

City of Refuge

Spring 2004

A Voice from the Street

Vol. 3- Issue 1

“You’re not important. Go away!”

by Greg Paul

If you ever see the words “homeless” and “health care” in the same paragraph, chances are you’ll find “access” in there somewhere too. One of the major political debates in Ontario just now centres on whether or not to privatize some aspects of our health care system. Most think this will lead to quicker access and better care for those who can afford it – and diminishing service to those who can’t. Many of our friends here at Sanctuary face almost insurmountable barriers to accessing decent care from conventional providers as it is.

Losing identification, including health cards, or having it stolen, is routine for homeless people who generally have no secure place to store anything. Getting a health card replaced when you don’t have an address, a phone number, or money is a Herculean task.

Then, too, addiction and/or psychiatric problems are common among our homeless friends. Sometimes their behaviours make them difficult or dangerous to deal with. Some of our folks are likely to see a security guard more quickly than a doctor in an emergency room.

Recently, “Bob” came to the Sanctuary clinic to see Thea Prescod, one of our two nurses. It appeared he’d broken a bone in his hand (six days before!); the back of his hand was swollen so that the skin was tight and shiny. Thea tried to persuade him to go to an emergency room to have it looked at, but he refused. He’d tried once, and left for reasons that were unclear. Would he go if Thea went with him? He reluctantly agreed.

When they arrived at the urgent care unit of a nearby hospital, they found it (surprise!) quite busy. The usual protocols were observed, and Bob was asked to sit and wait. Most of us find waiting room time ticks by at a slow and frustrating rate. For an addict, whose whole life is bent on getting that fix – now! at any cost! – it’s a cruel torture.

After sitting for a few minutes, Bob approached the intake worker. She explained the protocol patiently and assured him he’d be seen as soon as possible. He sat down. He fumed. He complained to Thea. Thea went over the process with him again,

and reminded him that it was important to have his hand seen to so that it wouldn’t heal poorly.

He leapt up and approached the triage nurse, a little more aggressively this time, insisting that he needed to be seen. The nurse patiently but firmly described the protocol again. He stalked back to Thea and threw himself into the chair. He explained that he had a very important meeting with somebody

on the street in just forty-five minutes, and that he’d better be done by then. Thea reminded him that he’d have that hand, hopefully, for the rest of his life.

There was a little more back and forth like this before Bob happened to see a doctor walk through the waiting room. He waved his swollen hand in the doctor’s face, insisting he be treated immediately. The doctor explained that the triage nurse was trained to assess and prioritize cases based on their urgency, and that he’d get to Bob as soon as he could. Bob insisted. The doctor, who had by this time glanced at

the intake form, responded sharply that his hand had already been in this condition for six days, and that some of the other patients in the waiting room had more urgent complaints.

Bob asked the doctor if he’d like to take the matter outside...

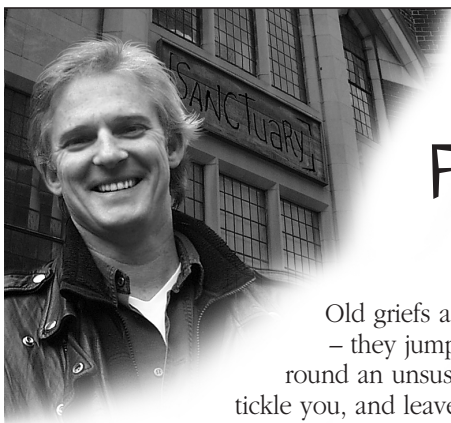
When Bob showed me his hand the next day, I asked him if he’d been to see a doctor about it. He told me he’d tried, but the doctor had just pointed to all the other people in the waiting room and said, “These people are more important than you. Go away.”

I knew that his version of the events wasn’t likely accurate, but I also knew that, regardless of what was actually said to him, he was telling me the truth about what he’d heard. It was the same message he’d heard all his life, starting with his parents: “You’re not important. Go away.”

And that’s the heart of the real “access” problem for many of our friends.

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A View From Here

by Greg Paul

Old griefs and old joys are sneaky – they jump out at you when you round an unsuspecting corner, slap or tickle you, and leave you reeling for a few moments before disappearing. You're left catching your breath, a little unsteady, suddenly aware that that tiny flutter in your heart, that bit of heaviness in your stomach had never really entirely gone away. You had just gotten used to it.

I said goodbye to two good friends in January. Billy had been hanging around Sanctuary for five or six years, and I'd been hanging around with him on the Steps at Church and Wellesley just as long. He became a fixture at both places, cadging coffees in the one place and proudly making meatloaf for ninety in the other. Rick, during the last six months of his life, informed me almost every time I saw him that he'd known me for nineteen years – long before Sanctuary got started. Billy loved to be at the centre of attention, but Rick generally slid in when nobody was looking and kept to the fringes.

"But then, this is my community, eh? My family of faith," he'd say with a sly little tilt of his head, hanging his big crooked front teeth over his bottom lip in an apologetic grin, after admitting he'd gone off the rails again. He battled an addiction to crack cocaine for as long as I knew him, and in the end, that's what killed him. After six months of sobriety, he came to see me in early December. He'd been on what, for him, was just a little toot – less than twenty-four hours of crack silliness. Usually when he went off, he really went off. He'd abandon his housing, his job, and everything he owned, and spend weeks or months sleeping in alleyways, hustling change on Queen Street.

"If I do that again, it'll kill me," he told me this time. I agreed. He looked haunted. Yellow eyes, grey skin, colourless hair limp on an almost fleshless skull. We talked about why he'd gone off, and what he needed to do to regain himself. We prayed. He left my office with the usual saucy "Thanks, Dad" – he was a year older than me – and that goofy grin tossed over his shoulder.

A few days after Christmas, and after a wonderful visit with his sister from B.C., paramedics picked him up, unconscious, off the street. A day later, he died as a John Doe in the ICU of Toronto General Hospital. The cirrhosis he'd known was hunting him finally took him down. It would be almost a month before we'd get word he was gone, despite the fact that there were a few people, including me, who were trying to find him. We had called the Coroner's office, but there's never much of a rush to identify the body of one more nameless street guy.

Billy died in hospital, too, but after a harrowing struggle with AIDS, and with his family around him. When I found out he was gone later that morning, mostly I felt relief for him. As did Rick, Billy knew his soul was safe in God's hands. Both men were very clear that, amidst their many battles, and deep brokenness,

they believed Jesus had done it all for them. For Rick in particular, it was about the only peace he ever had.

We had wonderful funeral celebrations for both of them at Sanctuary. In both cases, family members were amazed at how many friends they had, how loved they were, and how much they had enriched the lives of others. We laughed as much as we cried. There was much to sorrow in, much to regret – but also much to treasure and be thankful for.

Six weeks after Billy died, I met his family at a cemetery north of the city to bury him. It was a beautiful, warm, sunny day, and a peaceful place. We talked about how we instinctively know that this is not the end, and about how our hearts answer to the city that descends from heaven in the last two chapters of the Bible – a beautiful picture of God's eternal love for us, his promise of final healing, and the revelation of how truly precious we are in his sight. For me, it was a joyful moment.

I had thought that I had done my grieving for Billy all those times when I left his bedside and stopped to weep in the hospital stairwell, then rode my bicycle home struggling to see. I said my goodbyes to the family and walked with that joy still in my heart to where my car was parked. Stuck the key in the lock. And burst into tears. Climbed behind the wheel and sat there weeping for five minutes before I could drive away.

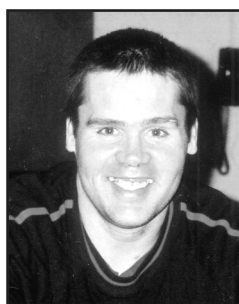
Newcomers to this kind of ministry often ask, "How am I supposed to do this – manage all the death and sorrow, the sheer weight of pain that piles up through the years?" Some think the answer is to insulate yourself, not get too close to anyone or let them get too close to you. But the Book says it plainly: "Jesus wept." Pretty simple. Pretty scary at times. But I'm learning that my capacity to truly rejoice is directly tied to my capacity to truly sorrow.

I heard Henri Nouwen say it a couple of times, and I think he about summed it up: "There is a time to mourn, and a time to dance..."

"...and sometimes it's the same time."

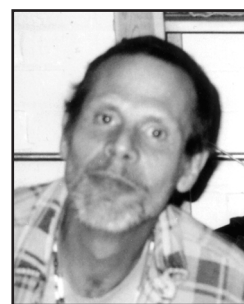
Let's dance.

In Memory of...



Billy Weldon

Aug. 8, 1967 -
Jan. 16, 2004



Rick James

May 21, 1957 -
Dec. 29, 2003

Faces of Our Community



Michael Clarke

Mike Clarke was Director of Yonge Street Mission's Evergreen when Sanctuary was just being birthed, and you could say he was one of the mid-wives who helped it into this world. Through all those years he has been a close friend and mentor to Greg – an invaluable source of wisdom, challenge and connections. He was a member of the first Advisory Committee, became a Trustee, and is still a charter member and current President of the Board of Directors.

Mike is a former police officer, was Executive Director of the Scott Mission for a time, and was ordained as an Anglican deacon last May. He is a Member of the Order of Canada, an honour received from the Governor General in 1995 for his work with youth at risk. He lives in Brampton with his wife Tina.

Jean Abanilla

Over the past 2 years Jean Abanilla has offered nursing care to our dropin community on Wednesdays. A long-time supporter of Sanctuary as a member of the congregation at Richvale Bible Chapel, Jean desired to offer her nursing services once she'd retired from the profession.



She readily admits that she has learned a lot from our community. Health care takes on a different look when it's being extended to folks who haven't got "homes". In fact, the kind of health care she gives is precisely the kind that would be given in a "home". Soaking tired, blistered feet; cleaning wounds and applying dressings; treating colds, fevers, flu symptoms; listening; comforting; encouraging. Her gentle spirit and quiet compassion have enabled her to extend this caregiving to folks who are in need. And in so doing she has blessed them. Thank you Jean, and congratulations to you and Zomy in your new role as grandparents!!

Chris Archer

We talk a lot around Sanctuary about our commitment to creating a "safe, welcoming place, centered around Jesus". Chris Archer has found it to be just that!!



Chris first came as a drop-in guest. Open to receiving care and support she was also very eager to give back and so it wasn't long before she was regularly helping in the kitchen, attending worship and community events and generally making her presence known with her sarcasm and wit!! Last Easter, Chris expressed her faith in Jesus by being baptized. "In my life I have come to believe that resurrection is possible".

Knowing what it's like to be homeless, Chris is a conscientious caregiver to the folks in our community. She has blessed us with her presence. Chris is celebrating a significant birthday at the end of March. HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!

Don Valley Bible Chapel

DVBC has partnered with Sanctuary as a commending church for Wayne and Linda Rumsby since September 2002. They also provide Sanctuary with ongoing food items that are collected each month through their food drive. Some of DVBC's congregation have supported Wayne and Linda by volunteering with Wayne at Mustard Tree and also recently by helping the Rumsbys out with a renovation team to work on their old house downtown. Sanctuary values the prayers and support that commending churches provide to our staff. The DVBC Worship Band will be playing at our upcoming Sanctuary Community Concert. Come and share in our worship with them.



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More than four hundred patients visit our tiny clinic, and receive treatment from three volunteer doctors and one volunteer nurse, plus our two staff nurses, Thea and Keren Elumir. Some come because they don't have health cards, and our clinic doesn't require them. But mostly they come, not because there isn't another source, but because they hear another message, a message delivered by good food, warm clothes, hot showers, clean socks, tender health care, and, more than anything else, simple friendship.

Most haven't entirely decoded that message yet. They sense that it's something new and good, welcoming, and that this is a safe place to admit their ills.

Bob never did get his hand properly treated. The doctor had threatened to call the police, and he was convinced the cops

would be waiting for him at any hospital he might go to. The hand, if it's ever to be right again, will require surgery. Every time he looks at it, or curses with frustration because it doesn't function the way it should, Bob will hear that dreadful voice condemning and banishing him yet again.

Someday, we hope, he'll hear another Voice whispering that clear, healing message: "You're my son. I love you, and I'm pleased with you."

Before the end of this year, we would love to have a full-time nurse join our staff team to allow us to further respond to this basic yet essential need within our community. If you or someone you know feels drawn to this type of ministry, please contact Alan at 416-922-0628 x.11 or by e-mail at alanb@sanctuaryministries.on.ca and we will be happy to talk through the possibility with you.

Volunteer Orientation Night



June 5th @ 7:30-10:00 p.m.

If you are interested in volunteering or would like to know more about Sanctuary come to our next Volunteer Orientation Night.

Please contact **Karen Paul** at 416-922-0628 ext. 17 or email her at karenp@sanctuaryministries.on.ca.

That

S A N C T U A R Y
C O M M U N I T Y
C O N C E R T

Friday Night Thing

Featuring

Rhythm & Blues House Band

redrain

the Un Mugged Band

- DON VALLEY BIBLE CHAPEL
- PROSE READING by Thea Prescod
- A PERFORMANCE by the Screaming Monkeys

FRIDAY

May 14th

8:00- 11:00p.m.

[SANCTUARY]

25 Charles St. East
(Yonge & Bloor)

Public parking across street

Money News - In our last newsletter, we mentioned that we were lagging significantly behind in terms of revenue for the year. We wanted to share with you the great news that, by year-end, our shortfall had been eliminated!

In a recent survey of Community Agencies in Toronto, it was found that 72% of the funding for this sector came from various levels of government while **only 6% came from private donations**. What a tremendous contrast with Sanctuary where, last year, nearly **90% of our funding came from private donations** and none of it came from the government!

It's amazing to see how God continues to provide for our needs. And it is through the generosity of many of our individual friends and supporters like yourselves that He does it. So thank you all for your invaluable partnership with us in our work here. We look forward to seeing how God demonstrates His faithfulness again in 2004!

Mustard Tree - As our previous newsletter went to press, we had just signed the lease for our woodworking shop at 233 Carlaw Avenue. As you now read this newsletter, the saws are sawing, the planers are planing, everything is abuzz with activity and we have a couple of our men experiencing meaningful work in the context of a supportive community. We're excited to see **Mike McKeown** and **Doug Martin** kicking up sawdust as they work with Wayne in the new shop!

As a way of thanking the many supporters of Mustard Tree in its developmental stages and also as a way of introducing even more of our friends to this valuable aspect of our work, we are planning an **Open House at Mustard Tree** on **Saturday, May 8th** from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. For more information about the Open House or if you have any other questions about Mustard Tree including how you can be involved, please contact Wayne Rumsby at (416) 922-0628 ext.16 or at (416) 778-0694.

Yes, I want to partner with you.

- ☐ My **church/workplace** should hear about Sanctuary.
- ☐ I would like to participate in a **volunteer orientation**.
- ☐ 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:
 - ☐ Where most needed
 - ☐ Staff Name _____
 - ☐ Street Outreach
 - ☐ Meal Programs
 - ☐ Health Care ☐ Arts/Music/Drama
 - ☐ Mustard Tree Employment Program

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Province _____ Postal Code _____

Tel.: _____

Email: _____

Please make donations payable to: **Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto**
Tax receipts will be issued at year end. Designated funds will be applied as directed by the donor. Funds given in excess of an approved or discontinued program will be applied at the discretion of the Board. Charitable #89037 9340 RR 0001 03-04

INTERESTED IN E-MAIL NEWS FROM SANCTUARY?

Would you prefer to receive this newsletter by e-mail?

Can we add you to our "E-mail Contact List" for special needs within the Sanctuary community?

If you answered "YES" to either question please send your e-mail address to:

info@sanctuaryministries.on.ca

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