

# Moments of Closure

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## Closing Ceremony

Out From Under: Disability, History and Things to Remember

Royal Ontario Museum, July 11, 2008, 2:00-4:00 p.m.

1. Words of welcome and introduction from Christine Karcza, ROM Board of Governors.
2. Closing Reflections from the Exhibit Curators, Melanie Panitch, Kathryn Church and Catherine Frazee
3. Musical Selection: *Amazing Grace*, performed by Kazumi Tsuruoka with David Matheson
4. Candle Lighting Ceremony
5. Musical Selection: *Never Turning Back*, performed by Jane Field with Patricia Seeley

## CURATOR REFLECTIONS

Melanie Panitch:

1. What has happened here?

What has happened here has been a collective adventure in search of history. Our appetite for memories and anecdotes, episodes and details has been fierce. Some histories we know about have told us that leaders counted, other histories have told us that guns counted, even more histories have told us that power counted. But what, we demanded - were the ideas that counted? What set of ideas determined the lives and identities of hundreds and thousands of Canadians? What has happened here is that we have brought those ideas out from under. No longer can they say, reminiscent of post war Germany: "they did not know what was going on, no one told them". In 1960 Pierre Burton: wrote about the overcrowding at Orillia. At the end he concluded , "if a fire should break out and dozens of small bodies found the next morning do not say you did not know what it was like behind those plaster walls; you have been told." In 2008 Disability Studies has been "at home" at the ROM for 3 months. We named those ideas. They have been told.

2. What can happen now?

Only half of Canadians can name the first prime Minister. The Dominion Institute has declared the mission of historical education in Canada a failure. The verdict: young people don't care about history. Not true. They are just not that into Canada Day quizzes. Rather – we keep scrapbooks, and preserve photos and visit historic sites – and yes, visit museums. Perhaps it's because our mainstream national narrative tends to gloss over many histories - those of women, aboriginal peoples, immigrants and disabled people - that we have been committed to creative pursuits to bring disability 'out from under'. The national narrative is formed around such questions as when was the CPR built? But as disability studies scholars we want to know about the Chinese labourers who were injured blasting rock. As we close in one site and open in another we dedicate ourselves to the task of confusing and complicating our national historical narrative so that it can never be written the same, ever again.

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Kathryn Church:

1. What has happened here?

What has happened here is a “perfect storm” of cultural production that brought a social movement into alliance with two public institutions: a university and a museum – both of which envision themselves as city-builders. On a wing and a prayer, some windy storytellers used some ordinary -- but surprisingly seaworthy vessels -- to ride the waves of a rich, untold history. The moment is unprecedented. Some of what happened here was luck. But some was skill. Amongst a sea of worthy faces, I want to single out the exhibit’s designer, Debbie Adams, without whom we would never have breached the walls of this institution. As curators, we knew the power of our objects and stories; what we learned from Debbie was the art and power of display. She researched, selected and sold us on a physical system that holds our remembrance with a touch as light as a feather. In fact, as Dr. David Mitchell observed, though not in these words, it is the effervescence of the exhibit’s structure that allows the viewer to perceive and absorb the weight of its social chronicle. Let me read you what another designer, a recent visitor to the exhibit, wrote about this aspect of the work:

“It is very impressive. The organizing structure, the intellectual worked very well. The voices, the ideas and the objects were clear and deeply moving. Your exhibition designers served you very well too. Elegant, unobtrusive design that presented the materials to the viewer rather than overwhelming and swamping the stories. I'm very pleased that I got to see it - and I hope that you'll be able to send it out to other museums.”

2. What could happen now?

A few months ago, we formed the Out from Under Research Group. It is comprised of fifteen people -- faculty members and exhibitors – whose task is to find out whether and how public exhibit and disability can come together in meaningful ways. What sense do audiences make of activist disability history, and of its presentation in this way? Can exhibiting challenge the oppressive framings of medicine, technology, neo-liberal economics and religion? Or will visitors refuse to be dislodged from these dominant interpretive frames? Our group pursued these questions through 16 focus groups with a total of 122 people. We talked to members of labour unions, community college and university faculty, university students and alumni, retirees, human rights lawyers, journalists, and government bureaucrats. Some of our participants have direct and/or family experience of disability. Others are community service providers who have jobs in various parts of the service sector. In addition, we engaged four research assistants, wearing those distinctive Vision/Passion/Action t-shirts, to charm more than 50 casual exhibit visitors into brief recorded interviews. Our group is now up to its collective neck in data – the analysis of which is a crucial part of finding out “what happened here.” This study pioneers museum visitor research into disability history. It holds out the possibility that we can significantly increase our understanding of the work that disability arts and culture can do to support the disability rights movement and its activism.

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Catherine Frazee

1. What has happened here?

In this place of giant proportions, this place of ancient treasure and mystery, disabled people have been seen and heard. In this immense depository of knowledge and thought, we have argued our own inconvenient truths, spoken our struggles, affirmed our place. We have gained entry, and have begun to wrestle with the implications of this entry. From this imperfect and incomplete assembly of objects and words we have built collective memory.

2. What can happen now?

What remains now is to hold the weight of this moment, and to remember that the justice-seeking movement of disabled people has deep roots both in history and in philosophy. What remains now is to bring closure, and in so doing, to express our respect for those whose lives are honoured in the exhibit and for the thousands of disabled people whose lives have passed without the recognitions of public history. We now invite you to share in a brief ceremony in which disability activists and allies, scholars and elders offer their words of tribute, remembrance, blessing and valediction.

### AMAZING GRACE

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

When we've been here ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun.  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we've first begun.

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come; 'Tis  
Grace that brought me safe thus far  
and Grace will lead me home.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

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### CANDLELIGHTING CEREMONY:

Etta Ginsberg McEwan:

**"This flame shines brightly for those who have gone before us and who endured. In Judaism we say "MIKHAYIL EL KHAYIL" ("from strength to strength"). Their strength is with us today and the strength of this light is for those who will follow. The darkness for each generation of survivors moves slowly into light as we battle onward."**

Michael Armstrong:

**"We give thanks for the millions of ancestors who brought us here, right back to the beginning of life on earth itself. May we rejoice in our conception, arising from our mothers' dance of life. May our singular manifestations, out of millions of possibilities, be lovingly revered."**

Meenu Sikand:

**aval allah noor upaa-i-aa kudrat kay sabh banday.  
ayk noor tay sabh jag upji-aa ka-un bhalay ko manday.  
maatee ayk anayk bhaaNt kar saajee saajanhaarai.  
naa kachh poch maatee kay bhaaNday naa kachh poch kumbhaarai. sabh meh sachaa ayko so-ee  
tis kaa kee-aa sabh kachh ho-ee.  
ayk noor te sabh jag upaji-aa, kaon bhale ko mande."**

**"First Creator created the Light. Then He made all mortal beings. From that One Light, the entire universe came into being.**

**The clay remains the same, but the potter molds it in many shapes.**

**There is nothing wrong with the pots of clay.**

**There is nothing wrong with the Potter.**

**The One creator has designed them all.**

**If one cannot see God in all, one cannot see God at all.**

Peter and Jonathan Sen and Renee, Alex and Andrew Kwan

**Jesus told people with disabilities that "neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life". We will remember this.**

**(Repeat in Chinese for the last sentence) 我們會記得這句話。**

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The Kanagaratnam family -- Sinniah, Vasantha, Karthiga and Kishan

**Geethasaram**

**What happened, it happened well**

**What is happening, it is happening well**

**What will happen, it will happen well**

**What did you lose?**

**Why are you crying?**

**What did you bring, for you to lose it?**

**What did you create, for it to be wasted?**

**What ever you possessed, you took it from here**

**What is yours today, will become someone else's tomorrow**

**Another day, it will belong to some other**

**This is world order, the basis of my creation.**

Marcia and Donna Marcaccio:

**God made all people. Every person is special to Him. I know he is sad that some people with disabilities are treated badly by other people. I light this candle in hopes that all people are treated with kindness and that they can have a good and meaningful life. I pray that the world will be kinder to people who have a disability.**

Uzma Khan:

**As-salaam-u 'Alaikum (peace be upon you) We thank our predecessors for their righteous deeds that have assisted in the progression of the disability rights movement. Those individuals will forever inspire future disability rights champions. Let us rejoice in the spirit of graciousness as we honour their intentions and work.**

The Wong-Ward family -- Ing, Tim and Zhen-Mei:

**History is created... it doesn't just happen. Today, we have created a new chapter in our history, as people with disabilities. And in doing so, we remember those who came before us, and give strength to those who will follow.**

**PowerPoint Moves to Second Slide, then a new slide for each Installation**

Digging -- Terry Poirier:

**In memory of those who have passed before us anonymously on scattered, unnamed, institutional gravestones. We honour them, seeking new awareness of past wrongs and a sharper realization of where we must place the hard blade of our efforts in our quest for justice.**

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Laboring -- Ruth Ruth Stackhouse

**To May, Mathilda and Audrey and their 200,000 hours of LABORING. May their caring and feeding and clothing of others exemplify the pride and dignity of contribution.**

Dressing -- David Reville

**Let us remember lives lived in confined, drab, indistinguishable insignificance. Let us resolve to honour and celebrate the warmth, colour and creativity that are born of choice and individual freedom.**

Naming --- Paris Master McRae

**To those whose spirits were broken by the sticks and stones of outrageous naming. And to those who stood up against those names and reclaimed their own names and their freedom to live their lives as they choose.**

Fixing -- Ryan Hutchins

**I light this candle for pride and dignity, and for a future where our greatest concern is with fixing holes in the social fabric. May that fabric be woven with every color, every form and every style of being.**

Measuring -- Jennifer Patterson

**To the memory of those whose worth was measured and found wanting. And to a future in which human worth will no longer be dependent on the judgements of others, but will be appreciated in all of its splendid diversity.**

Packing -- Sarah May Glyn-Williams

**Let us remember those whose lives were packed into trunks and sent away into institutional oblivion. Let us honour them, grieve their losses, and find in our grief the courage to stand up against injustice wherever and whenever we find it.**

Breathing -- Audrey King:

**To Sheila Keogh whose persistence in *BREATHING* on her own terms, with independence, defiance and meaningful contribution for over half a century, shall continue to profoundly light our way even in the face of naysayers.**

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Remembering -- Cindy Mitchell:

**To my dear daughter, Kristen Inwood, whose brief candle lit a family, a community and a nation far beyond the brief days she managed to stay among us. George Bernard Shaw saw life as “a splendid torch”. Let us, like Kristen, “let it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations”.**

Trailblazing -- Joan Mactavish

**In a totally dark and silent world, Mae Sophia Brown trailblazed her way through an education and an all-too-short career to prove she was capable and experienced emotions the same as any other person. Mae exemplified the endless possibilities that exist for us all when access is provided. Bravo! Miss Brown**

Struggling -- Esther Ignagni

**We remember the men and women with disabilities who struggle to enter worlds of work, of commerce, of public common. In solidarity, we affirm their claim to citizenship, to place and space in the halls of labour.**

Aspiring -- Christine Karcza:

**To our country and our flag, emblazoned with celebration of who and what we are, heralding the unity across our individualities. Let us aspire to create a country where all citizens truly do share in the promise.**

Leading -- Hazel Self:

**Let us honour the leaders of the past, who began the great journey that we share today. And let us make room for the leaders of the future – the young people who will carry our activist energies forward.**

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### NEVER TURNING BACK

We're gonna keep on moving forward  
Keep on moving forward  
Keep on moving forward  
Never turning back  
Never turning back.

We're gonna work for change together  
work for change together  
work for change together  
Never turning back  
Never turning back.

We're gonna reach across the borders  
reach across the borders  
reach across the borders  
Never turning back  
Never turning back.

We're gonna keep on living proudly  
keep on living proudly  
keep on living proudly  
Never turning back  
Never turning back.

### **PowerPoint Moves to Acknowledgments Slides**