

“You Have to Go and Be My Eyes”

Caregiver Grant Recipient Dessa S. Shares the Impact of Road Scholar

As a caregiver to her 46-year-old daughter who is fighting the final stages of Multiple Sclerosis, Road Scholar participant Dessa S. was in need of respite. She has spent the majority of her time in the past three years looking after her daughter and visiting her each day in Hospice care.

Years before, her daughter had visited Naniboujou Lodge on Lake Superior, and wanted very much for her mother to see this beautiful place for herself. With that in mind, Dessa applied for a scholarship for the Road Scholar learning adventure, *Lake Superior from Historic Naniboujou Lodge: Fur Trade History, Culture, Walks* (#8429).

“I don’t have a lot, and I’ve been on four Road Scholar programs — each on scholarship,” Dessa explained. “When I arrived at Naniboujou, I had in my possession a certificate saying that I had been given a Caregiver’s Scholarship and that I had been given a single room. I thought, ‘Oh my goodness, how wonderful!’”

Dessa could not have experienced the beauty of the lodge — or afternoon tai chi sessions, artist-led watercolor demonstrations and interpreted led nature walks — had she not been the recipient of a Road Scholar Caregiver Grant. And though the Caregiver Grant provided an incredible opportunity to enjoy a Road Scholar learning adventure, Dessa nearly didn’t make it to her program.

“The night before the program started, I went to see my daughter and she had been quite ill — we knew this time was coming,” explained Dessa. “I said that I wouldn’t go, but she wanted me to experience Naniboujou. She said, ‘You have to go and be my eyes.’ I sat with her that night and listened to her breathing, and waited for what I thought would be her last breath. Then I said my goodbye, and off I went.”

With a brave heart, Dessa arrived at Lake Superior for her Road Scholar program. She informed her Group Leader that she would need to make a special phone call each night.

“I called my daughter every evening. The caregiver would hold the phone up to my daughter’s ear and I told her what I had done during the day. I did that every night, and at first, the caregiver would have to relay any responses that my daughter made. After a few days, my daughter was able to respond here and there on her own and ask me questions. So it was wonderful for both of us.”

Dessa had no lack of stories to share with her daughter each day. Morning tai chi sessions and watercolor demonstrations from local artists reminded her of treasured hobbies that she had set aside before becoming a full-time caregiver. She was also able to connect with fellow Road Scholars during nature walks and afternoon free time.



“Road Scholar’s a treat because sometimes I meet someone like me,” said Dessa. “On this program, I was not there to look for friends — I was so tired. But I was pleased with all the people I met, and they understood my issues and could gather that I didn’t have a lot of energy to chat. I was grateful to have that leeway. It felt like the right place to be. Everyone understood what I was going through.”

Since returning from her rejuvenating experience at the Naniboujou Lodge, Dessa has enjoyed sharing stories of her Road Scholar experience with others.

“My favorite part was the demonstration of plein air painting — I’m a watercolorist. In my daughter’s decline, I have given up watercoloring, I’ve given up writing. I have even given up tai chi because there’s too much going on,” she explained.

“And I came back inspired to get back to watercolor again. I came back inspired to do tai chi again. I came back fully energized to be with my daughter on her journey — on our journey. This experience was very life giving to me and life giving to her. She’s my only child, and she told me to go — so I went. The program was just wonderful.”