

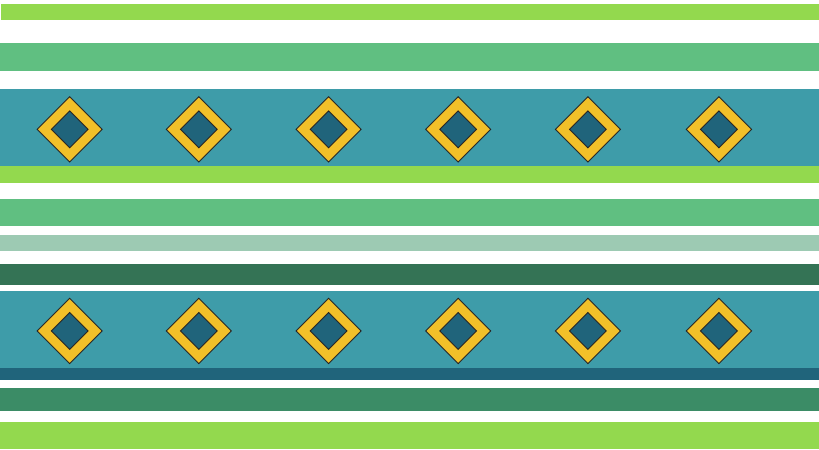
a moment
with warden woods
community centre





You found me at the Open House to say you were having a good time, to say you appreciated the food, to ask if there were more oranges. We talked about your kids and your grandkids, about how hard it can be to feed everyone when they come over. You found me again, several hours later, to ask what my last name was, and if my sister had died as a child. She did, in 1988, when I was 9 years old. You told me your daughter was in my sister's class. I wanted to cry because you triggered a hard memory, but also because I felt moved by the fact that you recognized me, and moved by the realisation that I will run into people here who knew me before I became what I am now.





You were trying to get your birth certificate recovered, but you didn't know your mother's maiden name. You left home at 16. You have spent the past 30 years estranged from your family, and a maiden name isn't the type of detail one always holds onto. Hospital birth records, genealogy charts, census, and marriage records all came up empty. Then we found your father's obituary. We left the respite number at the funeral home hoping your mother would call. Within twenty minutes, your sister rang for you. Your hug was a clear expression of appreciation for our efforts. Weeks later your birth certificate came, and you were able to move forward. We are so happy for you.



Dear Wendy,

You were a committed and amazing volunteer. You came anytime you were needed, even during the pandemic. You never claimed mileage, so we could use those funds to provide more meals to people who weren't as privileged as you. You helped until you were too sick to continue, and I used to call you to hear how treatment was going. You passed away this January, and I learned, near the end, that you asked your sister to let me know if anything happened to you. You were a great person. May God rest you in peace Wendy, you will be missed.



You were rummaging around for things to sell, and you asked me for pipes. I reminded you that consuming on site is not allowed, and that you are not alone. We talked for a bit, and you seemed happy for the conversation.

When I first started, you were very grumpy, bad-tempered, and always demanding help with something, from meal ordering to IT support. When you realized I will be here to help, whenever you need it, you became calmer. I saw how kindness and love shifted your personality and changed you. You started giving me an apple every time you visit the office. Now, I have so many apples.



You told me about what you described as a glamorous life, dates with the hottest models.

You told me you love music.

You told me you used to have the life people want.

You cried and told me you would try to stop drinking.



You are a resident at our respite, and you struggle with alcohol. One day after drinking you approached me to talk about alcoholism. I listened to you talk about your life and how you got here. You told me you had a good job, and had lived an accomplished life until your addiction cost you everything. I encouraged you to attend a program to help you manage your alcohol use, because you said you want stability, to be employed, and to achieve life goals. You demonstrated emotion, and you are determined. We are privileged to be supporting you.



Every Thursday at 3:00 pm in 40 Teesdale Place, the two of you are first to arrive. You always show up with great spirit and motivation to our weekly Crafting Circle. Since the very first gathering, one of you has offered your expertise and wisdom to teach crochet. The other has been busy spreading the word to new members, with a willingness to learn and engage worthy of our deepest admiration. Together, you are making the Crafting Circle a safer space for everyone where we can practice mutual care.



You showed up early looking far less cheerful than usual. When I asked if anything was wrong, tears swelled in your eyes. We sat down and you slowly told me about a distressing interaction you'd just experienced with one of your oldest and closest friends. You shared the story of your friendship and how your friend had been cruel and hurtful in recent months. We talked at length, and explored the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. You seemed relieved to have had the opportunity to talk openly and deeply about this friendship with someone. We haven't spoken about it since, but I left work that day feeling so moved that you felt comfortable enough with me to discuss something so personal.





I was running Adult Day Program, and reading some stories to the group of interesting things that happened in history on January 17th. One of the stories was about World War 2. You shared that when you were 11 years old, you and your classmates collected empty soup tins from around school property. You remembered that the tins were folded flat to be used as part of a defense device, and whomever collected the most tins got stamps in a special book for credit. I was touched by your memory, it illustrated the efforts even young kids were making to support the soldiers, and how much you wanted to help.



You were adjusting to life in the toddler room, and you were dependent on milk to help you nap. Your naps were short and you work up crying. We worked with your parents to find alternatives for comfort at nap time. You liked when we sang and hummed to you while patting your back, so we took turns doing that for a few weeks. Your parents tried it at home too, and they noticed improvements in your routine. Very slowly, we stopped giving you milk at naptime. After two months, you didn't need your milk to nap anymore. Your parents appreciated our hard work, and we appreciated yours.

“**Honestly**, life has been quiet over the last year. It has been a great comfort that my meals on wheels have arrived regularly to keep me fed and I enjoy the short, friendly conversations we have on Menu Day. The interaction with the volunteer drivers has also been essential for my mental wellbeing during this pandemic. I would not have survived without you! Sometimes it is the quiet, reliable services that provide the most help to handicapped seniors such as myself.”

It was exciting for you to participate in our annual meeting from your home at Byng Towers. You were happy to learn about the operations of our organization and be a part of the event from the comfort of your building's rec room. You are looking forward to doing it again next year.





You **didn't respond** or talk to me when I was interacting with you during activities. I realized you repeated words only when my co-workers interacted with you using your home language. So I started to learn the basics of your home language-

Good morning – Shuprobhat

Play-Khala

Sleep-Ghum

Wash hands-Hathdhaw

Drink-Pancrow

Come- Ashaw

Since then, you've grown closer to me, more confident in our relationship, and you respond when I ask.

It was his first week at Woodland Nursery School, and the transition was difficult. It was a lot of change for him, and you must have known it, and felt it. That day, he cried when Mama left in the morning. You got close to him and said Mommy coming soon. You patted his head gently with your palm. As we watched you, we remembered saying the same phrase to you during your own transition week. You were able to draw on a strategy that had been helpful to you, and offer up that strategy to the new toddler. You showed understanding, and empathy, and learning. You are growing up!

Your cat passed away and you were very vulnerable. You came to the office and poured your heart out. Thanks to you we learned how to get our local animal shelter to collect a beloved pet's body free of charge. Thanks to you we are ready to help the next person who needs this service.



You joined the Meals on Wheels program in September. In January, when our volunteer arrived for your delivery, she found you coming out of your house with your car key. You told her you just came from Nova Scotia and were going back out to find your brother. Our volunteer recognized your dementia. With my support she kept you from getting in the car. I called your son and suggested he take your car key to keep you safe. Your son was grateful for our steps to protect his father from harm.



You are living in the shelter right now due to family breakdown, a man at middle age. You are struggling with the loss of your home. You don't sleep well. We are getting to know you, and encouraging you to take it one day at a time. You are hoping to transition to permanent housing again, and we believe you will soon.



You arrived at daycare in a pink dress. I assumed your pronouns, and was easily corrected by your family. I was surprised at how easily your family showed their support, at how easily the whole scene fell into place, and how easily you got to be you with your family and with us. Maybe I should not have been surprised, but my experience has taught me to expect otherwise. You were he, in a pink dress, and it was easy.

Warden Woods Community Centre began to work with and for community in the 1960's. Over the years, our programs and services have changed and grown to meet the diverse needs of Southwest Scarborough. Today we operate a 24/7 respite program, daycare, early years, camps, youth programs, food security and social recreation, community meal delivery and transportation support, 24/7 assisted living, home help, seniors' recreation, and intergenerational community events. We continue to evolve.

Julia Gonsalves is currently Executive Director at Warden Woods. They are grateful to be working in close collaboration with a dynamite management and staff team, passionate volunteers and board members, and a community full of beautiful, interesting people. Every touching, thought-provoking, painful, and heart-warming story we have the privilege to witness and share in this work, is a gift.



We send congratulations to former Executive Director **Ginelle Skerritt**, first Black person and first woman to lead Warden Woods. She has continued her distinguished community leadership work as current Chief Executive Officer of York Region Children's Aid Society, the first Black Chief Executive Officer of any CAS in Ontario. As ED of Warden Woods from 2005 to 2020, Ginelle raised the profile of WWCC in provincial and federal circles of influence, successfully negotiating an agreement for continued use of 74 Firvalley Court, overseeing the opening of Scarborough's first respite for homeless community members, and expanding WWCC programs and services to meet local needs.



With thanks for the words and experiences of:

Adam

Andrea

Cleoni

Divneet

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Hana

Helen

Hyacinth

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Michael N.

Nagla

Nasrin

Nicolas

Niranjan

Pia

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And others



In loving memory of Wendy Mather



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