

# LearnABILITY



## Newsletter January 2013 issue 1

**Welcome to the first issue of LearnABILITY. Members of The Learning Network came together to show their work, express their opinions and share successes and celebrations. We appreciate you taking the time to read the articles and enjoy the pictures.**

### Volunteer Experience

By: Jacques Regimbal

First of all, you don't have to have a brain injury or physical challenges to realize how valuable and therapeutic it is to help others with their challenges or struggles. Whether it be physical, mental or especially memory or sight. I always liked the phrase that music calms the savage beast even if it's growling while singing. I myself have a memory difficulty, and I volunteer at a seniors group named Sprint ADP at the Anne Johnston station downtown. The benefits I gained volunteering have been tremendous. Knowing I can still play music and bring some joy and pleasure to others who may not be able to get out on a regular basis to enjoy and participate with others. A funny situation might come up where a Member will say we did that verse and I'll say practice makes perfect. Through volunteering I realized how important it is to help others. Even though I had an injury it's not a time to feel sorry for myself. I realized that even though I have a brain injury or memory challenges, I can still use my abilities to

help others. Go figure when I sing second verse same as the first, but mostly it is simply recognizing how much pleasure it is bringing to them. This helps my confidence and self esteem and means I can still be a productive member in the community. My point is that brain injury doesn't have to hold you back. So what are you doing today? No strings attached. There are so many ways to look up volunteering opportunities. For example; going on the internet, or to the library.

I am an Rock I am an Island.

See you there.



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## My Survival Story – By: Joseph Kure

I remember a few days where I would have a headache on my left side of my brain. Whenever I would go to the emergency I was always sent home. They said the cause of my headache could have been for various reasons – one was I had migraine headache or another time I could have had viral meningitis. This is more severe and I had to be in the hospital for about 2 weeks. It interrupted me going to college, but I eventually returned.

During the same year in August of 1993 I got better, continued in my education in the semester. In that same semester, a day or two before the exam, I had the last test in math. I could only do simple math e.g. add/subtract easy numbers. I had a headache on my left side. After the test some of my friends drove me home for me to get some rest. That same night at midnight I had a heavy headache in the left side of my head. I was driven to the hospital, and waited. If I remember, I threw up in a sink. Then they sent a neurologist to me – and I had to stay there over night. The next day they did a few tests – but because they didn't have the right testing equipment, they couldn't tell me everything that was happening. They told my family and me I would be sent to St. Michael's.

I can't remember how many tests I had, but I remembered the OLD MRI test at St Mike's. Back then not many hospitals had the MRI – it showed that I had something growing on the skull. It was fun there too – family and friends visited and the young priest from our Slovenian church. After a week I had my surgery. After the surgery I woke up and saw my younger sister. I thought I asked for a Canada Dry ginger ale, but I said Canadian Tire. I then found out I had a Ewing sarcoma – a malignant or a bad tumour normally found in teenagers but mine was on the skull - very rare to have it there. A few days later I took a bath and had a rash so one of the medicines was changed.

After the surgery, there were a few weeks to heal then I went to the old Princess Margaret Hospital. I had many test there to – including always having many blood tests when I came in as an outpatient. My first treatment was the two treatments of chemo (chemotherapy) that was bad for my cells. I had to lie down almost always because I did not have enough energy. I still have low red & white blood cells.

After I had a rest I had a radiation treatment on the T20 for a month in Dec –Jan. I still have the plastic frame they put on my head to get it in the right position. Next I had two other chemo treatments. I needed to stay in the hospital for 1-2 days for each one. After that they wanted to give me the first hard chemo again but my blood cells were always low.

I had to go back to St Michael's in April 1994 to the have operation the see if my tumour was gone. The worst pain was when they had to put the frame screwed onto my skull when I was conscious. After the second surgery the doctors said was a sack of fluid there and the tumour was not seen.

After the operation I was happy it was over in 1-2 years. I did have to get many MRI scans at first, seventeen years after my first operation I had my LAST MRI. The funny part is, it was the same tech staff there, and the first time in a VERY long time they asked if I wanted to see the warning video of the bad things that can happen if you have most metals in/near an MRI machine (a sledge hammer lifted ready to bash though the wall while tied down tight near the MRI).

Being positive and laughing a lot helped me through the experience greatly... along with a large number of Jelly Belly Jelly Beans.



### Meditation and Mindfulness – By: Elisabeth Coulson

Meditation and mindfulness set the tone for a disciplined way of life that brings peace and self awareness to the practitioner. They take little physical energy, and they help the mental and emotional strength we need to manage the ups and downs of daily living.

Traditionally, culture encourages us to focus on each other, rather than upon ourselves. When we begin practicing meditation and mindfulness we may feel guilty as we intentionally put our attention completely on ourselves.

The joys and troubles are largely unavoidable, and especially in the bad times we can feel that our lives are out of control.

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, in his book “Full Catastrophe Living” discusses how we can fully embrace the richness of life. He calls the range of life’s experiences “The Full Catastrophe” from a remark made by Zorbain Niko Kazantzakis’s novel “Zonba the Greek”

A calm acceptance of “The full catastrophe” is meditation practiced regularly with mindful acceptance of ourselves. Mindfulness is moment to moment awareness of what is happening in our lives. We look into ourselves with an inquiring mind, paying attention to each moment instead of trying to fill it up with something. The practice of meditation enables us to learn to relax. The practice of meditation is not meant in the sense of rehearsing but instead carries the sense of a way of life.

Kabat-Zinn says “The means and the end of meditation are the same.”

The heart of mindfulness practice consists of seven factors:

1. **Non Judging** – being an *impartial* witness to our experiences
2. **Patience** –the recognition that everything happens in its own time
3. **A “Beginner’s Mind”** – seeing and understanding everything that happens as if it were for the time.
4. **Trust** – trusting ourselves and our own feelings. “Inevitably we will make mistakes, it is not necessary always to look to others for guidance.”
5. **Non-Striving** – The goal of meditation is for us to be ourselves
6. **Acceptance** – seeing things as they really are in the present. We waste energy trying to change what is already fact
7. **Letting Go** – the practice of non-attachment is basic to mindfulness practice.



All these attitudes, together with a commitment to working on ourselves, and a high degree of perseverance are essential to the development of a strong meditation practice.

Ideally, we should practice 45 minutes day, 6 days a week. We don’t have to like it, we just have to do it, says Kabat-Zinn. Also, we need a vision of what we want for ourselves, a spiritual and mental goal.

According to Carl Jung, “The attachment of wholeness requires one to stake one’s whole being.” Nothing less, says Kabat-Zinn.

The easiest and most effective way to begin practicing mindfulness as a formal meditation practice is paying attention to our breathing. We need to be aware of what happens in our mouths, our nostrils and our belly. We need to be aware of the sensations accompanying each breath, keeping each sensation in the forefront of awareness. Focus especially on the belly using *diaphragmatic breathing*, breathing from the abdomen.

Paying attention to breathing is useful in conjunction with:

1. **Sitting meditation**
2. **The body scan**
3. **Yoga**
4. **Walking meditation**

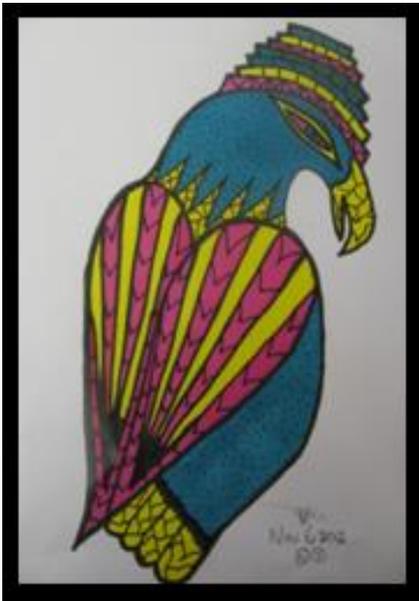


1. *Sitting meditation* is “the heart of formal meditation” says Kabat-Zinn. Mindful sitting, in a chair or on the floor, is like mindful breathing. “We relax into the present with calm acceptance.” We do not try to fill the moments with anything. Be aware of any discomfort we feel, we don’t reject it. Whatever happens, happens, even if we have to shift ourselves to be comfortable. We intentionally work with our reactions toward any sense of discomfort.
2. *The body scan* technique tunes into our bodies without making any judgements. We focus on each region, from our toes to the top of our head, breathing in and out. With each breath we focus on ourselves and consider the bad physical sensations flowing out with each out breath and vitality flowing in with each in breath. Body scan can be thought of as an active purification strengthening our knowledge of the experience of wholeness.
3. *Yoga* is meditation. Bodies need to be cared for, and one way to practice being in our own bodies is *hatha yoga*. Hatha yoga consists of gentle stretching and strengthening exercises, with moment to moment awareness of breathing. As we try the various positions and postures. In Hatha Yoga we practice accepting the body as we find it. It differs from most exercise programs with its focus on breathing. Exercises are adjusted to the state of the body as it is in at the moment.
4. *Walking meditation* is paying attention to the experience of walking and being fully aware of each sensation, as we put one foot in front of the other, as we shift our weight to balance.

Doing any meditation we practice being with things as they are, we practice being calm, and accepting each moment as it comes, as it *is*, says Kabat-Zinn, the reason for practicing meditation is to become more fully ourselves. As we experience each moment mindfully, as we practice taking responsibility for being, and learning to listen to and trust ourselves.

## ART CORNER

**Raven Crow** is a strong and courageous woman who, after having 3 major and 3 minor strokes, turned to art as a way to heal. While Raven initially described her art as a way to keep her mind active, she explains that over time it has evolved into something far more powerful – a way to cope with the many physical, emotional and cognitive challenges she now faces. Instead of focusing on everything she's lost, Raven feels her art has helped her focus on the positives. She now believes that her strokes were “a gift” and that these gifts have allowed her to become more sensitive to the emotions and energies of those around her. Raven's art is inspired by her personal journey of recovery, her Métis/Native culture and her background in spiritual healing. Here is a small sampling of her work.



Titled:  
*7 Steps with Heart*  
Nov 6 2012



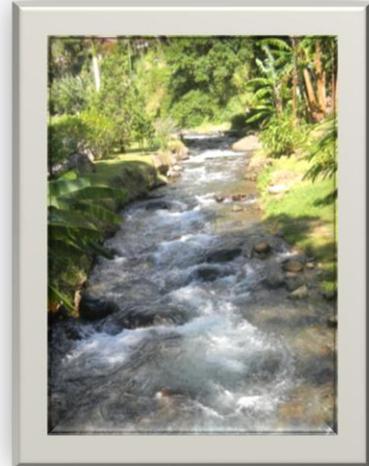
Titled:  
*Empowering your Uniqueness*  
Nov 9 2012

Art submitted by Raven Crow



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### Pictures taken by Everardo Quiell

**Jorge Oliviera** got involved in drawing (Art) when I was 10 years old. At the age of 17 years I had a stroke and had to more or less learn everything over again. At the age of 39, I decided to draw again but due to my injury I now have to use my left hand as my right hand no longer is capable of any motion. I love being creative and I am doing Art once more, which I love.



## Recent News

### True Story

This is a true story about four young guys. They were burnt alive at the age of 22 or under on Friday October 5<sup>th</sup> 2012 at Aluu River State of Nigeria. One escaped from the chaos. Their names were Lloyd, Ugonna, Chidiaka and Tekena. They were brilliant students becoming whatever they wanted to become in life. They burned them alive because of a stolen laptop and cell phone. Meanwhile, there was no laptop or cell phone. They just wanted to collect their money from a former friend. Their friend was not home, only the gate man and his mother. The guys were banging at the gate, the gate man opened the door, the friends mother came out side, but didn't know they were her sons friends and yelled "thieves" so loud the community ran to the house and beat them up. The guys told them they were not thieves and they just wanted to collect their money, but nobody listened. They beat them up, stripped them naked and burned them during the day. The next day, after they were killed the community was silent. 21 people were arrested without doing anything and five people were sentenced to death. The Nigerian president and the government need to do something about this so next time it doesn't happen again.

May your souls rest in perfect pieces my lovely brothers.

By: Jessica Nwoso



### The 100<sup>th</sup> Grey Cup

The Grey Cup is one of the oldest trophies in North America. It is a trophy awarded to the top Canadian team who had a successful playoff run in the eight team league, which consists of the Montreal Alouettes, Toronto Argonauts, Hamilton Tiger Cats, Winnipeg Jets, Saskatchewan Roughriders, Calgary Stampedes, Edmonton Eskimos and the B.C. Lions. The teams compete with each other during a 19 game, 19 week schedule. Every year a team from the eight

team league hosts the festivities. This year the 100<sup>th</sup> Grey Cup will be held in Toronto. This year for the first, and only time the Grey cup will travel across Canada via train, visiting Canadian cities and towns across Canada to mark the anniversary before it lands in this year's host city, Toronto. This Year's Grey Cup is projected to generate millions into the local economy.

By: Everardo Quiel



## A Meal Plan for the Saturday Day Group and a Holiday festive Dinner – by: Larry Eyres

### Roast turkey

Allow about 1 1/2 to about 1 1/4 per pound per person *\*Before cooking because of shrinkage*

Cooking time is about 20 to 30 minutes per pound. Hint allow for extra time

### Stuffing

Crumbled bread

Chopped onion

Dried poultry seasoning

Ground black pepper

A little powdered garlic

Wash and dry turkey thoroughly

Stuff the cavity of the turkey with the stuffing

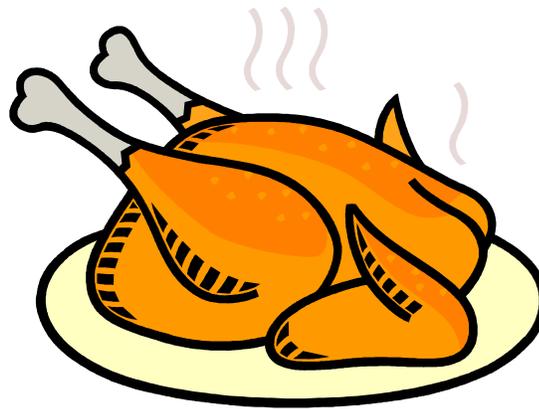
Salt and pepper inside and out

Place in a covered pan and in an oven of 350 degrees

Need to baste between every 20 minutes and half hour

After turkey is done allow about half an hour resting time

To retain juices for tastier turkey



### Boil potatoes

Cut potatoes in eights and boil for approx 20 minutes

To make mashed potatoes use potato masher add butter or margarine and milk to desired consistency

Any other vegetable you desire

Also boiled in salted water if using frozen vegetables see bag for cooking time

Also to be drained add a little butter or margarine to improve taste

Water may also be set aside for gravy from cooked vegetables and potatoes while turkey is resting

Make pan gravy - pour boiling vegetable and potato water into roasting pan, scrape pan with spoon to get all brown residue, thicken with cornstarch water mixture to desired thickness.

### Coleslaw

Shredded cabbage – medium to fine shred

Shredded carrot – medium to fine shred

Slice onion and celery

Salad dressing of your choice



### Cranberry sauce

Buy a can from the store

Or buy real cranberries and the instructions are on the back of the package – can also add red food colouring

Serve fruit juice or beer or liquid of your choice

Coffee and tea for adults and soft drinks or milk for the children

Dessert may also be served such as ice cream assorted pastry tray or raw fruit or cheese

Some mint candies and leave out beverages

## Tony's Broccoli Salad

(serves 5 – 6 people)

- 2 heads of broccoli (cleaned and cut into bite sized pieces)
- 1/2 sweet onion (Spanish) – thinly sliced
- 2/3 cup raisins/craisins
- 1/4 cup bacon bits
- 1/2 cup almonds (whole or pieces)
- Creamy poppy seed dressing



Instructions:

1. Wash and cut broccoli into bite size pieces
2. Thinly cut onion into pieces of desired size
3. Measure out ingredients (raisins, bacon bits, almonds)
4. Add dressing just before serving

By: Tony Sluga

## Thoughts on Being a Gentleman

By: Dawid Seczyk



Every single woman prefers a gentleman, because gentlemen are polite and nice to talk with. Here are ways to act like a gentleman:

- ✓ Don't be pushy, because women don't like to be pushed
- ✓ Do not swear at her
- ✓ Do not be picky about her
- ✓ Be easy going, don't try to change her look
- ✓ Wear nice clothes, smell good and be clean
- ✓ Buy her flowers and chocolates
- ✓ Be polite
- ✓ Make her see herself as beautiful, special and perfect.



## The Learning Network Holiday Party



Thanks to everyone who joined and contributed to this year's potluck.

From everyone at the Learning Network we wish you a safe and Happy New Year.

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*The views expressed in this newsletter are that of the authors. The publication of the pieces on this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the opinions of abi Possibilities Inc. and/or The Learning Network*

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