January–March 2011
The Willard Suitcases
The Lives They Left Behind

January 17th to March 18th 2011
Odegaard Library, University of Washington
Admission—Free
Opening Night Reception, 6PM–8PM—January 27th, 2011
Odegaard Library, Room 220

When the Willard Psychiatric Center in New York’s Finger Lakes closed in 1995, workers discovered hundreds of suitcases in the attic of an abandoned building. Many of the suitcases appeared untouched since their owners packed them decades earlier before entering the institution. The suitcases and their contents bear witness to the rich, complex lives their owners lived prior to being committed to Willard. They speak about aspirations, accomplishments, community connections, but also about loss and isolation.

The suitcases and the life stories of the people who owned them raise questions that are difficult to confront. Why were these people committed into this institution? How were they treated? Why did most of these suitcase owners live out their days at Willard? Are the circumstances today any better than they were for people who were institutionalized during the first half of the 20th century?

For nine weeks the Willard Suitcase exhibit will be showcased along with exhibits from two local organizations that are dedicated to improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities. These questions will be attempted to be answered, starting conversations about Washington State and its institutions for people with developmental disabilities and for people with mental illness.

Live Inclusive is a group of dedicated individuals committed to helping people with developmental disabilities lead full lives in their communities. The goal is for all people to have the opportunity to live inclusively within their own space and have the experiences everyone is entitled to as equal citizens. The objective is to provide information and education to the State of Washington about alternative living situations to institutions.

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