



## Home Ter Linde

My mom informed me that a new facility for disabled adults was about to open in Deinze. It is called “Home Ter Linde” and is part of the Brothers of Charity institution in Gent.

“Wonderful”, I thought! It was in Deinze, I could get there by bike and my diploma and experiences with disabled adults and children was exactly what was needed. I was curious to find out what jobs they had to offer. I called them up and was invited for an interview the next day. What a perfect alignment!

It was December 1996. I was 26 years young and with resume in hand I enthusiastically entered the building for the interview. Veerle N., the facility’s coordinator and Johan Van Holderbeke, the Orthopedagoog (Master’s in Special Education) were welcoming me. I had no idea what to expect. I felt very comfortable and I was curious to learn about the institution. I wanted to find out what they had to offer.

Veerle and Johan were very pleasant and friendly and made me feel at peace. During that interview I discovered several things.

\* Home Ter Linde was opening their building with three residential housing units, the Brem (Scotch Broom), the Hulst (Holly) and the Distel (Thistle). Each offering a permanent home for ten adults with a mental

disability. The building also included a day center for 13 participants who came to the day center every day.

\* The Brem was providing a home environment for ten people with a mild intellectual disability and had already opened the doors for their residents. The Hulst, which would be housing ten adults with moderate intellectual disabilities and the Distel which would be housing ten adults with severe intellectual disabilities were still in need of hiring their counselors. Those residents would arrive in a few weeks, after the holidays.

\* With my Bachelors Degree in Orthopedagogy I was able to apply for a head-counselor position, overseeing and managing a team of counselors. Veerle informed me that they already had hired all the managers and were now hiring regular counselors. I was hoping for a position that matched my degree because the pay would be much better. At the same time I realized the perfection in starting as a regular counselor. This was only my second job as a professional counselor and I had no experience yet working for this larger and well established institution.

\* So far so good! This interview felt very spontaneous and I felt relaxed. My intent was to find out what they had to offer and what they were looking for. I was using my intuition as a discerning tool. I decided if what I was hearing sounded in alignment with what I wanted I would take on the job.

\* The open positions entailed morning, day and evening shifts. I was very pleased to hear there was a designated counselor for the night shifts. I was not going to take on another job that required me to be away from home at night. Everything I heard about the job so far sounded perfect to me.

Veerle and Johan looked at my resume and noticed the many experiences I had working with people with disabilities, children and groups. Many other skills such as cooking and creating activities were a plus as well. I had a drivers license which was also needed for transporting the residents to activities in the community.

That same afternoon Veerle called me back and I was offered a job as counselor in "The Hulst". Hubert was our head councilor and three other

counselors and myself would form our team. Together we would be guiding ten adults ages 21-65 with moderate intellectual abilities. Every resident had their own bedroom. We had our own living room and kitchen and our own counselors office. I was informed that the furniture was recently delivered and needed to be assembled. Everything needed to be installed and organized before our residents would move into our section of the facility. That sounded great to me! I had three weeks to settle in, create and set up our home environment and get to know the other counselors, the institution and expectations before welcoming our residents in their new home.

Gladly, I took on the position. Everything felt really good about this job. I was hired and could start immediately. It was the beginning of December. On January 4th 1997 the facility would be officially opened and all residents would be moving in that week.

This was a new situation for everyone. The residents had to adjust to their new home environment, the new rules, the new house mates and counselors. We as counselors had to adjust to all aspects of the job. I liked the fact that I didn't have to walk into an already established environment. We were all creating it anew together.

I really enjoyed interacting with the family members of the residents. Observing the family dynamics helped me understand the residents better. Reading the background information from a file is totally different then meeting and interacting with the family itself. I valued those interactions tremendously. It also gave the family a sense of who we were and in what hands their disabled child or family member would be entrusted. A very important human aspect of the job.

Our group was a mixed group. Some residents were very open and socially oriented and loved to interact with you. Others were more introverted or autistic, lived in their own unique worlds and didn't connect very well. I loved them all, each with their own unique qualities, habits and behaviors. It didn't take long before everyone became familiar with each other and a unique groups dynamic was created. I also had to deal with some unpredictable aggressive behavior. Especially in the beginning you never know when a group is put together how it all will work out.

I worked three different shift. Starting the morning shift with waking

up the residents, having breakfast and doing dishes together. A morning activity could entail a groups activity such as going to the Wednesday market in Deinze, working in the garden, helping with preparing a warm lunch, making crafts, and many more. At lunch time we set the table together, ate the lunch we prepared in our kitchen, and did the dishes. This was followed by a siesta. All activities were done together with the residents.

A daily schedule and weekly schedule, were displayed in pictures on a board in our living room so everybody knew the routines. Providing a cozy and loving home environment was an important aspect of the job. In the afternoon from two until around four or five another activity was provided. After that we all came together again and each relaxed in their own way. For dinner we had sandwiches or a simple bread and charcuterie meal. There was a bath schedule, everyone knew when it was their time. At night some watched TV, some sat in their room, some walked around. We made it as fun and relaxed as possible.

Attending weekly meetings with other social workers and employees was also part of the job.

The habits, facial expressions, laughs and unique expression of every person is what made this kind of work so wonderful to me. The personal unique relationships that I build with every single person is priceless! Even after I left this job, I kept visiting our residents once in a while and they kept responding to me the way they knew me before. We were happy to see each other! Even after I moved to America I called them once in a while to just say hi and let them know I was thinking about them. I love to keep the loving relationships I have built in my life active, that is for me what life is all about. My relationship with others is a reflection of my relationship with life. Also when I visit Belgium, which happens every three to four years, I like to go see them. Some are still living in the same place, some moved to other parts of the institution and some died. I am very appreciative that someone has always informed me if one of our residents had passed away.

I love them and they love me unconditionally. They are unique souls in a body. A body that in our society is labeled as disabled. Disabled to do the many things our society calls normal. I believe that we all choose the physical body we enter into and for specific reasons. The reasons are not

always known to our little personalities, but chosen for good reasons by our soul. We learn from our gifts and we learn from our limitations. Labeling something as lesser than is not really how I look at it. Every experience is valuable. Some are fun and some are more challenging or even painful. I notice that I learn the fastest and the most from those experiences that are not the most comfortable.

I loved my interactions with the residents and the brief communications with the family members. On some occasions I was able to support the family when there was a death in their family. Supporting the grieving family members in these transitioning times and at the same time helping our resident understanding the loss of their family member felt natural to me. Being able to do this was a gift to me. Creating a safe space where others feel supported and acknowledges for who they are as valuable human beings is what makes my life complete.

Being able to be myself and letting others be themselves is the purpose of my life.

Mieke's Voice 2019©Mieke Benton  
Starshowerusa@startmail.com

(Sharing permitted with my name and email included)  
(With a simple email let me know if you like  
to be added or removed from this list).

#### Mieke's Voice - Part 1

- Week 1 - Introduction part 1
- Week 2 - A Rough Start
- Week 3 - Vision
- Week 4 - History Lesson
- Week 5 - Bookstore Caecilia
- Week 6 - Invisible Hand
- Week 7 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 1 - My parents Anny & Hugo
- Week 8 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 2 - My brother Jeroen
- Week 9 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 3 - My sister Kathleen
- Week 10 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 4 - Something about myself, Mieke
- Week 11 - Encounters with extraterrestrials

Week 12 - The Movie E.T. - The Extra -Terrestrial

Week 13 - What happens after the body dies?

Mieke's Voice - Part 2

Week 14 - Introduction part 2

Week 15 - Expressing my authentic nature

Week 16 - Sexuality - part 1 - Unity

Week 17 - Sexuality - part 2 - Separation

Week 18 - Sexuality - part 3 - Menstruation

Week 19 - Intimate Relationships

Week 20 - America - part 1 - Newspaper Article

Week 21 - America - part 2 - Stepping into a movie

Week 22 - Another taste of freedom as a college student

Week 23 - Riding the waves, both high and low

Week 24 - A Holistic approach to healing

Week 25 - Overnight resident counselor in a high school

Week 26 - Mieke the younger in action - Part 1

Week 27 - Mieke the younger in action - Part 2

Week 28 - Totem Initiation

Week 29 - Extra Freedom and Independence

Week 30 - First Wake-up call

Week 31 - Second Wake-up call

Week 32 - Home Ter Linde