

From Institution to Community: A Personal and Communal Lenten Journey

Justin Clark's Lenten Reflection, Feb 13 & 14, 2016

(Donna)

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, a time of renewal. A time to journey in an intentional way with Jesus who lived 40 days in the desert and was tempted to abandon his call, his mission. We have 40 days to change our ways and change our hearts, to make choices about how we live.

In the reflection today, Justin will offer us a glimpse of the choices he made in his life and how a community of people have supported him. You will hear about choice and love and joy. You will also hear about challenge and fear and tears.

As we journey through Lent as individuals and as a community may we listen deeply to the call of Jesus to love, to follow Him and to support one another to live our mission boldly, remembering that we are not alone. We are supported by God's grace and one another.

(Justin)

Good morning.

Hello! How are you?

My name is Justin Matthew Clark. Today I will show you part of a video that my friends, Danielle Allen, Mark Chan and I made several ago. In the video you will hear my old computer voice which sounds very much like a robot. Today, I am using this new computer with a new voice. I enjoy it much better!

My friends Germaine, Danielle, John and I are newer members of this community. From the first time we came to Sunday Mass here at St. Joe's, we felt at home. We want to thank you all for your beautiful spirit of welcome.

The woman who accompanies us to Mass most Sundays is Danielle Allen. Danielle and my good friend, Normand, are co-founders of Ottawa Foyers Partage, homes for the differently abled where I live.

In this video I share a bit of my own exodus story - how, through God's grace I was able to leave the oppressive institution in Smith Falls after a court decision on November 15, 1982 and move into a loving, life-giving Foyers Partage community here in Ottawa.

When I was born I had cerebral palsy which means I did not have enough oxygen at birth. Throughout my life, God has blessed me with some very special friends who taught me to believe in myself. Their presence has given me energy to grow as a person, encouraged me to

keep trusting that longing for freedom God had put in my heart. I hope hearing my story will inspire you to remember the importance of lasting friendships and to trust that spark, that dream God has placed in your own heart.

Just to let you know, I had to shorten this presentation by more than half. If you want to see the whole video, the link will be published in this week's bulletin. Thank you.

MY LIFE – JUSTIN CLARK (abridged version)

[Video includes highlights from CBC Television – The Journal, 1982 \(Barbara Frum and Knowlton Nash\).](#)

For six days Canadians have watched a gripping and dramatic legal case unfold in a Perth Ontario courtroom. At stake is the future of Justin Clark, 20 years old a victim of cerebral palsy, a man confined to a wheelchair.

Despite his handicap, Justin Clark wanted the right to make his own decisions. He wanted his freedom. Justin Clark has spent the last eighteen years in an institution. He was placed in the Rideau Regional Centre when he was just two. It is the only home he has ever known. Justin's life has been a series of struggles, perhaps the most difficult this fight for his freedom.

The case involved a suit brought by Justin's parents who were seeking to have him declared mentally incompetent. They wanted to be appointed his legal guardians. Justin felt it was time he be on his own, and that he should be allowed to move from the institution to an Ottawa group home for the disabled.

Witnesses for Justin's parents testified Justin is retarded, that he is sociable but not capable of making his own decisions. Witnesses for Justin testified he is mentally competent and that he should be allowed his independence.

Justin watched the proceedings from a stretcher. He had developed an ulcer and was suffering back pain. Justin's friends from the institution sat nearby.

Several times the judge pleaded with both side to settle out of court. It was not to be. And every day a father who believed his son was helpless and a determined young cerebral palsy victim would meet in court.

Then it was Justin's turn to testify. He answered questions by pointing to symbols on a board; the symbols were interpreted by a translator. The courtroom was moved to tears. When asked who would take care of him if he moved out of the institution, Justin pointed to the symbol, "1".

Yesterday the judge agreed with him. In handing down his decision, the judge summed up the proceedings by saying:

With incredible effort, Justin Cark has managed to communicate his passion for freedom as well as his love of family during the course of this trial. We have recognised a gentle, trusting, believing spirit and very much a thinking human being with his unique part to play in our compassionate interdependent society.

Dramatization:

Three Gavel taps: Order! Justin Clark has managed to communicate his passion for freedom during this trial. We have recognized a thinking human being who has a unique part to play in our compassionate, interdependent society. I find and declare Matthew Justin Clark to be mentally competent!

We interviewed Justin earlier today in our Ottawa studios. To do so we used the Bliss Symbols Board. The board was developed in Canada and is used around the world to allow people who can't verbalize to touch individual words and symbols on a multi-coloured board. Together the symbols make up thoughts and sentences. Carol McLaughlin, Justin's best friend, acted as interpreter. In some cases we edited her voice over Justin's answers.

Justin, can you hear me?

Yeah.

Are you happy?

Yeah! 😊

Are you very, very happy?

Yeah! Yeah! 😊

We had to talk to you in the afternoon, Justin. Are you going to be staying home tonight to watch yourself on The Journal?

Out!

You want to go out instead? 😊 You want to go out to celebrate, Justin? Where are you going tonight to celebrate?

Country music!

You want to go out to listen to country and western music?

Yeah! 😊

Carol, let me ask you something because this is a great win for you as well. How happy are you?

I am ecstatic. It truly is a dream that we've been working towards for a long time, to help Justin win the right to make his own choices and decisions in his life. I think that a very powerful message has come out of all this in terms of Justin and his ability to fight this kind of thing.

Thank you both. It's wonderful to talk to you. And Good luck, Justin.

Thank you.

Bye, bye. Bye. Bye

That evening I could go to supper with my friends. I was so excited and happy I did not sleep at night.

Judge Matheson is a very important person in my life. He looked beyond my words. He heard what my heart and my soul were saying. Here is a picture of the judge and myself on Remembrance Day, 2001. The person kneeling in between is Gabe.

During my time at Rideau Regional I definitely felt poor. My life was totally controlled by others. At first my dreams seemed pretty impossible. But slowly it came to pass. People from all over came to help me – Normand, my friend; David Baker, my lawyer; Shirley McNaughton, head of the Bliss Institute; and many others.

After court, I went to Participation House in Hamilton. I thought this home was not quite what I was looking for. Then I visited a home in Ottawa. I was very excited and happy about this home and decided to move there at Foyers Partage. I moved into my present home on Booth St. in Ottawa on June 17th, 1983. Since I moved here, I went to school at MacArthur High. Then I worked on a computer at the YM-YWCA. I also learned about *Leisure in the Community*, through the City of Ottawa Summer Program. I got my first electronic computer assisted

device, an Epson computer in 1984.

Now I go to a place called Computer Wise during the week. I love my work. I make Thanks You cards for people and foundations who donate money to our organization. I work on some family calendars and birthday cards. I also make videos. I also send emails to my sister and brother and good friends. On Booth St. I live with Germaine and Dallacy who had also lived at Smith Falls.

Germaine and Dallacy go swimming sometimes. They also peel potatoes for homeless people. Over the years committed wonderful people have lived with us and attended to our needs.

I often go visit friends. We can go for nice walks by the river or go for a walk downtown. We throw parties for one another, go on holidays together. Since my life in Ottawa I have gone on several trips. I've been to Germany, Switzerland, France, from the Maritimes to Vancouver to the US where I visit my brother and even to Nicaragua.

I am now happy to be living at Ottawa Foyers Partage because it feels like a family (Pics of Mom and Dad,

(Family Pictures – Mom, Dad, siblings, nieces and nephews)

I am very, very happy to see my beautiful family on a regular basis. I love them very, very much, and they love me very, very much also.

Thank you!

You can view the entire video at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=t29a8dSj5PA>

Justin Clark
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