

Dance, death and dogs

I feel the need to share this experience with you, on Thursday evenings I lead a dance session with Claire Hughes at the Camphill Community, a residential home for adults with learning difficulties. There would be 30-40 participants including some staff, all enjoying dance in their own way. We get to know the names of those residents who are able to tell us, there are many who cannot speak.

There is one young man, a tall red-head, he comes to every session, he is not able to tell me his name. In the circle-dances he holds your hand too tight, sometimes he will take his other hand, reach across and pinch the skin on the top of your hand, when he does this I look at him and wonder "*what he is trying to say*" ... you learn to anticipate, to brush his hand away, or distract him in dance.

Last night, we were in the circle, he was beside me, we were holding hands, he didn't try to pinch me, he moved in a different way, he lifted my hand towards his face, it felt wrong to pull away, I had no idea what his next action might be, and wondered to myself ... *is going to try and bite me* ... I was glad I had not pulled away as I watched him place the gentlest of kisses on the very spot he usually pinches. At that moment I said to myself, "*he knows my pain*".

Last Sunday I had to take that terrible decision to put my dog Sidiki to sleep, he was deteriorating quickly from inoperable tumours which had only been discovered two days previously. He had been my companion for 11 years, I am heart-broken. The following day I hear the tragic news that a dear friend, Peter Woods, has also left our world.

Peter's service was earlier today, it was beautiful, Peter was deeply involved in the Belfast music and dance scene; it was he who asked me to take over the dance session at Camphill. The pastor gave a wonderful tribute to his life and at the end of the service we all sang ...

Dance, dance, wherever you may be
I am the Lord of the Dance, said He
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said He...

Peter was a great animal lover and as I sit here to reflect on a very difficult week, I take pleasure in imagining Peter & Sidiki taking off on a whole new adventure together ...