

*“One candle in the  
midst of a circle  
represents the gift  
each one of us  
brings to others in a  
circle of support – a  
circle of friends”*

## Celebrating Bob Perske!!

**N THIS ISSUE** we celebrate **Bob Perske!!** We present for all who walk with us the highlights of his life celebration which was lived on Saturday, October 29, 2016 in Darien, CT – his home for the past 40 years!

Yes!! We celebrate the life of Bob Perske – a man whose impact and contributions to all of us with and without disability were both humble and powerful.

His close friend, **Bob Williams**, wrote:

*“In his work – spanning more than 6 decades as a chaplain at an institution, an ARC executive, a community living innovator, a writer and a fierce friend of those falsely accused and condemned – Bob Perske constantly beckoned us to seek and seize a newer world of hope, opportunity and justice.”*



As this issue of Communitas EST goes to press we dedicate ourselves more than ever to **continue to fight for and live the values and principles of full inclusion and welcome of ALL people – focusing on the dignity and gifts each child and adult brings to our community.**

The admonition that Bob always left with us is so necessary today – **KOKO ... Keep On Keeping On.**

**B**ORN ON OCTOBER 16, 1927 in Denver Colorado, Bob took the lessons and Morse Code he learned from his cop friend and mentor, **Bob Swanlund**, with him to the Navy in 1945.

Here is how Bob looked at his life beginning in 1945. In 2011, Bob wrote:

*“I just finished digging through some old photos and ... do you know what? I think I have discovered the “bookends” to all my remembered efforts. They began in 1945 and they ended a few weeks ago when the Governor pardoned **Joe Arridy**.*



*Actually, as I look at the situation, I would like to extend the last bookend so it encompasses and liberates our friend Richard! (Last bookend realized on April 10, 2015)”*

Bob humbly wrote in 1995:

*“I’m not the smartest guy you will ever meet, but I’ve found over the years I have a good heart. When I see somebody in agony, I have to get involved. I’m an individualist. I know I have to work for the general good of people, but I always let myself get hooked on an individual person with an intellectual disability who is in trouble. Most of what I’ve learned comes from such involvements.*

*“I’m an inductive thinker. I get all of my wider views from a person’s specific situation. I’ve also discovered that everyone I’ve come to care about is unique and unrepeatable. I hope it will be so for you, too.”*

Bob lived these words from his days as a minister to people with disabilities at the Kansas Neurological Institute (KNI), to his life as a writer/**advocate**, until his death the summer of 2016.

# “THERE CAN BE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT IN RISK TAKING”

**H**IS FIRST, and to us, most influential piece of writing was ***The Dignity Of Risk*** in which he argues for deinstitutionalization and community inclusion which inherently included the normal “risks” of normal living! He writes:

*“In the past, we found clever ways to build avoidance of risk into the lives of persons living with disabilities. Now we must work equally hard to help find the proper amount of risk these people have the right to take. We have learned that there can be healthy development in risk taking ... and there can be crippling indignity in safety.”*

Bob gave his gift of writing and advocating to all of us from the 70s when he moved to Darien, CT to work at Random House Publishing to his last writings about **“Unequal Justice.”**

***He “kept on keeping on” (KOKO)...***

These latest books were inspired by Bob’s fierce sense of justice especially for the wrongfully convicted with intellectual disabilities. He compiled an exhaustive list of 75 cases he followed, reported on, and wrote about in *Unequal Justice*.

The 2 most prominent individuals Bob was “hooked on” were Joe Arridy of Colorado and Richard LaPointe of Connecticut. Much more information on both of these men can be found on two websites – [www.friendsofjoearridy.com](http://www.friendsofjoearridy.com) and [www.friendsofrichardlapointe.com](http://www.friendsofrichardlapointe.com) Joe Arridy was posthumously pardoned in 2011. He was executed in 1939 for a murder he falsely confessed to.

Bob wrote his own final words to Joe Arridy (and by extension also Richard LaPointe)...

*So Now You And I Will be Moving on  
I plan to go as a true believer:  
I believe in God.  
I believe in Evolution  
I believe that all of us are brothers and sisters who were tied together by a single DNA match millions of years ago.  
I believe that our earth revolves around the sun,  
I believe there are thousands of solar systems like ours.  
I believe that Martin Luther King was right when he said that “the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.*

# **“AND BOTH OF US WILL BE LAUGHING AND SHOUTING: TRAIN WECK!! TRAIN WECK!!”**

*I believe that someday I may meet with Joe Arridy...I want so very much to do that.*

*In my career I came to care about many people like Joe:*

*So vulnerable*

*So concrete in their thinking*

*So unable to figure out all of the complexities going on around them*

*So quick to respond to kindness from others.*

*So I believe that someday I will be able to get down on the floor together with Joe and his train...and both of us will be laughing and shouting:*

*“Train wreck!! Train wreck!!”*

Immediately after his death, Bob's friend, **Richard Schwier** of Saskatoon Canada wrote:

*“One of the kindest people I've ever known died last week. What a guy!*

*Kind people aren't wimpy. Bob fought his entire life for people with disabilities. Don't get me started. That story will be told elsewhere and often. He spent a bunch of the last couple of decades fighting to get Richard LaPointe out of jail for a murder he didn't commit, but was convicted because he wanted to please the police, who persuaded him to confess. He didn't do it. Really. He just wanted to make other people happy – even the police. Bob got involved after Richard was railroaded. Anyway, Richard's free now because of the relentless advocacy and support of Bob Perske. FREE.*

*So much is made of big people who do big things in big arenas. Happy are we to have shared this planet for a brief time with a:*

*Humble Man, who was  
A great writer, who  
Cared about his friends, and whose  
Eyes could sparkle with deep mirth. Who  
Made real friendships with people who have few, and who  
Saw injustice and fixed it.*

**CHAMPION.”**

**“Humble, generous and  
passionate spirit.”**



# “We’d been Perske’d”

**Craig Severa**, Advocacy Coordinator, The ARC Pikes Peak Region in Colorado wrote the following about his friend Bob Perske:

**I** RECENTLY ATTENDED Robert Perske’s goin’ home ceremony at the Darien Community Center. Ladies wept and strong men cried. His death truly diminished us all, that is all of us who drank Bob’s kool-aid, drank from the common cup of **Bob’s love and infinite acceptance**. We’d been “**Perske’d**.” **He didn’t want anyone left behind**. He was a modest giant, who should be included in the pantheon of our field along with **Burton Blatt, Gunnar Dybwad, and Wolf Wolfensburger** - the people whose radical thinking 65 years ago is now the gospel bedrock of what we believe about people who have a developmental disability. The main idea being that they are human beings. That’s how it was in the bad old days, before 1950, when Burt Blatt told us the obvious answers to questions regarding the value and potential of these individuals who we found would act like human beings if we just treated them as such.



*In the center of it all was **Martha Perske**, his best pal and his best gal, the center of his being, the recipient of his undying love, the port in the storm, the one thing he could count on, the light in the window. In the end there was always **Martha** patient and loving, waiting his return from another sojourn for truth and justice,*

**another battle for people who are marginalized, exploited, abused, and generally misunderstood. The 3%, who have nobody in their corner.** He was not interested in accolades, legacies, or financial gain. **He just wanted to do the right thing.** He watched my kids grow up. I can still see him cat napping on our couch, in front of the fire. It was always a pleasure to get to spoil him a little, something his modesty would rarely allow. I loved the man. **He is not replaceable.**

**THANK YOU BOB PERSKE! WE PROMISE YOU WE WILL “KEEP ON KEEPING ON”.....**

# ***The Robert and Martha Perske Papers ~***

## ***The Robert Perske Fund for Criminal Justice ~***

**T**HE ROBERT AND MARTHA Perske Papers are part of the Special Collections and University Archives at UMass Amherst. A complete list of the collection can be accessed at:

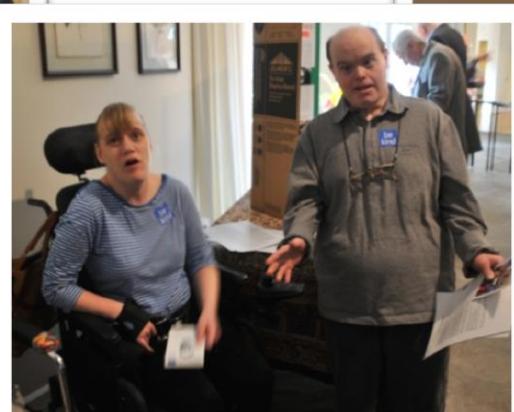
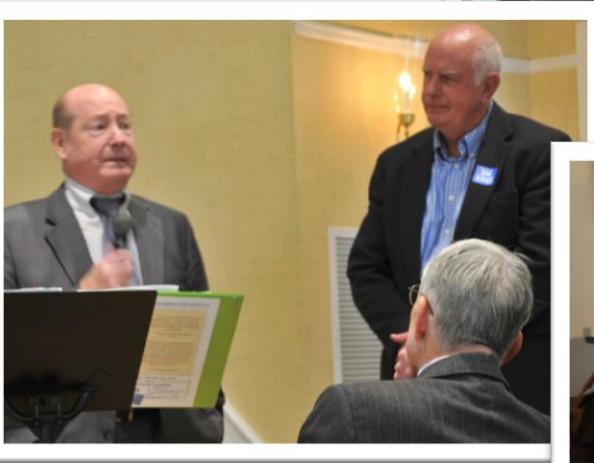
<http://scua.library.umass.edu/ead/mums72>. Questions about the collection can be sent to [scua@library.umass.edu](mailto:scua@library.umass.edu)

Finally, the ARC of the US created “The Robert Perske Fund for Criminal Justice” on October 29, 2016 at their National Convention in Orlando, Florida. For more information and to make a donation visit: [thearc.org/perskefund](http://thearc.org/perskefund)

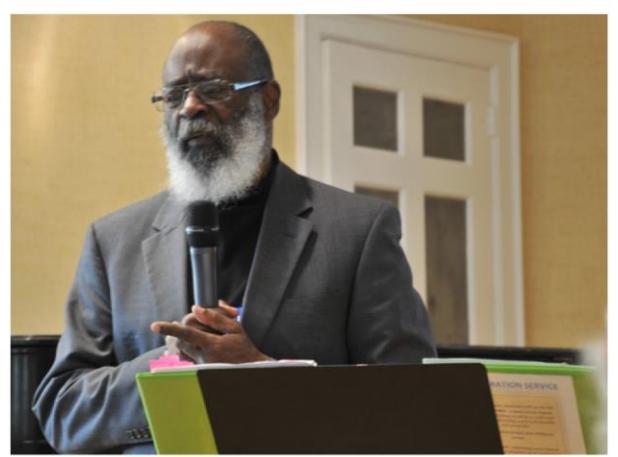
## **PERSKE LIFE CELEBRATION SERVICE** Saturday, October 29, 2016 ~Darien, CT



*Beautiful photos  
courtesy of  
Katie Banzhaf  
Exec. Director  
ARC STAR, INC.*



*Enjoying good food & reuniting!!*



Wonderful music and fellowship!!