is always filled with the faces and stories of insight and strength of the kids, the presence of the extended community of support and all that is woven in the heart of this place.

-Maria Vigna, former teacher/ED