

City of Refuge

A Voice from the Street

Summer 2007 • Vol. 6- Issue 2

The Daily Battle by Greg Paul

The sign says “Sanctuary West”. Although the lettering is the same, the sign itself is brighter and bolder than the tired, faded old thing gracing the main building on Charles Street. It sits atop a large ground-level loading bay door in the middle of an innocuous strip of industrial units on a strangely mixed street in Toronto’s west end. (186 St. Helen’s Avenue, if you want to visit.) Peering across the opposite curb and through the bay door, half rolled up on this beautiful June morning, is a row of small neat family homes. And that’s appropriate, since what goes on inside has as much to do with growing people, nurturing all those good things we mean when we say “home”, as it does with producing fine wooden products



What the neighbours can see is a neat, well equipped and active wood shop – the “home” of Mustard Tree, Sanctuary’s work training program. (Our art studio dwells there too, but that’s a story for another time.) There’s a small show room for the benches, chests, boxes, steps and framed mirrors, each beautifully and uniquely finished, that are so carefully crafted within. A locker room and shower behind the show room; on a mezzanine above them an office for Wayne Rumsby and Steve Hunter, staff members who facilitate the program, and a combined lunch and meeting room with a small but fully equipped kitchen. (Sharing a healthy lunch is part of the program too.)

The craftsmanship and integrity of design evident in each piece give no clue to the hurdles being overcome here by the program participants. If you knew that their recent – and often lengthy – experience includes homelessness, addiction, criminal records, chronic and debilitating mental and physical health issues or struggling in the welfare trap, you’d still only have part of the story. Wayne explains some of the more subtle challenges:

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“The coping mechanisms our people have developed through the years can sabotage their progress as surely as the original problem. Most of us can recognize an opportunity, step up, and get in the groove. But for our folks, getting in the groove means having to leave the safe ‘hiding place’ they’ve found – and that’s a daily battle.”

By the standards of productivity, our people have long since been written off by a driven, grasping society. Efficient work results in productivity; a focus on growth results in fruitfulness. Most of us manage to be relatively productive because, in some area of our lives, we are or have been fruitful. For people who have spent their lives merely surviving the desert of poverty, preparing the soil for true growth is of primary importance.

One participant with a long history of homelessness, and before that, years spent in and out of jail, still has to battle an illness that routinely robs him of sleep, leaves him in acute pain, and requires many trips to the hospital. At one time, merely getting onto the Ontario Disability Support Program was the big goal – it meant a little more money each month than welfare. He did little more with his days than try to cope with his illness and keep boredom at bay. Now he speaks enthusiastically of learning something new every day, and his hope that, eventually, he’ll be able to work regularly and productively enough that he won’t need government assistance.

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A View From Here



Greg Paul

"This is a man's man's man's world..."

That's what James Brown used to holler, and there's no denying it down here where Doug and I walk out a pleasant April midnight. The air has a soft, faint humidity that forecasts the summer; Allen Gardens and the dark cut of George Street leading south are alive with furtive shadows, muttering voices. An occasional distant bark of laughter that seems to bear more menace than delight.

The proud gospel strut with which Brown started that old soul classic would give way, by the end of the song, to the singer on his knees, bent over and moaning,

"He's lost in the wilderness, He's lost in the bitterness, He's lost, lost and"

Yes, it's a man's world. The courtyard in front of Seaton House, Toronto's largest men's hostel, is enclosed by a tall fence of wrought iron bars. Dozens of men loiter inside the compound and out on the street, ghosting in and out of the pools of sodium light. Smoking and sipping from bottles kept hidden in jacket sleeves. The numbers thin out as we stroll south to Dundas, turn west and along by Filmore's, a huge ancient strip club and residential hotel. Its patrons are not the suit-and-tie crowd that roll half pickled out of the clubs on Yonge Street and into cabs. In this short block, we are offered drugs six times, a new record; we are checked out and dismissed by several other dealers as well.

It might be a man's world, but as James used to sing, "it would be nothing without a woman to care"... And here she comes. Out of the dark block behind Filmore's backside, stumbling, hair gone wild, clothes askew; drunk enough to be even more than usually vulnerable in this particular here and now. She ducks her head with embarrassment when she recognizes us – she had been on the verge of asking us if we wanted a date. Instead, she smiles, a beautiful smile, wide and full of the most perfect white teeth. Explains she feels safer down here, a statement Doug and I will puzzle over later: safer here, in this dark underbelly of the city, than in Sanctuary's Yonge/Bloor neighbourhood?

As we knew she would, she asks for money. There is no pretence that it's for food, or subway fare, or a room for the night. Will we give her something so that she won't have to sell herself tonight? We have both already given away all we can afford this night, but even so we might have dug a little deeper had we believed it would do more than delay the matter for a half hour or so. She is gracious when we decline, and doesn't press the issue.

Instead, she tells us she really wants to be baptized. She was present at a recent baptism, she reminds me; it's true that she has been talking about this for years. When she is clean and sober, she expresses her faith in clear, simple terms. I tell her I would be delighted to baptize her; that she must come see me when she is sober to talk about it.

Before going our separate ways, we give her what little we can: a tender hug, assurances of our affection and concern, a prayer. A little three-person prayer meeting in the shadow of Filmore's. She darts across the street, mostly to get away from us, I think, but pauses on the opposite sidewalk to call out our names, and to shout that she loves us.

In the days immediately following this encounter, another young woman in our community, pregnant, shows our nurses the bruises dealt out by her boyfriend. Still another, her pleasant personality and high sense of style richly deserving of the nickname California, is found strangled and beaten to death in the stairwell of the subway entrance just a stone's throw from Sanctuary's front doors.

Doug remarks that it's enough to make you ashamed to be a man, and we can't help but remember the first woman's assertion that she felt safer down there in 'Crack Central'.

One day shortly after California's memorial, the Sanctuary door bell rings. I've known this man almost since I first began walking the streets daily in this neighbourhood more than fifteen years ago. Crack addict, alcoholic, street fighter. We've had to bar him repeatedly because of violent threats and actions, even taking the unusual (for us) step of barring him indefinitely. Except we've always said he could come and worship on Sunday if he wanted to.

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Community Memorials

California

We knew her as California, or Callie. The friends and family we have met in recent months knew her as Bly Markis. All of us agree that Callie was a bright light and someone whose life was snuffed out far too young. Murdered in a stairwell less than 100 yards from our door, Callie's death shook our community and reminded us all of the tenuousness of life on the street. We only knew Callie for a few years but we are grateful for the mark that she made on our lives.

"She was sincere and polite. She was pretty, and had a nice laugh. She was one of a few people I've met on the street who have taught me that you can maintain your dignity and keep a sense of joy in life in spite of the greatest challenges. She was the kind of person that I think anyone would like to have as a friend."

- Andrew Cressman, a friend of Callie's from his outreach work with Sanctuary.



Bly Markis

Marty (by Keren Elumir)

Marty was one of my first friends at Sanctuary. The first time we met, he told me about growing up in northern Ontario and how his Dad lived at Pathways in the Soo. It didn't take long until Marty had become part of my family. Errol and I even got to meet his dad on a trip home to the Soo once.

On Valentine's Day, Marty's body was found. He had died with a brain injury. The Marty I want to remember is the Marty that would wait outside of Mount Sinai when my baby Ekko was first born and so sick. He would wait at night to make sure my little girl was still alive before he would head down to his tent. That same Marty fasted from alcohol for 12 hours (no mean feat with his level of addiction), sat beside his fire and tried to learn how to pray out of love for my baby. Every time he would be railing at the absence of God in his life, he would look at Ekko and know that God had heard his prayers at least once.

He used to call frequently and he'd invariably start off by saying, "How are you, kid?" At times Marty was my source of street info and taught me many things about street culture. But I prefer to remember him sitting at my kitchen table and chatting instead. He always would want coffee and I'd drink tea. The kids would be playing and he'd be pulling treats out of his pockets. Ekko still sleeps with the ladybug he brought her once.

Marty asked me to baptize him. It was a long process for Marty and not something he jumped into without thinking. His faith in Jesus Christ was very real but he was so afraid of making a public statement of faith and then letting Jesus down. He knew his addictions were not under control and struggled enormously with that. It was a privilege and a very tender time when we gathered around the baptismal tank and I got to be a part of helping Marty express his faith to his street friends.

So I grieve and I don't understand how that faith and all those addictions really work themselves out. But I know Marty's faith was real. I also know Jesus' love is real. Heaven has welcomed home my beloved friend. I am so grateful his struggle is over.



Marty Lang

Come On In...



October 13. 2007

2:00-5:00 p.m.

...and learn more about Sanctuary.

A great opportunity for old friends to see how we have grown over the years and for new friends to see up close what Sanctuary is all about.

Mark it on your calendar NOW!



Baptism Celebrations!!

Congratulations to **Steve Grant**, a long-time member of our community, and **Phil Shelton**, who were baptized in April. Although Phil has only been around Sanctuary a relatively short while, he has made his way quickly into the heart of things, playing drums as we worship together on Sundays. Steve is a fixture on our outreach teams. It's an honour and a joy for the rest of us to be part of such a significant step for these two men.

Staff Update – Two New Faces for the Summer

We are excited and grateful for two young women who we are going to be seeing more than usual this summer.

Aylish Chantler and *Emily Karsten* have both been friends of our Sanctuary community for several months and have settled in really well. A few months ago, they both found themselves asking: “Why earn lots of money during the summer months when I could spend extra time hanging around Sanctuary?” To be honest, we couldn't come up with a good reason and, as a result, they have both committed to giving up the riches of summer employment for the sake of ‘going deeper’ with our community here.

Having said that, both Aylish and Emily are still looking for friends who will be willing to support them in their work here. If you are interested in learning more about what they will be doing and/or in supporting them either in prayer or financially, please call or e-mail and we'll get you connected with them!



Aylish Chantler



Emily Karsten

The Daily Battle ... continued from page 1

Another participant left a message for Wayne and Steve at about four o'clock this morning: she had just got home from the hospital, and wouldn't be in today. Helping a friend move, a large piece of furniture had fallen on her leg. But here she is anyway, hobbling on crutches through the open bay door, having stumped her way several blocks south from the Lansdowne subway station. She's smiling, and despite being unable to put much weight on her foot, she's eager to get to work. Not long ago, she and her dog were living under the Bloor Viaduct, panhandling to get by.

She's not likely to be as productive as she'd like today, not with that leg. But fruitful? Oh, yes. Yes, indeed.

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I remark on how healthy he looks. He laughs, pats his stomach, tells us proudly that he's had his own place for a few months now, hasn't been in jail for two years – until this last little while, jail is the only place I've know him to be ‘housed’ during the whole time I've known him. He admits he slips occasionally, but overall he's the healthiest and happiest I've ever seen him. It's nothing short of miraculous.

Then he says something amazing: this new life began, he claims, when he was baptized about a year ago. Before that, he says, he had been ashamed to admit what he believed because of his behaviour on the street. It's different now.

The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans¹, describes the new life, a life resurrected out of the grave of our brokenness and dysfunction, that is symbolized in the act of baptism. A new life rooted in the resurrection of Jesus himself.

“And sin shall have no dominion over you...”

That's how Paul wraps it up. I find myself thinking about her beautiful smile, so bright in such a dark place, and her desire to be baptized. To live something new. And yes, I discover in my own heart, there is still reason to hope.

¹. Romans 6:1-14

Faces of Our Community

– Nada Thomson –

It's been just over a year now since our Sanctuary family first met Nada – and it's been a good year! Nada found out about Sanctuary when she was attending Bayview Glen Church and heard about their partnership with us. She had a longing to be involved with marginalized people in downtown Toronto (In her words, "I have been blessed with a great business, a home, and people I call my family so it seemed like a good idea to maybe share some of this intangible wealth.") and it seemed that Sanctuary might be a fit.

Well, the verdict is in, and it is! We are a fit for her and Nada's a fit for us. She came looking for a place to volunteer and instead found that Sanctuary has become home for her – her home church and so much more.

When she's not here, Nada has a professional organizing company (www.artfulorganizers.com) out of which she has been able to receive all kinds of things from her clients that she has been able to share with her friends here. If you need help along those lines, we heartily commend Nada's skills to you!

It has been neat to see how Nada has found 'home' here and we are grateful to have her around. In her words, "...this place truly is a sanctuary set up by God for the healing of His children." *Thanks Nada!*

– David Cox –

In recent newsletters, we have profiled our community members who are regular and predictable members of our "kitchen crew" and this month is no exception. For the last year or so, David Cox has been coming around Sanctuary and pitching in wherever needed in the kitchen.

Born in Windsor, Nova Scotia and raised in a military family, David spent his youth living all over Nova Scotia. He studied psychology at Acadia University and has worked in a variety of group home settings ever since. He first came to Toronto and found work in a group home at the age of 23, left the city for a number of years but came back a few years. Since that time, he has been busy volunteering with a variety of agencies including the Grange Settlement, Meals on Wheels and most recently here.

We're thrilled that David has found his way to Sanctuary – in his words, he came here knowing that we focused on cultivating a 'communal' feel – and are grateful for the gifts he offers his community here. *Thanks David!*



Nada Thomson



David Cox

Financial Update

The good news is that we are off to a good start this year with expenses in line and revenue on track as well. That's the good news: we are on track to cover this year's expenses.

A challenge remains for us though in that we feel a real need to bring in an additional \$200,000 beyond our budgeted expenses. This would allow us, first of all, to eliminate our line of credit and secondly, to be aggressive in paying down our mortgage at Sanctuary West, home to our supportive employment program and arts studio.

Thanks to the many of you who contribute regularly and generously to our work here. We are honoured that you entrust your financial resources to us and trust that you will continue to do so, as you are able, in the months ahead.

PLEASE HELP US SAVE MONEY BY ... adding your name to the email list.

Send an email to info@sanctuaryministries.on.ca stating that you would like to receive our newsletter and any announcements by email. Thanks!



arts ExtraVaganza

July 20 & 21
7:30-11:00 PM
[SANCTUARY]
25 Charles St. E
416-922-0628 x.15

Sanctuary FAQ's



What should I do when I pass someone panhandling on the street?

Give them money? Buy them food? Avoid them altogether?

There isn't a simple answer to this question. Even our staff are divided on it – so here are some things to consider:

- Panhandling is dehumanizing. There is a tremendous loss of dignity and self-worth that accompanies the verbal abuse and rejection that panhandlers endure. Often, a pleasant smile and greeting relieve the dehumanization more than any amount of money could.
- Often, giving money or buying food for someone about whom we know nothing feels irresponsible. If that's the case, get to know someone who you see regularly panhandling and offer them first, the gift of relationship and maybe some money or food as well!
- Another thought: Each of us has benefited from gifts that we didn't deserve – which God, or maybe our parents gave to us knowing that we would use them badly. Therein lies the beauty of "Grace", and we all need it...

We would like to, on occasion, address some of the more common questions that we are asked – whether about 'street life' or about Sanctuary's work. While we are quite happy to make up the questions, we also invite your suggestions. If there is a question that you would like to have addressed, please feel free to contact us by phone or e-mail at info@sanctuaryministries.on.ca.

CANADIAN TIRE MONEY



Help Sanctuary purchase building maintenance supplies and tools for the shop by collecting your Canadian Tire Money. Collect them through your church, study group, workplace, or as an individual.

Mail them to:

SANCTUARY MINISTRIES
25 Charles St. E., Toronto, Ont.
M4Y 1R9

Any questions please call :

Linda at 416-922-0628 ext.10
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Yes, I want to partner with you...

- ☐ I would like to order ___ copies of **"God in the Alley"** (Retail price \$15.00).
I would like to order ___ copies of **"A Night at Grace's"** CD (Retail price \$20.00).
Enclosed please find a cheque for \$_____.

- ☐ My **church/workplace** should hear about Sanctuary.
☐ I would like to learn more about **volunteering**.
☐ I commit to **pray** for the Sanctuary community.
☐ I would like to support Sanctuary on a **monthly basis**.
☐ I want to **financially support** your ministry:



- ☐ Staff Name _____
☐ Street Outreach ☐ Meal Programs
☐ Health Care ☐ Arts/Music/Drama
☐ Mustard Tree Employment Program ☐ Where most needed
☐ Other _____

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06-07

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