10 YEARS!

Flatlanders Inn: Celebrating a decade of open doors & opening hearts

10th Anniversary Newsletter
Spring 2017
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10 Years, Looking Back

By Andy Wood

In 2007, we opened the doors of Flatlanders Inn for the first time and they've remained gloriously and sometimes painfully open ever since. Over the past decade 112 different people have come through these doors to call Flatlanders Inn home. But they haven’t just come through our doors. Many have also responded to the challenge of community living by opening their hearts as well. In this newsletter, you'll read about how many of these folks have moved on with a piece of Flatlanders lodged in their hearts – of the Kingdom inching in. We hope you'll also get a sense of how many people have left behind their own gifts in our hearts as well. Over the decade, some stays have been brief for whatever reason – sometimes it’s just not working out and other times it’s working out so well they get back on their feet quickly. Others have stayed longer. We don’t judge success or failure by the length of stay. We simply and faithfully share our lives, open our hearts, and welcome the stranger into friendship as they come through our doors. Such is the way of Flatlanders – such is the way of the Kingdom.

Over ten years ago, there was a seed of a dream. It was to have a place – a home, really – for people to share life together in the way of Jesus. A place where real community could grow. A place where those who had been overlooked, lost in valleys of abuse, oppression, loneliness and shame could be brought onto a level and healing playing field. A place where many of the barriers to real relationship with others, God and creation could begin to be levelled. This is still the way of Flatlanders – and it is the way of the Kingdom.
The seed of this dream sprouted in March of 2007 when our doors officially opened. It was planted in the fertile soil of the Vineyard. However, the dream began to take shape before the physical space did. From a bunch of guys sleeping on couches and taking in people off the street in the Comfy Couch Room, to families welcoming others into their homes, the heart of Flatlanders Inn was germinated in many ways. Welcoming the other, the stranger, the one who just needs to get back on their feet again – this was and is the way of Flatlanders – this is the way of the Kingdom.

Community living rises and falls around the kitchen sink. It’s difficult, and messy, and challenging, and beautiful all at the same time. Everyone needs to clean up after themselves and clean up after others a little too. There’s mess involved, but there’s also great joy. Like Bruce Cockburn sings, “nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight.” The past 10 years have seen many hearts creak open to experience the beauty and mess of the Kingdom. May it continue to be true of Flatlanders as we welcome the reality of Gods’ Kingdom. Thanks for celebrating this milestone with us!

I Thess. 2:8 - “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.”

Andy Wood has been part of the Flatlanders leadership team since the beginning. He is our pastoral liaison with Winnipeg Centre Vineyard church.

“What’s it going to be called? What does it look like? How do we structure it so that vulnerable people aren’t crushed by rules? We are struggling to figure out how to be open, to be vulnerable to the surprises and to the visitors who need help for the short term but could present challenges.”

—— Adam Ward, reflecting on the beginning of Flatlanders
A baby is born to a Flatlanders resident—the first of the three babies who have been born to people living at Flatlanders.

First leaders who came as a family.

Phase 2: Flatlanders expands to the 3rd floor.

Phase 3: Flatlanders expands again, adding two family units, the Studio, and the greenspace.

Flatlanders is built and opens on the second floor of WCV. From the beginning, Flatlanders has leaders, interns, children, and transitional residents.

The first formal conversations about starting some kind of housing go back to 2003.
Celebrating ten years of Flatlanders!

An unexpected donation from the Simple Way leads to our annual Spread the Love barbecue.

Our fullest year ever. Occupancy jumps by 67% as we make use of the new rooms on the third floor.

Another baby is born into the Flatlanders community.

And another baby is born!

Celebrating ten years of Flatlanders!
Flatlanders is:

An offer from God... a pivotal choice

The right path in the midst of darkness

A place of comfort... mingled with pain

A house full of laughter

with moments of bursting anger... mostly my own

It is where many friendships have been formed

as well as the occasional enemy... to chisel my character

I have found acceptance and forgiveness here

along with a growing sense of my own contentment and purpose

I have faced some of my worst fears during my time at Flats

and it is the place where my sobriety has finally taken root

which literally means the world to me

Of course it’s not always easy living here

and there have been many difficult times over the years

but my soul has been truly enriched by this place I call home

by Gord Holmstrom (at Flatlanders since 2013)
Possibly my favorite memory of living at Flatlanders is that of Thanksgiving 2015, only a few weeks after I had moved in. Most of us were sticking around for the day, and there was a general sense of anticipation as we baked the pies, made the perogies, cleaned the dining room, and immersed ourselves in preparing our home to welcome others and celebrate together. The food was delicious, laughter uplifting, and post-meal walk peaceful. In my mind, at least, it was practically perfect. I knew I was part of a community.

Other events or situations are not remembered with the same feelings of fondness. I have hurt others and been hurt. I have struggled with finding a balance between being present to the community and respecting my need for personal space. I have felt frustrated and irritated with fellow Flatlanders and with myself. I have become more aware of some of my own shortcomings and how they play out in communal living. Just as celebration, friendship and mutual encouragement are a part of our community life, so are struggles, tension, and pain.

A few months ago, I read Jean Vanier’s *Community and Growth*. This collection of thoughts and insights, written by the founder of the l’Arche community, is one that moved me and challenged me, inspiring in me both a sense of hope and realism. And while this book stirred up enough reflections that I could probably fill half the

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**Favourite Memories from Former Flatlanders:**

“There are so many. Probably being Kenny’s roommate was the best part of living at Flatlanders. We connected so well. I also remember going downtown one time with Raymond Funk. I gave him our two bus tickets then left him alone for a minute. When I came back, he had traded our bus tickets for cigarettes, and we had to walk home.”
--- *Eric Friesen, lived at Flats 2007-2009*

“I don’t know. I just loved being there. I was there for years.”
--- *Kenny Lacquette, lived at Flats 2007-2010*

“Visiting my friends there almost every morning for breakfast before going to work. Cutting grass and helping with other stuff so they can be more comfortable. Also, watching Lord of the Rings 1, 2, and 3 at Flatlanders.”
--- *Kirby Boucher, long-time friend of Flats reflecting on the first few years*
newsletter with them, for both our sakes, I will not. I would, however, like to share with you some of the thoughts and insights that I found especially meaningful.

“Perhaps the essential quality for anyone who lives in community is patience: a recognition that we, others, and the whole community take time to grow. Nothing is achieved in a day. If we are to live in community, we have to be friends of time”. **Friends of time**… I love the poetic sound to it. But as I reflect on the actual meaning and the implications behind it, I am less enthused. As someone who focuses a lot what can be changed and improved, being patient and comfortable with slow growth is a challenge. And from the challenge is birthed an invitation to not only tolerate slow growth but to embrace it, knowing that the slowness is the very thing that makes it real and lasting.

The importance of both diversity and unity, and of recognizing each individual’s value within a community, is reflected throughout the book. “Everyone,” writes Vanier, “is called to manifest a particle of the glory of God in communion with others”. I see God’s glory shown in so many ways at Flatlanders, when I take the time to look. I see it in one community member’s generosity - in the way he shares his food with others, among other things. I see it in another member’s ability to speak difficult truths in a way that is both straightforward and loving. I see it in our three year-old member’s curiosity and wonder. In another member’s attitude of delight in both the big and small things. These are only a few examples of many. Each of us, all twenty-four people that make up Flatlanders - as well as the people who have been here before, the people who will live here in the future, and our larger community of friends - reflects a particle of God’s glory.

I would like to end this reflection on community writing about love. Because, although it may come across as cliché (or at least unimaginative) to finish off on this note, to end on a different note would feel incomplete. The most important and foundational element would be missing.

Words about and of love are weaved throughout the book. No one quote can summarize them all, but this definition describes love in one of its most basic and true forms: “(Love) is the recognition of a covenant, of a mutual belonging. It is listening to others, being concerned for them and feeling empathy with them. It is to see their beauty and reveal it to them.”.

**Erin O’Neill is an intern who has lived at Flats for nearly two years.**
Lord Have Mercy, Christ Have Mercy - by Jessica Williams

When the evening comes
we set a table
and eat.

My children laugh
then fight
then laugh again.

I look at my husband
with love
then anger
then love again.

We clean up together.
The kids watch youtube.

But there are three girls
on Sutherland tonight.

We put out bowls for breakfast.
Make their lunches.
Yell.
About brushing teeth
and p.j.’s.
–we’re tired.

We say our prayers.
We don’t mention them.

But there are three girls
on Sutherland tonight.

And as we stay warm
the girls are there
alone
they stand in cold air.

Cars come
and go
a steady flow
of evil
right beneath our sleeping heads.

When I wake
I pour the coffee he made
and look North.

Treaty One Territory.
Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Later
once the kids are safe at school
I choke out words for this
in living rooms
with friends.

But no one knows what to say
when morning comes.

And Sutherland is still.

This poem was written as a raw attempt at putting words to a specific tension/reality we face living at 782 Main Street.

I have lived here with my family for 2.5 years. It has been a remarkable honour to share life with the people we live with.

I will never be the same.
“They’re good people. Kind-hearted. I can come here so I don’t have to be alone.”
— Raymond Funk, long-time friend of Flatlanders, passed away in 2015

“I like being invited for supper there. I like the hospitality. And they are resourceful. If I need help with something, they are good at connecting me with resources.”
— Teddy LeClare, long-time friend of Flatlanders

“Things aren’t clear cut, there are greys everywhere. Challenges. A spirituality of failure, weakness, addiction and vulnerability begins to emerge for me.”
— Adam Ward, former Flatlanders leader reflecting on the first few years
Prayers and Poetry
From our Fridges ...

Reflections On Moving In

I observe everyone here, then I write in my mind and in my heart the harmony that exists here between so many different people. The subject that I paint is “family”. We’re not just community, we’re family. The grace here is raw. It is not in its completed form, but it is very real, and it is from Jesus. I have suffered some trying to figure out people's boundaries and what their buttons and triggers are, because I seem to have stepped on a lot of toes, and I am searching for balance. The thoughts I am investigating are people, and they dazzle me. In my head, it's sparklers going off with imagination and dazzlement, trying to find common ground and live with them. When I was in jail, my level of tension was higher than the roof, so now that I’m here I feel like I’m relaxed and like I have a place where I can heal. However, others notice that there is still a lot of tension in me, and it will take time for me to let my guard down so I can let you in. Thank you to everyone here for allowing me to come to a place to heal - in more ways than one.

—by Curtis Haas, at Flatlanders since early 2017

A Prayer is Born

As I was sleeping one day in the fall of 2014, I had a dream in which the Lord Jesus appeared to me. In the dream, He was above me, and He told me, “I want everyone to be saved!” I replied, “Okay!”

Later that same day, once awake, I wrote this prayer. I then asked Jesus if the prayer was okay. He indicated that it was, so I have been spreading that prayer ever since—and you can spread it too! Thanks, and God bless you!

—by Léo Sourisseau, at Flatlanders since 2014
Life at Flats

1300 Community meals cooked and eaten over the past 10 years

The number of times we have deep-cleaned this place since 2007 521

11 French presses of coffee consumed each day at Flatlanders

The number of times people have rung our doorbell asking for some kind of help since 2007 2600

102 Pairs of shoes beside our three doorways

The average number of months that people stay in Flatlanders 18

59 People contacted us in 2016 to ask about moving in
In the 10 years we have been around:

112 People have called Flatlanders their home, including:

- 65 men/boys
- 47 women/girls

58 individuals

- 5 couples (10 people)
- 11 families (44 people)

55 transitional residents

19 leaders   14 interns

24 children
I usually like to encourage people with funny stories. For example, one time I shared a sandwich with two men experiencing homelessness, and one of them asked me if I had accepted Jesus, and then offered me a free condom he had been given at a clinic. Today, however, I'm going to write about some difficulties in my life, what acceptance and heroism mean, and how important Flatlanders has been to me over this past year.

Obstacles

One of the obstacles I've faced is learning to accept the judgments of those we care about and admire when those views are negative and impossible to amend. If you have ever been in any significant romantic relationship, you know that it's the people you care about most who can hurt you the most.

One of my favourite TV shows has a scene where, after years of working towards becoming a lawyer, a young man is denied a position at his older brother's law firm because the older brother couldn’t let go of the bad name that the younger brother had earned many years before. It’s very sad, but incredibly cathartic for anyone who has experienced similar judgement.

Judgements regarding character and identity are often more subtle in real life. People may congratulate our progress or offer praise, but they do so in a voice that says that they are giving the same encouragement to you as they would give to an infant who just learned how to make it to the toilet before voiding his excrement.

Although I’ve drawn a humorous analogy, the realization that you have been permanently “chained to the potty” in the mind of someone you love is extremely painful. Some time last year I was with someone who has known me almost my whole life, whose judgement and approval meant a great deal. I’d done some amazing things and helped a lot of people in my life with limited resources, and I had thought that this person believed in me in spite of my bad habits, disabilities and poor choices. However, in that conversation I realized that in their view, I had made one too many mistakes to be thought of as an adult. It struck me in a way that, if I hadn’t already been through much greater pain, would have really hurt.

Heroes

That’s when I came to a
profound paradigm shift in my definition of heroism. As the central characters in our own lives, we all see ourselves as heroes (at least on some level). In my life, I have had to accept that I can’t change certain parts of myself with my own volition. I can’t make myself perfect, as Jesus commanded us to be perfect. I have desires that are hardwired into my mind and, without help, I can’t deal with them properly.

I heard about Flatlanders and the Vineyard Church from my friend Will, at a time in my life when I was trying to change myself on my own and doing it unsuccessfully. I woke up one Sunday in the Salvation Army in 2015. I didn’t have time to shower because they herd everybody out early so they can clean, so I just washed my face, came to the Vineyard, and sat as far away from the stage as I could. I really hated myself. I wasn’t dressed for church. The only reason I went was because my friend said this place was different, and I knew I needed to hear something encouraging. I was standing in the back, trying to be as unnoticeable as possible.

While I was planning my escape, Pastor Nathan walked up to me. He was extremely kind. He asked me how I was and I told him not good. He asked, “can I pray for you brother?” I said “sure”. Then he put his hand on my shoulder. But instead of swaying back and forth, pulsating his speech, Nathan’s gesture was familiar and comforting. He talked to God like a normal person. Not only that, without knowing me he managed to pray precisely for everything I was struggling with. During worship that day, I genuinely felt the Holy Spirit for the first time. God actually felt present.

I had grown up in the church, but it had often felt like very few Christians had an authentic identity or original thoughts. There
was a span of three to four years where all we discussed in Winnipeg home-groups was the Purpose Driven Life, and you couldn’t go to any Christian program without hearing a girl sing “Jesus take the wheel”. Our heroes were people like Rick Warren, Tim Tebow, and Carrie Underwood. And ever since junior high, Christians around me would extol the virtues these people. The whole world of evangelical churches loved Tim Tebow because he was an NFL quarterback and kept his virginity. That’s great, but my conception of what a hero is has shifted. After living with different people and interacting with many characters in the community at drop-in, I don’t see sick or mentally ill people. I see characters with stories. And I measure people not by what they have, but by what they have overcome. We’re all tragic heroes.

Flatlanders

At Flatlanders, nobody is “chained to the potty.” When my neighbour is struggling I see a hero. This is a place of evolution. Jesus commanded “be perfect as Your Heavenly Father is perfect.” Flatlanders isn’t just transitional housing where we live until we can afford a bigger place. It’s a community where we support each other to grow toward that perfection daily. Ever since that day Nathan prayed for me, I catch myself when I get frustrated and begin thinking less of people. At Flatlanders, I learned to separate my emotions from my pride so that the response I make towards someone, even when I know I’m right, will preserve their dignity and maintain trust.

Ever since my uncle passed away last year. I’ve asked myself what my legacy will be? I want it to be in moments of encouragement like the one I had with Nathan. And in the people I help build. The Flatlanders community is the spiritual soil that is helping me realize what the fully perfected version of myself looks like. And I am sincerely grateful to everyone who has helped create and maintain this awesome place to live.

—Alan Klassen has lived at Flatlanders since early 2016
As strange as it might seem, the most life changing, dramatic thing I learned while living at Flatlanders is that washing dishes is important and you have to do it every day. Sharing a space with many other people taught me to clean up after myself and (at times) others without complaining - to embrace cleaning and tidying as a part of my life. Since my time at Flatlanders, I've learned to ALMOST enjoy doing the dishes.

—-Kris Longmuir, lived at Flats 2012-2013
Flatlanders Inn is a diverse and intentional community in Winnipeg’s North End that seeks to cultivate a positive, nurturing, and relational place to live for people who want to get their feet back under them.

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