Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project

File Title: "Simply for the people". Spoken and sung tribute to GLC on his 70th birthday from Canada by Christopher Campbell and Joan Miller.

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Start of Transcription

00:00: [Song: “Simply for the People”] to 02:12

02:14: Woman: 11 years ago, Leonard Cheshire came to visit us. On that occasion he made some very special comments.

02:23 [applause] to 02:26

02:28: Leonard Cheshire: Here in Canada it’s different, because there is clearly a partnership, a marriage if you like, between the disabled resident and the local community. But every home that has started up here, owing to being small, much smaller than we would think of in Europe where our average number is about 30; some homes are larger, some are very much smaller – we have one of only 6 as an experiment. We are branching out into married accommodation. But basically, we think in terms of a 30-bedded unit which we still think is run as a family - those who live in it do. But here you like to think of something much smaller. And to me that’s a very interesting experiment. It’s something that I can go back and discuss with other committees and trustees back at home to see if we should copy that plan. But what is most extraordinary is the way that the homes in Ontario have grown so fast, and as I said in such an imaginative way in so short a time. Four years ago, when I last came, almost to the day, I was privileged to take part in the opening of the first home: McLeod House, Lowther Avenue, Toronto. And of course, when I talk about the Ontario homes, I cannot do so without picking out 1 person – Marg McLeod – to whom really it is all due. It was she who provided the drive for the first home, and out of that home has come really in their own way all the others. And I’m very happy to be able to pay as best I can my own tribute to what she, and of course all those with her, have done.

05:00 [applause] to 05:12

05:13: Woman: Here then is Marg McLeod. Marg: I’d like to ask how you first got involved with Cheshire homes and in your own words, how do you explain to your friends, people you meet, what Cheshire is?

05:33: Margaret McLeod: I had working at the crippled children’s centre for 10 years as a volunteer teacher. All the years I was there I wondered why more people weren’t concerned about what happened to the children afterwards and

05:44 [no speech] to 05:47

05:48: MM: I just by chance had a cerebral palsy conference and met somebody who worked for Leonard Cheshire who’d been sent out here by the Cheshire Foundation to see if there’s a need in Canada for the work that they’d been doing around the world. That’s how I got started.

06:15: Woman: How would you describe to your friends what Cheshire is?

06:21: MM: I think the philosophy is very elusive to describe, because the world and people in general tend to think of handicapped people as “them”. They don’t stop to think that they’re exactly like all of us, except that they need wheels or they need crutches or they need something else. So I say what we’ve been trying to do is to give handicapped citizens a choice in where to live, where to work, how to live their lives as opposed to able-bodied people like doctors and professionals making decisions about where a handicapped person should go, never listening to what they say, so I think maybe that’s what I’ve tried to convey, that it’s a team effort to bring into being something that handicapped people want for themselves which we can bring into being together.

07:37: Woman: OK, so you see it as a philosophy.

07:40: MM: I see it as a philosophy and I see it as a partnership, and I see that whether we’re handicapped or not handicapped doesn’t make a whit of difference if we listen to what the ones we talk to want us to do and try to do it. And it’s going to change as the years go by because people change, and just the way we start with group homes, and very soon handicapped people said to us ‘Well I’d hate to live in a group home, I’d much rather live in an apartment. Who knows what they may tell us in 5 years, and let’s keep our ears open and move along whichever way they want to go without any fixed ideas about what we think they should be doing.

08:17: Woman: So, it’s important to be flexible.

08:20: MM: Very

[08:22 music to 10:02]

10:03: Woman: There are certain themes and concepts that are synonymous with Cheshire. When we speak of Cheshire, we’re referring to a term which represents a wide-ranging attitude about life and living. The hard part of course is trying to define the Cheshire spirit. Are there any attributes characteristic of Cheshire which stand out above the rest? Would one be humour? I’m going to ask you about some of the funny things that might have happened when you were … when the homes were beginning. Would you say that McLeod House maybe has a special spot in your heart?

10:38: MM: Oh yes.

10:39: Woman: Being the first Cheshire home, was there anything maybe funny about how it began?

10:44: MM: Well you know the story of how we got the house. That was funny in itself.

10:51: Woman: What was that?

10:52: MM: Well

[10:53 no speech to 10:55]

10:56: MM: After being a committee for about 7 or 8 months, the Kinsman Club gave us $5000. We had a very small steering committee. I don’t think we were incorporated yet; maybe we were. So on our civic holiday weekend they asked for volunteers to go house-hunting, so I went house-hunting, and one of the first houses I saw was the [11:23 unclear] Lowther, and since the handicapped people who I’d talked to in England living in Cheshire homes, ‘cos I learned a lot from them about what they liked and what they didn’t like, and they said ‘Don’t stick us way out in the country; we like to be where the action is. And here I came across this house run by a little nun named Sister Agatha, and 5 little nunettes were living there, and I told her what we wanted to do. Well the house was right in where the action was. There were hippies down the street, and you see in the stores on Bloor Street … it was this wonderful location. And I told Sister Agatha we wanted to … this house was for sale and we wanted to buy it, and the house cost 72,000 and we had 5, so we were going to put a deposit down whenever we saw the right house. So Sister Agatha, who was very religious and about 5 foot 2 thought she’d love to have us in the house, so when other people came to see the house over the weekend she said to me ‘Margaret, do you think God will forgive me if I tell a few lies’. So, I said ‘Well I have no direct line to the Lord, but I’m sure he will’. And she said ‘Because somebody wants to buy it, and they said “Oh these lovely fireplaces” ‘, and Sister Agatha with her habit and her cross hanging from her chest said ‘Oh but the fireplaces smoke terribly’, and she said ‘They don’t you know Margaret, but I told them because I want you to get it’.

13:00: Woman: Another Cheshire attribute is determination. What do you remember about the Nucleus? Would you say that Nucleus is different from any other projects?

13:08: MM: Yes, Nucleus is very close to my heart because they were 14 quadriplegics who were determined that they weren’t going to go and live in Wilberdale? or someplace like that. They wanted to have their own apartments, and this group of people, by the time I met them, had approached any number of people. They had approached the Lyndhurst board, who said that wasn’t their mandate. They’d approached the Canadian Paraplegic Association, and out of that approach several people from the CPA volunteered to be on their committee and did all of their paperwork and did a great deal of work for them as volunteers. We had no success with boards – they said that wasn’t their mandate; they just did their own little job and so … then the Nucleus people had approached Clarendon, and they’d approached others, but nobody sort of gave them too much hope. They’d put their names down in lots of places and heard that they … years before they could get in, so they darn well decided to form their own committee. Very near the beginning I told them what I always thought, and that is: let’s get the government people knowing about you people and what you’re planning to do, and let’s hear what kind of encouragement they give us. For so many years I’ve heard people say ‘Of course the funding is all dried up for what you’re trying to do’. Well I’ve long since learned to ignore that sentence, because if you do it, it happens anyway.

15:02: Woman: Another Cheshire characteristic is innovation.

15:06: MM: The other thing I wanted to tell you about Kerry house was that David Pitt, our Community and Social Services government friend, I told them that there was interest in that area – that part of Ontario - and he said that this isn’t a very good time for them to go ahead because the government funding is cut off at this time. Well I’d heard that in one way or another ever since we started, so I said to the people ‘I don’t know if we can get a promise of brilliant funding, and they said ‘Oh well, we’re going to do it anyway’. And for 2 years Kerry House existed with community support, Rotarian support and so on, with no government funding at all, which was quite courageous and outstanding and wonderful.

16:05: Woman: And perhaps the most important point of all: respect for individuals. Do you remember the beginnings of Morrison residence at all?

16:21: MM: Yes, well you see we met … Morrison took a long, long time because it was made up of parents mostly from Bloor View and I insisted that we have … you see [16:36 unclear to 16:37] who had a son at Bloor View had been on the McLeod House committee, so we knew each other. They were also on the Morrison committee, and I insisted that, along with the parents and the social workers from Bloor View, we have the kids that were going to use this house, who were now about 18. And we had about 5. Greg Thomson was one and Tracy Carpenter was one and I don’t recall the names of the others, but they talked amongst their friends to find out where did their friends want to move on to after they left Bloor View. But it took a long, long time. Morrison was named after a volunteer at Bloor View I believe, but we had meetings at the old Bloor View, and there again we went to see the Cabinet minister about what we wanted to do, and he was Mr Brunel, who was probably the dearest Cabinet minister we ever had come, because he came to all the openings of the projects when he was Chairman and when he was the Cabinet minister. But our committee had an appointment with Mr Brunel in order to tell him what we were trying to do, ‘cos after all Bloor View was funded by the Ministry of Health [17:51 unclear to 17:52] Bloor View shouldn’t they care what happens to their graduates it seemed to me, and I suppose to other people too, so we had an appointment one morning at 10, and the parents on the committee said ‘Well our children will be at school, so they won’t be at the meeting’, and I said ‘We won’t have a meeting unless the kids are there. They’re young adults now, and they must come’. And so, there was a little bit of a disagreement about that, but they all came in the Bloor View van, and guess who Mr Brunel talked to at the meeting – the kids. And that was good.

[18:21 no speech to 18:23]

18:24: MM: Interestingly enough Tracy lives at Morrison on Bloor Street to this day at an apartment there, and Greg lived at the [18:35 unclear] until he died a year ago, so that’s what makes it all worthwhile.

18:46: Woman: The diversity of people living in and working for Cheshire projects reflects these schemes. All of these people in their own way have overcome great obstacles in order to create unique and successful projects. Together they possess those attributes which can only be described as the Cheshire spirit – rock-solid determination, a positive outlook and a willingness to show a Cheshire smile when the going gets tough. The Cheshire team is a partnership dedicated to getting things done. Today is a special occasion to honour a special man on his 70th birthday. This is a man who modestly claims to have absolutely no qualifications, and yet he has succeeded in building from nothing one of the most successful foundations in the world. We are celebrating the success of the Cheshire Homes foundation, both in Canada and elsewhere in the world. We are also acknowledging the man who created the concept. There is still a great demand for more Cheshire projects. Meeting the needs of the individuals who require these services in their community is reason enough for developing a new project. So, thank you Leonard, and have a happy birthday.

20:05: [song] to 21:36

21:36: Speech ends

21:36: End of recording

End of transcription