

# Nomination:

## Judith Snow

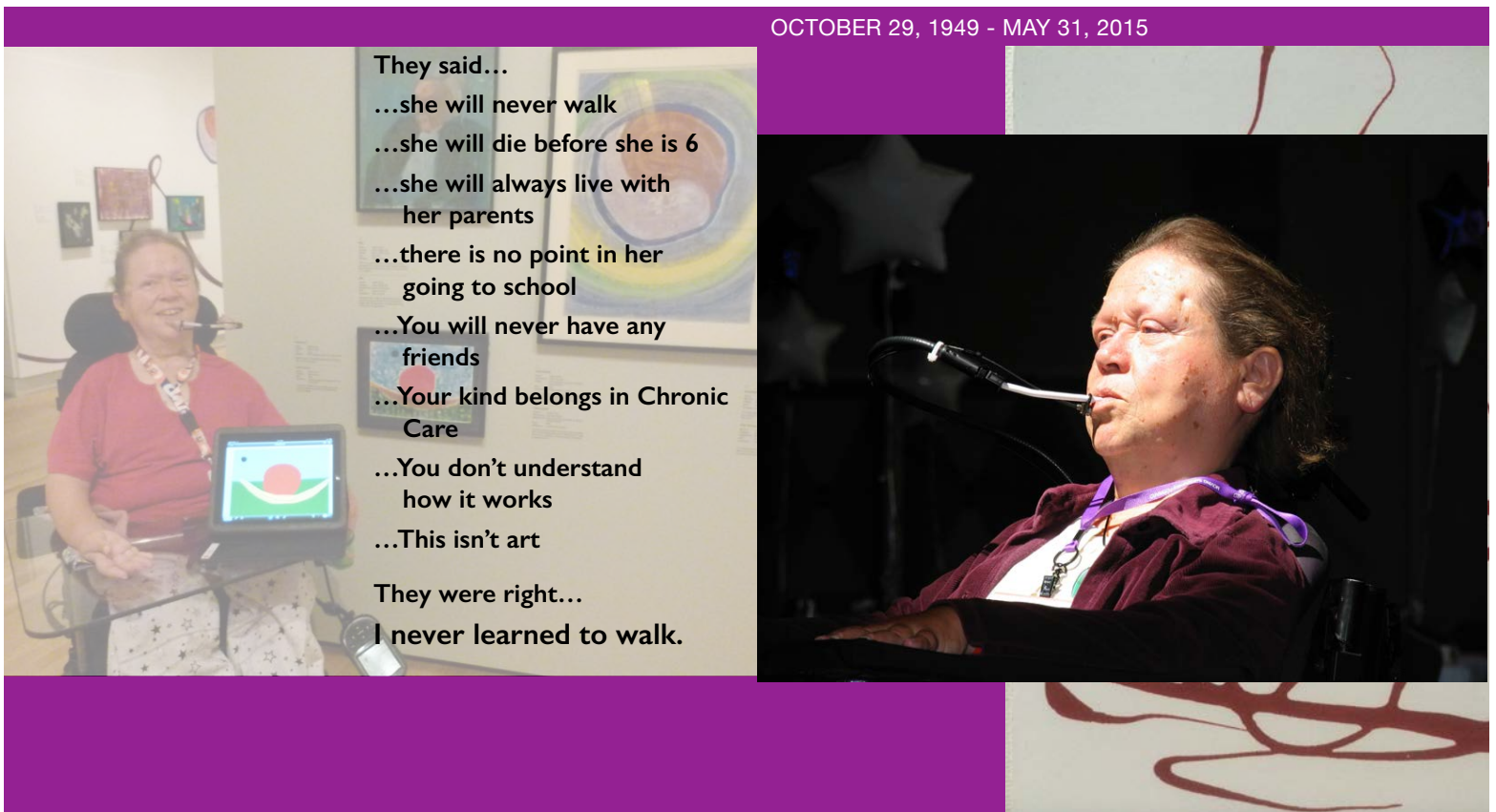
### To the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame

Oct. 29, 1949 - May 31, 2015

Being an advocate for inclusion draws almost exclusively on anger, courage & righteousness. Being an artist has given me space to express ambivalence, awe, playfulness, fear and, most of all, love.

## Judith Snow

OCTOBER 29, 1949 - MAY 31, 2015



Submitted by: Bill Worrell ([b\\_worrell@hotmail.com](mailto:b_worrell@hotmail.com)) & Jack Pearpoint ([jack@inclusion.com](mailto:jack@inclusion.com))

There are four components to this submission.

1. This **Nomination Summary**
2. **The Wonderful Life of Judith Snow:** TASH Journal Tribute honouring Judith's contributions  
Jay Klein & Jack Pearpoint - a must read
3. **A compilation of support letters** from around the globe
4. **A website honouring Judith Snow** as a Change Maker.

<https://inclusion.com/inclusion-resources/change-makers/judith-snow-writing-videos/>

*Judith Snow Nomination*

# Nominating the Remarkable Judith Snow

*Judith Snow A remarkable leader, philosopher, teacher, artist, creator. Without Judith's pioneering leadership, we would not have the Joshua Committee, the Circle of Friends, innovative housing options, international leadership on the concept of Giftedness - and much more. She was the first person to battle for Independent Funding for a person living with complex disabilities – although Judith didn't believe in disability – just Giftedness and Capacity...*

*Summarizing Judith's remarkable life is a challenge, so in addition to these notes, we asked a few friends and colleagues to help us with letters. They are attached to honour Judith's remarkable global impact.*

*“When Judith told the story of her life, it was transformational. She had the gift of speech and the ability to communicate with a wide range of people. She was a visionary.”*

Doris McWhorter, Director of the Education Research and Evaluation Strategy Branch at Ontario's Ministry of Education.

*The future of social care hinges on a key insight, that the late Canadian artist, citizen and wayfinder, Judith Snow, shared: “Inclusion is about willingness to take a unique difference and develop it as a gift to others. It is not about disability.”*

Cormac Russell, Nurture Development, Ireland, UK    [Cormac Russell@CormacRussell](mailto:CormacRussell@CormacRussell)

*Judith Snow has been a pioneer in creating visibility and liberation for people who are assigned disability labels. Her visibility is global in the 'disability sector', so if one searches for headlines and column inches, the public 'coverage' is limited. This is because the acknowledgement of people with disabilities was almost non-existent when Judith began leading. People with disabilities were still largely considered to be 'non-human' and wards of the state to be institutionalized and forgotten. The battles for 'deinstitutionalization' were lively, but in the wisdom of the time, with the best intentions, it really meant moving into 'mini-institutions' – group homes. Judith was decades ahead of her time - inventing the future options that have gradually become the aspirational norm.*

*Thus, when Judith graduated from York University in 1977, she also lost her stu-*

*dent subsidy. Since she could no longer live with her parents, she was 'transferred' to West Park Lodge – a nursing home with a dying, aging roommate. Meanwhile, she created the first support centre for handicapped students at York University – an unpaid creation, which reflected the level of commitment to the issues of disability. It is a remarkable story, but essentially, Judith decided she would not die in the nursing home and 'left'. She had no housing, no income, no attendant care (24 hour support was essential). In desperation, friends gathered with her and invented (or re-invented) a Circle of Friends who allied to keep her alive and contributing because they valued her brilliance and her life. This did not happen overnight, but Judith survived. She dubbed her friends "the Joshua Committee" because they knocked down walls.*

*The story of the Joshua Committee (Circle of Friends) has become the cornerstone of support systems for people with (and without) disabilities throughout North America, England, Scotland, Wales, Holland, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and a growing list of liberators around the world. (See: Now in One Book: From Behind the Piano and What's Really Worth Doing?)*

*Following her 'escape' from West Park Nursing home in 1978, she led a remarkable life of contribution. Thinker, speaker, advisor, coach, leader, traveller, artist. Judith led a full life. If she heard 'you can't, it became a challenge to 'just do it' - and she did – over and over and over again. By her speaking and her example, she was (and still is) the inspiration to thousands of families all over the world – that their children need not be institutionalized – and can lead full and contributing lives in the community. Judith did it – 'and so can we'.*

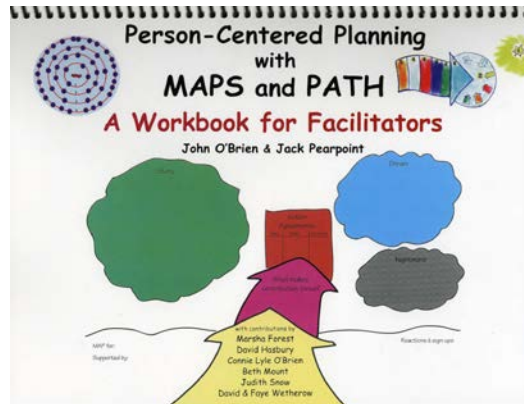
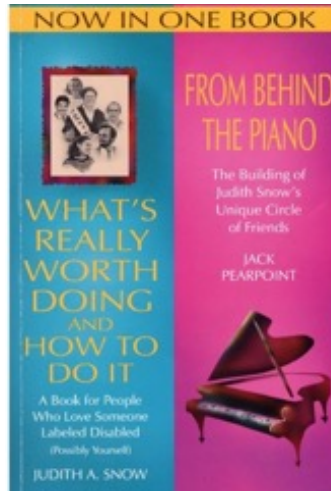
*There are many wonderful Judith quotes. This one captures her life mission.*

*"People must see that disability does not have to be fixed or cured, but accepted and challenged. The individual must be welcomed, celebrated, listened to, and supported in every environment to develop every talent that he or she potentially has, just as ordinary people are. Her/his contributions must be facilitated and used for the betterment of the wider group. In short, every citizen must be an ordinary citizen."*



# Author and co-Author


- o From Behind the Piano & What's Really Worth Doing
- o Who's Drawing the Lines?
- o Great Questions: Writings of Judith Snow
- o Judith Snow Challenge Poster Co-author: MAPS & PATH Workbook
- o The Book of Judith – Michael Rubinfeld



### A Challenge from Judith Snow

Look around yourself for an opportunity to enter into a relationship with someone who has been exiled. Act on the faith that this person has dreams and hopes much like your own and that this person has meaning in her or his life that can be conveyed to you and that has the power to enrich your life and the lives of others. Understand that this person may be the bearer of a deep and creative dream. Bend your will and inner and outer ear to listen to this dream. Walk into the daily activities and environments of life with this person as dream and reality interact in a creative dance that expresses the meaning of life.

Try this and may you rejoice in all that you create together.



*Judith Snow Nomination*

### The Power in Vulnerability

Judith A. Snow

gifts. Differences in each other's physical and cognitive functioning, our interests, history and experience, our possessions and resources only add to the mix of possibilities that increase our total capacity.

Many people, especially parents of a newly labeled child, establish their relationship with a person who is disabled through a process of identifying a need: the person is struggling with or through empathizing with an experience of injustice that the person is undergoing. Taking on the role of therapist and advocate, one person stands by the other.

Therapy calls for the person with a disability to be seen as needing to be fixed in some way. Advocacy calls for the person with a disability to be viewed as a victim of some outrageous misfortune or circumstance. Both these stances have value and can lead to good for the person and the community. But neither approach calls for a contribution from the labeled person in order to sustain the relationship or the work. And if success in therapy or advocacy is not quickly forthcoming, the relationship must suffer. Paradoxically, even success can destroy such a relationship because success erodes its foundation.

Sustained vibrant relationship demands that the person with a disability be viewed with a different vision and intended to with a different eye. Movement of the alternative possibilities is to see and know the person as a welcome fellow traveler. We must see our shared life journey as one of transforming human suffering by creating the supportive relationships we all need to sustain life and of celebrating together life's joys, victories and sorrows.

As fellow participants in an imperfect community many persons with disabilities have valuable gifts to offer. Some show a capacity to take a great deal of satisfaction from very simple everyday occurrences. The unusual behavior of others can be a contribution to those who find society's restricted codes too tight for self-expression. The silent ones may be the best listeners. The very presence of many people with disabilities is a way out of the overwhelming individualism imposed by society's norms. There is an unlimited number of possible gifts that individually each person with a disability can develop. The everyone, the culture of which can only be determined by those who stand close enough to watch, listen, care and share. Welcoming into community those who have been excluded and receiving community so that these people's differences become part of every day life - this is the strong need to building the capacity of communities everywhere.



## Hanging with Mother Theresa – 1982



## The Joshua Committee – a portrait by Martha Perske



Judith Snow  
Sandy Gray, Peter Dill, Jack Pearpoint,  
Marsha Forest, Peter Clutterbuck





**McGill Summer  
Institute Faculty**  
early 1990's

## **Toronto Summer Institutes**

Judith Snow, Jack Pearpoint, Lynda Kahn & friends



John McKnight, John O'Brien, Jack Pearpoint, Marsha Forest, Judith Snow



*Judith Snow Nomination*

# Adventurer

## Canoeing & Rock Wall Climbing (on a cruise)



*Judith Snow Nomination*



# Judith Snow – Artist

## Royal Ontario Museum exhibit





## KEY movies and Videos

(Links to these videos and articles are found on this web page)

<https://inclusion.com/inclusion-resources/change-makers/judith-snow-writing-videos/>

- o [Judith Snow: A STORY](#) – A 1.36 minute video by Judith – her story
- o [Judith Snow: A POEM](#) – A 1 minute video poem by Judith
- o [Judith Snow: ARTIST](#) – A 2.40 minute video by Judith about being an artist. These 3 videos above were created by the Royal Ontario Museum as part of a display when Judith was an ‘exhibit’ with her art at the ROM for over six months.
- o Judith Snow: Not One of the Crowd – 1981 – TVO
- o Judith Snow: How I Live – 1982 – TVO
- o Judith Snow: – on Dreaming – 8 minutes

## Articles/writings

- Judith Snow. On Dreaming. MAPS & PATH WORKBOOK the transcript of Judith’s video ‘On Dreaming’ which is included in the MAPS & PATH Workbook
- Creating What I Know About Community
- A Short Story – Judith Snow
- Following the Right Star Home. Snow. 1997
- Judith Snow. Personal Assistance. What it is & What it is Not
- Notes on Gifts & Assets. 1996
- Snow. Nancy B. Right to Die
- The Power in Vulnerability
- The BMX Model of Inclusion
- Beyond Needs. 1999
- Judith. Snow. 10 Years of Trying. 70-80+
- Learning Together booklet. 1993. UK
- Enchantment for Inclusion. Learning Together. 1993. UK

- Snow.In the Spirit of Inclusion.Dec.91
- Judith.Snow.Bradwin Address.FC..Oct.22.1988
- Joshua Committee Model. Marsha Forest & Judith Snow
- Stalking the Bureaucracy in a Wheelchair.by M Webber.
- Judith.Snow.Wonderful Life.TASH Journal
- Jack.Tribute.Judith Snow.emissary.obit
- Two Eulogies: Dani & Scott.2002
- The Quiet Voice
- A Book in Progress – 2001
- Thoughts on Landmark.2001
- On Resilience.1999
- International Association of Inclusive Citizenship. 2003
- Where do I go from Here?1999
- Thinking about McConnell.2000

**Judith's Condition:** (Judith insisted there was no such thing as disability. Disability was in people's attitudes plus physical/design barriers in society). Regrettably, it is also important to acknowledge that Judith lived with a complex disability. She was the subject of (now) illegal medical experiments, and she was quadriplegic all her life. For many years she had some use of her right thumb, and later managed her life through sip and puff technology – driving her wheelchair and typing at nearly 60 words a minute. Her major medical label was spinal muscular atrophy.

### **For a fuller exploration of Judith's work:**

<https://inclusion.com/inclusion-resources/change-makers/judith-snow-writing-videos/>

Note: All videos and articles listed above are 'live links' on the web this website. We highly recommend the first three videos (total 5 minutes) which were made by the Royal Ontario Museum with and for Judith - and their exhibit.



**JUDITH SNOW** ACTIVIST, ARTIST, COMMUNICATOR, 65

## Advocate for inclusion was 'a visionary'

Spinal muscular atrophy did not stop her – she lived 35 years more than doctors expected and contributed greatly to her community

**JAMES CULLINGHAM**

**A**lthough Judith Snow suffered from a condition that eventually denied her all movement below the neck, she had a full life as a writer, actor, artist, Communist, educator, nature enthusiast and an internationally renowned champion for inclusion.

Her friend Jack Pearpoint, publisher of Inclusion Press and former president of Frontier College, believes her life itself was an inspiration. "She was officially dead for 35 years according to the medical profession. She had been told she couldn't live past 30. She blew them all out of the water."

Ms. Snow, who suffered from spinal muscular atrophy, disliked the word "disability" so much that she once told a journalist she preferred the word "freak" to "disabled." Her objection to the D-word arose from the belief that we all have limitations – even those who are not "disabled" – nevertheless, we all have gifts and contributions to make.

Ms. Snow died of a heart attack at the age of 65 in her Toronto apartment on May 31. Just an hour earlier, she had been working at her computer. The night before, she had been out attending a friend's 65th birthday party, then stayed up until 4 a.m. playing cards with her attendant.

Judith Snow was born in Oshawa, Ont., on Oct. 29, 1949, to Rita (née Lock) and Edwin Randolph Snow. She was the third of four children. Her parents persuaded a local school to accept Judith, who as a child was not able to walk, in a system that once insisted it had no place for someone like her.

That was the first act of defiance for a woman whose advocacy would eventually mean so much to others. Ms. Snow's father told her that once upon a time someone like her would have been strangled in the rural British village where he came from because she would have been unable to do farm work. Ms. Snow says she asked him why he hadn't strangled her. He replied that perhaps the point of her life was to find out.

Though Ms. Snow had lost all remaining, limited use of her limbs following spinal surgery in 1972, she completed a master's degree in clinical psychology at Toronto's York University in 1976. After graduation, her mobility deteriorated further and by 1978 she was operating her wheelchair with her thumb. She was relegated to a nursing home, but it could not meet the needs of the ambitious and peripatetic Ms. Snow, who was still running a centre for handicapped students that she had started at university.

In 1979, with her health and spirits failing, Ms. Snow revolted. She refused to return to the nursing home, taking refuge first with friends in university housing and then at the home of Mr. Pearpoint and Marsha Forest, a married couple who would become close friends. The couple created the first "Joshua



In the summer of 1982, Judith Snow met Mother Teresa at an event in Toronto to promote world peace and nuclear disarmament. **BILL WITTMAN**



Ms. Snow believed everyone has a gift. **PHOTOS COURTESY OF JACK PEARPOINT**

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**When Judith told the story of her life, it was transformational. She had the gift of speech and the ability to communicate with a wide range of people.**

**Doris McWhorter**  
Director of the Education Research and Evaluation Strategy Branch at Ontario's Ministry of Education

Committee," a circle of friends dedicated to enabling Ms. Snow to live independently. The name came from Ms. Snow's assertion that they would blow down walls. Through concerted political pressure they managed to obtain an Ontario Order-in-Council, providing a modicum of support for Ms. Snow to live on her own and continue her work. Mr. Pearpoint said that Ms. Snow's determination "infinitely broadened the range of choices available to someone like her." He said that opportunities for individual care – a focus of her campaign – are "dramatically improved and [have] many miles to go."

The actions of the Joshua Committee were a launching pad for Ms. Snow's career as an activist and educator. Through her association with the Toronto Summer Institute on Inclusion, Community and Diversity, based originally at McGill University, in Montreal, and now in Toronto, as well as the Asset-Based Com-

munity Development Institute of Northwestern University, in Chicago, Ms. Snow became a leader in a movement bent on creating opportunity. The work took her across Canada, Europe, the United States and the Caribbean.

In the summer of 1982, she met Mother Teresa at a Toronto event to promote world peace and nuclear disarmament.

On several visits to Denver, Ms. Snow met with 10-year-old Annie Green, a girl afflicted with an organic brain syndrome. The girl's father, Mike Green, a community organizer, said that Ms. Snow helped him to see his daughter as a person "who could have her own dream for her life" rather than someone suffering from limitations. Ms. Snow became Annie's god-mother.

Mr. Pearpoint summed up Ms. Snow's method: "She believed everyone had a gift. What we have to do is figure out what the gift is and how to assist that person in making a contribution. Her gifts and capacities existed in a whole different frame because they came out of the mouth of someone who wasn't supposed to be there."

Doris McWhorter, director of the Education Research and Evaluation Strategy Branch at Ontario's Ministry of Education, who met Ms. Snow in the 1980s, claimed, "When Judith told the story of her life, it was transformational. She had the gift of speech and the ability to communicate with a wide range of people. She was a visionary."

Ms. Snow was interested in all spiritual expressions of love and inclusive community. Mr. Green said she was enthralled to learn more about the culture of the Navajo, whose communities

they visited. Ms. Snow was also a member of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) and stood as a party candidate in both federal and provincial elections. She was never elected.

Ms. Snow was a curious, demanding, generous, humorous and adventurous person. Ms. McWhorter said, "she sometimes took risks that scared the rest of us." Ms. Snow canoed on the Madawaska and St. Lawrence Rivers in Ontario while strapped to a thwart, explored the Colorado Rockies while being transported in a hammock strung between poles – a contraption Ms. Snow dubbed her "Cleopatra chair" – and was once tugged up to the very top of a climbing wall aboard a cruise ship to espy the horizon. Ms. Snow's friend Sandy Gray, now retired after a career in community work in Canada and abroad, said, "Judith played all the odds and won."

The slide show presented at Ms. Snow's funeral portrayed her wearing a variety of wigs and costumes and taking on a joint.

Ms. Snow assisted playwright Michael Rubinfeld in staging the 2009 play *The Book of Judith*, which was presented as a mock revival show with a chorus in a tent outside the Canadian Mental Health Association in Toronto. Mr. Rubinfeld conceived the work while struggling to respond to a question posed by one of Ms. Snow's attendants: "Can you find Judith a lover?" In his discomfort with the question, Mr. Rubinfeld determined he could not find a lover, but he would write a play that addressed prejudice about the so-called disabled. Ms. Snow appeared in the acclaimed production.

Ms. Snow's influence also extended to technology when she participated in experiments for the creation of devices to assist people like her. As an adult she lost the ability to move her right thumb to control her chair. She participated in the development of a "sip and puff" system that allows quadriplegics to command a chair by emitting Morse code through a mouth tube. She also helped form the Laser Eagles Art Guild, which assists those without the physical capacity to hold a brush to paint by laser. In 2011, the Royal Ontario Museum held an exhibition of Ms. Snow's paintings.

"Judith wanted to explore her artistic life," Ms. McWhorter said. "She wanted to evolve." Mr. Pearpoint added, "She always knew she was an artist, but she had been told her whole life she couldn't be. She discovered, 'of course I can.'"

Mr. Green said, "Judith didn't work on disability, she worked on community."

Ms. Snow leaves her siblings: Ian Randolph Snow, Rosemary Anne Malo and James (Jim) Edwin Snow.

*Special to The Globe and Mail*

**To submit an I Remember:**  
obit@globeandmail.com

Send us a memory of someone we have recently profiled on the Obituaries page. Please include I Remember in the subject field.





*Judith Snow*