

Callanish Writes

When the makings of a writing group at Callanish first started to take shape, Janie and I felt that the idea was ripe with potential. However, when we began, we could not have imagined just how powerful an experience it would be.

Coming together to write as a group for the first time, we "landed" in this new space by considering our origins - who we are, who we were. Now, as I sit here recalling the origins of Callanish Writes, I find myself fondly remembering that pivotal first session, where we dared to step in, and the sheer exhilaration that followed.

Reading out loud for the first time, writing poetry, responding to each other's work - these were firsts for many of us - and opened a vast door of possibility.

As the weeks passed, we began to examine the terrain of cancer, from diagnosis to the scars that adorn the body and the mind, and even the "secret scar" gained in the mischievous childhood of one participant (you know who you are).

We wrote about "goopy emotions" and "cold toes"; we gave "cause to pause" on the matters of life, with and without cancer, with and without answers.

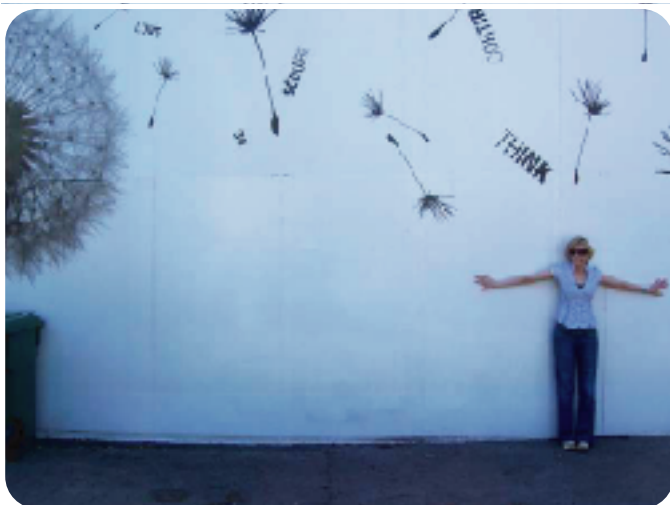
Through language, we traveled from the icy peaks of Patagonia to the streets of New York City with a "llama in a limo." We visited "forests of faith" and mourned "days of hope renewed, but ended."

Each week we found beautiful and pithy words to "throw off the tongue" and "the grace to move on." Together, we continued to "let the light (and the bedbugs) bite," because we had the reassurance that whatever came out on paper could be held by the group - the same support that is such an integral part of the Callanish culture.

Eight sessions and thousands of words later, I sit in awe of all that has transpired - what has been written, spoken, heard and, now, printed. To say it is an honour to write in community with this first, extraordinary group of Callanish writers would be an understatement.

Indeed, I am forever changed.

Kirsten Andersen, April 2008



Kirsten in Montreal
May 2008 (for a clinical trial)



Jen Luce

Hi, my name is Jen. I'm 30 years old and have been an ovarian cancer survivor since December 2006. I've been a member of Callanish since April 2007 when I went on their first ever young adult retreat. It absolutely changed my life. I measure almost everything up to the care I received while I was there, and the group of friends that I made have been such a support to me. I don't know what I would do without them.

Life sure can become topsy turvy in a second can't it? I just find it so amazing how we go on and on in our day-to-day lives expecting to have the same before us each day as we rise, and how quickly all of that changes in the blink of an eye.

I've been a part of "Callanish Writes" since the beginning of March and we've been meeting bi-weekly. I've found it such a beautiful way to express, as I do consider myself to be a writer as well; although, hearing everyone's words spoken has resonated with me in more ways that I can express. Our fearless leaders Kirsten, Janie and Gretchen (as well as help by Liz with refreshments and a kind smile to greet us), have been guiding us on this journey of written expression.

I wrote the poem below in dedication to a dear friend of mine, Janelle Hughes, who passed away from metastatic breast cancer at 5:19 pm on Friday, May 23, 2008. I met Janelle at a Young Adult Cancer Retreat put on by Callanish. Her smile and laughter spread through to all of us, and her honesty and depth was always honoured. A number of us from retreat became close friends with Janelle, as she became part of our "cancer clan".

Janelle's favourite creature was a butterfly, as it is mine, and it represents constant learning, metamorphosis, and delicate beauty. "Butterflies are symbols of freedom and creativity. They hold the gift of transformation and soul evolution. To the Native Americans the butterfly is a symbol of joy. They remind us not to take life so seriously. They feed on flowers that they help pollinate, thereby further spreading beauty. They represent the element of air, quickly changing and ever moving, so gracefully. Butterflies are messengers of the moment." This was Janelle in a nutshell.

Love you girl, miss you lots!



My Sweet Butterfly

*Another day has dawned
Yet the writing is on the wall.
So sad that I've been scorned,
By this body so young,
Yet it's not mine I speak of,
But of a girl's time lost.
So bold
So bald,
So beautiful.
And strong,
Always learning
Always loving
Never lost.
Amidst all the confusion,
Clarity was reached.*

photo of Janelle taken on retreat
May 9th 2008

Will You Face the Fire With Me?

(Collaborative Poem - each person in the group added a line or two)

*Will you face the fire with me?
Yes.*

*To feel the flames: of fear, of warmth, of light
Together*

*I surrender to the deep blue of connection
Yes. I wander and wonder
how I ignored any connections
not all, but many*

*The ignorance is what burns me
deep inside
if we play face to face, there will be space.*

*Yes. I will face the fire with you,
for its warmth and calling
brings us closer,
to the connection we have so longed
It is necessary to be one*

*The fire lights your cheeks
I see a faint smile in the dim light
Together we sit in quiet and calm
The darkness behind us recedes*

*I will walk through its embers,
like the Valley of Death,
and be transformed whole,
as I was once before*

*In the quiet, there is no distance between us
Just breath and fire and the quiet night skies
Maybe an owl or two*

*I will stand in the heat
and hold you until the fire is out*

*We will gather the twigs, the branches, the wood
and make the next fire together
Rising up from the belly and erupting
from the heart*

*Yes. I will face the fire with you
As you would with me
From leaping flames to dull glowing embers
Together - in community*



The "Callanish Writes" Group

Chor Leoni/Callanish Partnership

Chor Leoni is regarded as a leader in the Canadian male choir movement, acting as mentors and inspiration to choirs across the country. A rich full-bodied sound, innovative programming, technical precision, meticulous intonation, and versatility, coupled with an ever-present musical curiosity and commitment to the creation of new Canadian choral works, are qualities that have catapulted Chor Leoni to national and international fame since its founding by Diane Loomer C.M. in 1992.



Chor Leoni undertook the Healing Voices project at the request of music therapist Valerie Weeks, as a service to music therapists and others who work in the patient and people care field. Valerie and others have remarked on the special effect which male choral singing has for patients and clients. She and other music therapists and caregivers have used Chor Leoni recordings in their work in areas such as hospices and palliative care. Healing Voices is a compilation of previously released tracks, live performances, and new recordings selected by Valerie and artistic director, Diane Loomer.

Everyone involved with the project, including conductor, producer, instrumentalists, singers, composers, arrangers, photographers, proof readers, graphic artists, CD manufacturer, choir volunteers, distributors, and therapists (to name most, but not all) have donated their time, expertise, and devotion to make this project possible.

Over many years, members of the Callanish Community have enjoyed Chor Leoni's performances and were delighted to be invited to partner with Chor Leoni in their Healing Voices Project. Part of the \$20.00 charge for each CD is retained by Callanish to help sustain their programs and part is forwarded to Chor Leoni to cover the cost of the CD and shipping charges. Chor Leoni has chosen Callanish as a partner because they believe that the Society and its good work exemplify the spirit in which this project was launched.

Two Chor Leoni CD's Honoured by ACCC

Meeting for their biennial convention in Sackville, New Brunswick over the May long weekend, the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors announced that two recent recordings by Vancouver's Chor Leoni Men's Choir have received awards of excellence.

Circle of Compassion, featuring repertoire from recent Remembrance Day performances, is the recipient of the 2008 National Choral Award for Outstanding Choral Recording given by the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors.

Chor Leoni's **Healing Voices** recording project, featuring music that focuses on healing and calming, also received the 2008 Outstanding Sponsorship Award.

Thank you to all at Chor Leoni. Our heartfelt congratulations!

For further information about Chor Leoni, visit their website at www.chorleoni.org.