

Extending Families

by Vanessa Reid



There is a photograph on the wall at Santropol Roulant of an older man at his front door, which stands at the end of a long, grey hallway. He laughs and watches a young woman who reaches into a bright red knapsack filled with hot meals. She looks up at him; they are laughing together. The newspaper article with which this photo appeared – about “shut-ins” needing help in the winter – does not accompany the photograph. We discarded it. It was the wrong story.

To the journalist, an elderly bachelor in low-income housing receiving meals-on-wheels was a sentimental story. To a social worker, he is a patient in need of healthcare administered by professionals. As a statistic, he represents a growing trend of isolated urban elderly. As a person, M. Lachance* was funny and warm and wouldn't let you leave until you had discussed last week's hockey scores.

He died suddenly in hospital. His sister, with whom we had previously been unacquainted, called to let us know. She thanked us for the way in which we were in her brother's life over the last four years. “He had so many people in his life,” she said, a little surprised.

What is extraordinary is the way M. Lachance touched the lives of hundreds of young people who volunteered or worked at Santropol Roulant over the years he received our meals. He was known - and he was loved. M. Lachance was not a “recipient” of a meal service, he was the catalyst for a whole community of young people (and the young at heart) to create a new kind of community. His gift to us was to invite us each to bring the best of ourselves forward and create a Santropol Roulant.

The work we do at Santropol Roulant is part of an emerging narrative about family, connection and the ties that bind. These are not the traditional ties through marriage, bloodlines, and obligatory or contractual responsibilities. A new set of relationships is forming between unlikely people, between strangers who touch one another's lives – and become lifelines.

Vanessa Reid began her love affair with Santropol Roulant in 1995 delivering meals by bike while studying architecture at McGill University. After working in India, she landed back in Montreal finding her roots at, and her community through, the Roulant as executive director from 2001-2005. The love affair continues....

**name has been changed*

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Madame Poitras' Slippers

by Ryan Madden



On an unusually warm February afternoon, Marc, Ximena and I walked into Madame Poitras' apartment on Jeanne-Mance. Her home for fifty years, the apartment is filled with sunlight, plants, knitting and life. Madame Poitras has been a Santropol Roulant client for nearly two years, but she is also known by staff and volunteers for her generous gifts of woolen slippers at Christmas and during deliveries. She has been knitting these slippers with love for seventy-two years. "I really have absolutely no idea how many slippers I've knitted," she confessed. "Thousands!" In preparation for our arrival, Madame Poitras had her old knitting books open, ready to share her story with us.

She showed us the type of sweater her grandmother first made her knit. It took her six months to complete. She was seven years old. Then her mom taught her to knit slippers, but after developing this skill for most of her youth, marriage and adult responsibilities filled up her life, as it does for many. She married a Scotch-Irish man, the only member of her family to marry an Anglophone, and eventually the only family member to get a divorce. These circumstances have made Madame Poitras something of an anomaly in the family, but it also meant that following her marriage in 1960, she would not knit again for another thirty years.

She would pick her needles back up after becoming President of L'Action Centre-Ville in 1981, an organization offering services and support to seniors. She would take the seniors to the swimming pool and teach them how to knit. In those days, clients wanted to learn how to knit the blé dinde slippers, very much in vogue at the time. Madame Poitras felt they were inferior to the ones she used to make, but she also understood that her elderly clients liked the extra padding that blé dinde slippers gave to their feet. So she taught them how to make the fashionable slippers and as a result, she started knitting again too.

While working for Les Petits Pauvres—a seniors' organization—Madame Poitras knitted slippers for their charity bazaars. She has also been knitting slippers for the staff of the local community clinic who have been visiting her for ten years, and has been doing the same thing for the lucky feet of staff and volunteers at Santropol Roulant.

"I do two slippers every evening in front of the TV," she told us. "It's a hobby. Knitting and reading are my two hobbies right now. I like to knit. If I didn't like to knit, I wouldn't knit."

We are all thankful for her hobby. The three of us each left with slippers, and Ximena was given a beautiful woolen shawl. Indeed, we are only a few of the many who have received Madame Poitras' slippers, which include people from all continents on the globe. It's her special way of making the world warmer for us.

A Curry Affair

by Emma Davenport



I met Mrs K one afternoon on a sunny but cold weekend in early February, where we spent several hours talking about food, recipes and her interest in culinary activities. Now with leg troubles, it has become more difficult to find the energy to cook, but she loves talking about it. She also still makes some of her more favourite dishes from time to time. When I arrived, she had already prepared a huge pot of spicy red beans served with rice. Her West Indian friends inspired this recipe. It was delicious and Mrs K was right when she said, “They’re a meal in themselves!”

I asked her how she became so enthusiastic about food. Although from a Russian Jewish background, Mrs K married a man from Greece. Initially she felt like a “bump on a log,” so to fit in she embraced both the language and the food. What helped was her evident enthusiasm for talking to people. Somewhat wistfully during our conversation, she considered how she could have pursued a path in linguistics.

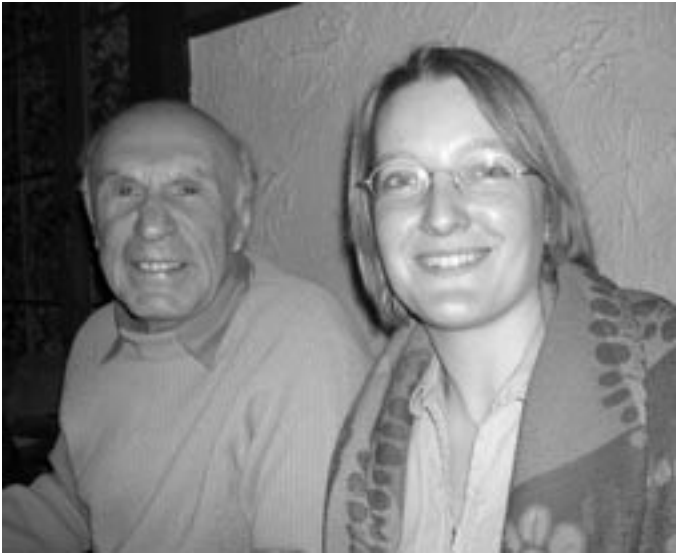
I wanted to find out more about how she had developed a reputation for making such great curries considering her cultural background. Mrs K told me about a trip to London in the mid-fifties, where she remembers going to an Indian film festival and marvelling at the costumes and makeup. They were “out of this world”. Inspired by her trip, Mrs K began to make curries and soon her expertise became known throughout the local community. She tells of one story that makes her laugh. Her neighbours were from India and she would look after their “tots” while making a curry. Hot madras was her favourite. One day, the father said to her “Martha, could you teach my wife to cook curry?” She was happy to oblige and so shared her recipe for a spicy chicken curry. I scribbled down the ingredients and method, looking forward to trying out the recipe back in the Roulant kitchen.

Her kitchen would make an army instructor jealous. Everything is clean and organised. An avid recycler, Mrs K keeps and reuses containers, plastic bags, pretty much anything.

As we talked, it became clear that this 74 year old who was born and raised in Montreal is a walking encyclopaedia of recipes, reflecting not only her interest in different cultures but also a period in history when disposable income wasn’t as common and people spent more time preparing meals in advance. In this way, money was saved and meals were made to be enjoyed. For example, with some mincemeat Mrs K can give you nine recipes off the top of her head, from porcupine meatballs to keftades to a quick shepherd’s pie. Her love of food, however, is also pragmatic. She can suggest something for when you come home and you’re too tired to cook a whole meal or inversely, when you are having “the whole gang over” and you want to do something a little special.

*Mrs K was a client from 2003 to 2005. Recently, Mrs K moved to a residential home, where she enjoys the company of others and of course, talking about food!
· Emma started volunteering in 2004, and created the Friperie project in our basement. Her energy and enthusiasm was contagious. We are lucky to have been able to hire her on as a full time staff member.*

Les deux côtés d'une amitié par Delphine et George



Il y a maintenant quelques mois, à l'occasion du brunch de Noël organisé par le Santropol Roulant, j'ai eu la chance de rencontrer George. Au cours de ce repas mémorable, nous avons ri, échangé des idées et discuté de divers sujets. Avant que nous nous en retournions chacun de notre côté, George a laissé son numéro de téléphone à moi et à nos compagnons de table. Quelques semaines plus tard, nous sommes allés prendre un café et nous avons discuté de littérature, de musique classique et de politique. Depuis ce jour, nous nous voyons régulièrement autour d'un café ou d'un repas léger. Petit à petit, j'ai pu apprécier la curiosité, la vivacité d'esprit et l'ouverture au monde de George qui semble toujours avide d'entendre mon opinion. Tous deux amateurs de livres, nous avons profité de la saison estivale pour visiter la Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec et déambuler dans les rues animées de Montréal. J'ai beaucoup appris de l'expérience que George a accumulée au fil des années et de son sens de l'humour. Aujourd'hui, à la veille de son départ en Irlande, je me dis que notre rencontre et cette nouvelle amitié vont me marquer. J'espère que d'autres prendront le temps de découvrir les superbes occasions que la communauté du Santropol Roulant offre bien au-delà du simple bénévolat et qu'ils en seront reconnaissants.

Merci Georges et merci au Santropol Roulant!

Delphine

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Nous nous sommes rencontrés à un brunch du Santropol et en discutant nous nous sommes rapidement bien entendus. Après quelques semaines, à mon grand plaisir, j'ai reçu un coup de fil de Delphine et ensuite nous nous sommes rencontrés à quelques reprises. Nous sommes devenus amis malgré une immense différence d'âge et un bagage d'expérience de vie tout aussi différent.

Elle est charmante, intelligente et très curieuse. Je suis très content d'avoir fait sa connaissance ainsi que celle de son mari, que j'ai d'ailleurs trouvé très aimable. Ils semblent bien se compléter et je leur souhaite beaucoup de bonheur.

Avec amitié,

George

Nuoc-Mum: le sel et le poivre du Viêt-nam

par Marc Nisbet



Monsieur et Madame Lam sont des réfugiés politiques qui ont émigré du Viêt-Nam laissant derrière eux leur famille, leur maison et leurs souvenirs. Au début des années 80, ils ont élu domicile à Montréal et deux ans plus tard ils sont devenus membres du Santropol Roulant.

Comme les trois millions d'immigrants vietnamiens à travers le monde, Mr Lam espère voir le jour où son pays sera libre, son peuple ne souffrira plus et lui et sa femme pourront enfin retourner dans leur pays natal. Durant notre entretien, Mr Lam a décrit comment l'exode des familles du Viêt-Nam durant la guerre a interrompu la transmission des recettes vietnamiennes traditionnelles. « Les gens étaient trop occupés à trouver un moyen de fuir, ils n'avaient pas le temps de penser à transmettre l'héritage culturel ». C'est la génération plus âgée de Vietnamiens expatriés qui a préservé ces connaissances culturelles en préparant les mets traditionnels dans leurs maisons et dans leurs restaurants partout dans le monde.

Avec l'âge et les séquelles d'une opération que Mr Lam a subi, il était devenu difficile pour le couple de préparer sa nourriture. Ils se sont alors tournés vers le Santropol Roulant. Il leur a fallu s'habituer aux nouvelles saveurs et odeurs, ce qui n'était pas évident pour un couple de personnes âgées. Les Lam ont appris à apprécier la cuisine du Santropol, mais de temps à autre il leur arrive de vouloir retrouver le goût de leur pays et une sortie au restaurant vietnamien du coin leur permet de satisfaire leur élan de nostalgie!

Mr Lam voulait partager sa recette pour le *Nuoc-Mum*, la sauce à trempette traditionnelle par excellence de la cuisine vietnamienne. Pour me transmettre cette recette, Mr Lam m'a invité dans un restaurant vietnamien au coin de St-Laurent et Jean-Talon, qui, d'après lui, est celui où le goût de la nourriture est le plus authentique. Après avoir conversé en vietnamien avec le serveur, Mr Lam a commandé un *Mo Chay*. C'est un plat à partager constitué de boeuf mariné, de menthe, de fèves germées, de laitue et de vermicelles de riz, et qui est accompagné de *won ton* de farine de riz dans lesquels on roule ses propres dumplings pour ensuite les tremper dans le *Nuoc-Mum*. Voici donc la recette des Lam pour le *Nuoc-Mum*.

Nuoc-Mum (sauce à trempette vietnamienne)

Cette recette est pour une personne. On sert cette sauce dans un petit bol placé devant chaque personne. On peut l'utiliser comme trempette pour les rouleaux de printemps, comme sauce pour des nouilles ou même comme vinaigrette pour une salade. Voici les ingrédients qu'il suffit de mélanger pour obtenir la sauce :

5 cuillerées à table de sauce de poisson , 1 gousse d'ail émincée finement

1 cuillerée à thé de jus de citron, 1 cuillerée à thé de zeste de citron, 1 piment chili coupé en anneaux très fins

1 pincée de sucre

David & Adrian: Brothers in Rhyme

by Adrian and David



Adrian and I know each other for a long time. We are very good friends. We go way back. The first time I met Adrian I did not know him very well. Then I got to know him better when I helped him with the work at Santropol Roulant and on the road, doing the delivery. That's the good old days. We just had the two of us.

Good friends help friends with their creations. Adrian helped me write my first book, "David's Book on Bowling". This brought us closer together. One time, he invited me to his parents' house to watch a video. We talked, ate chocolate cake and afterwards, they dropped me at my home. Big up, Burhop Family! Adrian has stuck around the longest. That makes me feel very very good.

David and I like to cruise the boulevard, freestylin' and beat-boxin', and if we get hungry, we swing by Chez José for a double chocolate cookie. That's how we do it, nice and easy, nothin' heavy.

DJD: Yo, A! We gotta go in the studio and cut some tracks.

MCA: Sounds like a plan, D.

DJD: Hot riddim stylee!

David Allen, AKA: DJD & Original Writer 'pon the Scene has been volunteering at the Roulant since 1998. he cooks, does deliveries, helps out in the office and at Special events. In 2001 he received the national award for Volunteer of the Year. · Adrian Burhop, AKA: MC A & Editor-in-Style worked with the intergenerational Meals-on-wheels program from 1999 to 2001. He still volunteers for deliveries and special events.

A One-Woman Show

Our Experimental Balcony Garden with Mme. Lambert



The Alternatives and Santropol Roulant rooftop garden is two flights of stairs up on the second floor terrace of a University of Quebec building. Open 7 days a week, it is very accessible to many members of our community, but difficult for our clients living with restricted mobility to visit. In the summer of 2005, we decided to spread the seeds of the rooftop garden and contacted Mme. Lambert, a Santropol Roulant client and long-time expert community gardener unable to tend to her plot of many years because of failing eyesight.

We visited, discussed installation plans, and set up a lightweight tube garden growing lettuce on Mme. Lambert's balcony. She tended to the garden, fertilized and harvested, and we checked in from time to time to see how the garden was growing and to have a visit. Mme. Lambert was extremely open-minded to our wacky design and unconventional fertilizing techniques and it was great to see all of her ribbons from prize-winning tomatoes and peppers!

Merci Mme Lambert pour avoir partagé vos connaissances horticoles avec nous!!!

The Storm

by Anurag Dhir



One sunny August afternoon under a large white tent in the park, 30 people were waiting to be served brunch. One half of the group was made up of Santropol Roulant volunteers and staff, while the other half consisted of the Roulant's elderly clients – today's guests of honour.

An intergenerational buddy system was set up whereby a volunteer was paired up with a guest. As a result, there were murmurs of friendly chatter, but for the most part, a polite silence prevailed. It was as if one half didn't feel like talking and the other half didn't want to say anything foolish for fear of extending the silence or worse, silencing themselves. Or maybe everyone was just *really* hungry. Either way, this was a room full of nice people who probably had more to share than their bashfulness and grumbling bellies could allow. Murmurmurmur, grumblegrumble.

Suddenly, a large grey cloud descended over the taut white tent in the park and erased the sun. Such a drastic change from blue to charcoal grey usually means one thing, so excuse me if I desist from building up the drama unnecessarily. It rained. Hard. The wind blew. Hard.

Inside the billowy white tent, heads began to turn. Things were getting exciting, but everyone expressed confidence that their shelter could withstand the storm. That was until an elderly gentleman pointed a finger behind his young companion's shoulder. The young man turned to inspect. "Uh," he declared, "I think the tent is moving." His elder companion agreed.

Like the summer-weary tree branches which surrounded it, the tent's poles began to bend at extreme angles, pulling at the spikes which anchored the tent to the ground. Any generational gaps were quickly filled with a shared desire to preserve the integrity of their temporary home. So young and old sprang or walked into action, gathering in the four corners to support the pillars that held the tent up. And despite the wind's best effort, the tent held. The rain drops on the tent sounded like a marching band being chased by elephants, but staff, volunteers and clients smiled and laughed doing their duty. There wasn't many words shared, but there seemed to be a more natural communication. Of a shared experience, perhaps. Or maybe they were still *really* hungry, and now a little hysterical.

Finally, like it started, the rains suddenly stopped and the wind retreated. Someone began to applaud and in conjunction with sweet exhales and scattered giggles, the 29 others started clapping too. The sun seemed to respond as it came out for an encore, shining down once again on the wet, white tent. The return of warmth and light reenergized this rag tag bunch of intergenerational storm wranglers, because everyone started to chatter like old friends reunited. There were handshakes and backslaps to go with the reminiscing of "The Great Brunch Storm of 2004." Brunch? Oh yes, the food arrived minutes after the sun returned, and it too was applauded. In fact, the story-telling stopped only momentarily because as the wide-eyed grins on this beautiful group illustrated, nothing feeds a story better than a delicious meal shared with new friends. So the brunch was a success. There was music too. And not a bad word was spoken about the storm.

The Generation Bridge

by Lynne, Susie and Ian



Lynne Cooper and Sara (Susie) Raphals' cumulative age is 111 years. Eighty-four of them belong to Susie, and twenty-seven to Lynne. Both are dedicated volunteers and board members at Santropol Roulant, and close friends. The heart of the mission of Santropol Roulant is to bring people together across generations, and the friendship of Lynne and Susie epitomizes this goal.

Both Lynne and Susie have moved to Montreal, from homes far away. Lynne arrived in Montreal five years ago from Chile, and spent the first three years in this town working under the table, and fighting with immigration. She came to Santropol Roulant during her first lonely days in Montreal, and found a community where she belonged. Five years later she says that Santropol Roulant is her home away from home, "it's the place where I grew up in Montreal."

It was only a year ago that Susie moved to Montreal from San Francisco. She attended a General Meeting at Santropol Roulant, and found "the most unusual group of young people, with a warm and generous sense of humanity." Susie has been a radical since she was twelve years old, and she has a lifetime of work on unions and co-operatives. Now, she dedicates her energy to the elderly community, because, as she says, "it's very important for old and isolated people to keep their head in the world. It's too easy to get lost." She also demonstrates that the elderly are more than just people in need of care, but have significant contributions to offer a community.

It is clear that Lynne and Susie's relationship is unlike that of family members who are separated by a generation. Theirs is a plain and simple friendship, and it is a relationship that has been the seed of a whole new community bringing together each of their family members and friends.

Un coup de coeur : vers une profession soignante

par Julie Pelletier



Cher Santropol Roulant,

Depuis plus de deux ans maintenant, je suis travailleuse sociale aux Services à domicile du CLSC Métro. C'est donc dire que j'ai été en contact avec toi à de nombreuses occasions. C'est le gentil Marc qui m'a demandé de t'écrire à l'occasion de ton 10^e anniversaire. Il m'a fait cette demande après avoir eu vent du fait que je me sens un lien spécial avec toi.

Peut-être te souviendras-tu que j'ai été bénévole chez toi pendant quelque temps, fin 2001 et début 2002. J'étudiais alors en service social et, dans le cadre d'un cours de travail social auprès des personnes âgées, un projet-pilote avait été monté par Shari Brotman, professeur, et Santropol Roulant. Pour mener à bien ce projet en l'espace de quelques semaines, nous étions nombreux à venir élargir les rangs des bénévoles qui livraient des repas. Le projet ne se limitait toutefois pas à la livraison; il nous fallait établir un lien avec une personne âgée qui recevait les services de Santropol Roulant, une personne qui accepterait de nous raconter son histoire de vie. C'est en compagnie d'un camarade de classe que j'ai livré des repas et que j'ai fait la connaissance de monsieur St-Martin sur la route du Centre-Sud.

Il est de ces rencontres qui changent le cours d'une vie; elles sont rares, mais leur souvenir demeure toujours précieux; ma rencontre avec toi et avec monsieur St-Martin en est une. Ce projet a changé ma vie, ni plus ni moins, en lui donnant un nouveau sens. En me mettant en contact direct avec la population des aînés en perte d'autonomie, cette expérience m'a fait réellement prendre conscience de leurs multiples réalités sociales. En fait, j'ai vécu un véritable coup de cœur! Dès les premières visites, j'ai su que c'était dans ce domaine du service social que je voulais œuvrer : avec et pour les personnes âgées à domicile.

Merci mille fois, Santropol Roulant, d'avoir joué un rôle aussi déterminant dans ma vie! Merci aussi de continuer à offrir des services que je considère plus que nécessaires pour le mieux-être de si nombreuses personnes. Joyeux anniversaire et longue vie!!

Julie Pelletier

On Being Asked What it was Like for Me when I Interviewed Clients at the Roulant

W. O. Nilsson

Perhaps it was like a late meal
after a day of digging or climbing.
Or maybe it was like coming upon
a group of often mended questions stacked neatly in a field.

But I'd say it was most like taking a hold of a bookshelf
(fiercely, so your knuckles glowed)
and shaking it until things began to tumble.
Red and black spines cracked open and pages
turned themselves as they fell, amazed at their freedom.
Some pages got loose (I don't know if they were torn in the fall
or had worn free years before under a careless thumb)
and floated up into the daylight like champagne.
If you snatched one out of the air and held it in your hand for a moment,
you'd see what I mean.

I carried a suitcase with me on each visit.
I was only going to Westmount or Côte-des-Neiges,
but there was no saying when I'd be back.
The suitcase didn't hold much –
some bones, a few roses –
things to trade or to lie down upon at night.

I spent years away some afternoons,
reading Marx under haystacks with Susie,
wandering compassionate cities in Toivo's chair.

I moved through a chorus of slippers
to arrive at Mme. P's dangerous, inviting smile,
like a sly hammock in someone else's yard. She said,
"I got engaged to an Irishman, but married a Scot!"
– regretting the loss of a drink.

I sat with George K.,
his bones arranged at cultured angles,
in what might have been his living room
or some other town.
His voice came from far away,
scratched and sweet like a tune on an old phonograph.
He offered me brandy like he was asking me to dance.

I don't know what it meant, seeing the world on hinges in this way.
My mother used to tell me:

*Always keep at least one box in your house unopened.
Don't ask what's in it.
Don't show it about.
Just leave it on a shelf in the closet,
Like a friend you don't yet recognize,
Or a hope you can't yet name.*

On Santropol Roulant

As told by Leonora to Fiona



I came to Santropol Roulant in 1998.

Janet from CLSC told me to go there.

I lived down there, you know in the tall building on St. Urbain & Pine?

I'd walk over everyday. Sometimes I'd bring a little lunch.

Oh! I loved to visit with all those nice young people all day.

Sometimes I would knit or just sit.

Every night a different person would walk me home.

They used to have exercise classes and oh such a lovely brunch on Tuesdays.

In 2002 I moved into a home. God bless them, they carried all my things up here.

Even though I am far away now they still come and pick me up by car and visit me.

They bring me flour, eggs and sometimes a few bananas.

Oh Lord! I love all of them down there.

No one ever fuss at me. They treat me so nice.

Leonora was born in Trinidad in 1909 and moved to Montreal in the early 1970's. She has been a special friend to the Roulant for the past 7 years. Leonora has never actually received a meal-on-wheels as she prefers her own Trinidadian cooking. In fact she does more cooking for us ... so in this way we continue to feed and nourish each other with friendship, support and special visits.

