

Reflection

A message to all who have cared for the Fulford Residence as much as I have.

More than 30 years ago, even as I pursued a career in schools, I enjoyed volunteering time at the Fulford Residence. I loved getting to know so many ladies who had led long and interesting lives. I visited their rooms for chats about their careers and their travels. I loved seeing their photos of family and friends, or of themselves wearing the uniforms of their workplaces. I looked into the eyes of these teachers and nurses, lawyers and business executives, and hoped one day I would appear to others as such a woman, strong, resilient, able and loved. Fulford has been home to so many classy and capable ladies.

Wednesday morning church services were a highlight, with visiting priests or lay readers. Music, stories and a time of prayer fed hungry souls with spiritual support. I was privileged to conduct some of these services, opportunities to bring the outside world into the house through stories of childhood, summer holidays, children in my schools, and travels that many of the ladies recognized.

When I was invited to become a member of the Board, I learned how much the members were privileged to do with, and for, the ladies. We were invited to purchase Christmas gifts for each lady, to bake our most delicious cookies and squares for festive occasions, to pour glasses of wine for a special meal in the dining room. We learned the history of the Shepherd suppers, the MacDonnell Tea, Fashion Shows and historic celebrations. We took ladies on tours of the growing city of Montreal, to view the neighbourhoods where they had lived, studied and worked. We took them on drives to see Christmas lights, on pub crawls with the escort of handsome Montreal police officers, and visits to exhibitions at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. In summer months we served breakfast on the balconies and took them to the colourful Atwater Market for coffee and a pastry. We played bridge, called for Bingo with prizes, and led book and reading groups.

Fulford holds a forever place in our hearts. In fact, I imagined that this might be a home for me in my very senior years, just as it had been for my mother and aunties who lived there happily for years.

In March 2020 COVID 19 hit our part of the world. Visits to Fulford were severely limited, then the ladies were “locked down” with the very best of care. We were so proud of our management team and staff who kept the ladies protected and well. We anticipated the arrival of the vaccine. Sadly, in early January 2021, COVID made its way into the house with a vengeance. Within weeks our many precious ladies became ill and twelve sadly died.

As a member of the Board I was aware that the growing number of empty rooms was leading to a growing loss of income. I was also coming to understand that contagious diseases like COVID could call into question the health of our building with its limited ventilation and limited bathrooms; significant upgrades would soon be needed. We had watched our finances dwindling for several years, even as we did our best to raise funds and to manage our resources as carefully as possible, anxious to maintain the excellent care our ladies were receiving.

At our monthly Board meeting in late February, 2021, we were forced to face the reality that important decisions would be required or we would go bankrupt. With breaking hearts, we began to plan for ongoing care for our ladies, and compensation and new positions for our valued staff members. We wanted to also provide compassionate support for all Fulford families.

The hardest part of this decision has been the lack of understanding from some in our community. Although we have professionals in place to ensure a transition of the ladies to excellent care facilities, some families see the Board members as uncaring and unresponsive. Fulford has been our home too, and we continue to work hard to remind the ladies that they are loved, and we endeavor to ensure their changes will be as smooth and joy-filled as possible. In fact, many of us plan to stay in touch, to visit, and to follow every Fulford resident as long as they are able to know and to welcome us. This is our mission, and this is the historic vision of the Fulford Residence.

Sue Winn, Volunteer and Board Member
April 6, 2021



(l to r) Bishop Mary Irwin-Gibson, Fulford Residence Board President;
Miss Ramsay, Fulford Resident; Sue Winn, Fulford Residence Board Member