

City of Refuge

Fall 2004

A Voice from the Street

Vol. 3- Issue 2

“A Home By Any Other Name...”

by Greg Paul

Scott* used to live at Tent City, for a few years Toronto's most visible display of homelessness. Before that, he'd lived in rooming houses, hostels, and frequently, on the street. When the city and the property owner shut Tent City down, city workers were diligent in their efforts to find the residents new and healthier homes. A special pot of money squeezed out of the already strapped Toronto coffers made it possible to place Scott in a bachelor apartment in a good building close to Sanctuary, at a cost of \$800 per month.

So Scott is “housed” now, to the satisfaction of our social network. He's certainly more secure than he was, and there are no rats running through his place, no PCB-contaminated soil beneath his bed. But he's more isolated than ever, sleeps on a mattress on the floor, and hasn't been sober in months. He's been booted out of one place already, and got stabbed in a street altercation a little while ago.

Davey* loves to work. A physically strong guy with a pleasant demeanour and a grab-bag of saleable skills, he doesn't usually have much trouble getting a job. When he has work, he gets himself a cheap room somewhere out of the downtown core, and plans on working eighty or ninety hours a week. Employers love him. He takes pride in being able to work longer and harder than other guys, and getting more done per hour too.

Davey is good for about two months before weariness and, mostly, boredom set in. Then he starts chipping again (using small amounts of drugs sporadically), misses a day or two of work – he's such a great worker that his employers always cut him a lot of slack at first – and within a week or two, he's gone completely AWOL. Back sleeping in the park, his arms covered with bruises from the needle, he is doing B&Es and a little unofficial security for a local booze can to get by.

Alvin* has secure housing and a job at the moment – he'll be a guest of the federal government at a facility in Kingston for the next two years or so. It wasn't anything big, really, just a compendium of minor misdeeds and missed court appointments. And, well, yes, that little matter of resisting arrest at the end which, unfortunately, he doesn't remember much about since he'd been on a crack tear for days.



*Lucas House
A home creation pilot project*

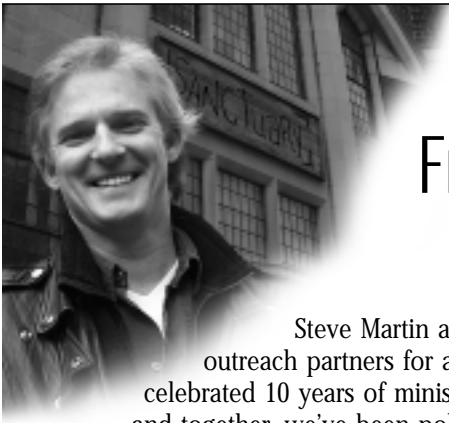
Alvin has had both stable housing and decent jobs (out in the real world) a couple of times in the past few years. Furthermore, he's been through so many drug and alcohol rehab programs that he could, he says, “write the book”. He's hoping to do some serious work with a Correctional Services psychologist while he's inside, maybe finally get some understanding of why he keeps doing this to himself. He's even doing Bible study (voraciously!) and working out, but he knows it'll be a whole different challenge when he's released.

Housing, employment, drug rehab, decent psychiatric care, those are the answers generally proposed for the problem of homelessness, and usually in that order. And it's true that there are a lot of people who could manage if they could just get housing they can afford or a steady job at a reasonable wage. But there are many in

our community whose problems run a lot deeper than that – a surprising number who need all four of those basic items, and then some.

Sanctuary is a charter member of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's newly formed “Round Table on Poverty and Homelessness”. There are currently about twenty leaders of Christian organizations from across the country who gather periodically to discuss how they might better serve and advocate for the poor and homeless at a national level.

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A View From Here

by Greg Paul

Steve Martin and I have been street outreach partners for a long time. Steve just celebrated 10 years of ministry here at Sanctuary, and together, we've been poking into some of the dark corners of our downtown neighbourhood all that time. Our birthdays are just a few days apart in September, so we've often gone out for cake together too.

Birthdays are important in a way that more communal celebrations (Thanksgiving, Christmas) are not: they mark the importance and value of the individual, and they provide regular markers along that person's journey. For the past couple of years, Steve and his wife Crystal, along with Thea (Sanctuary staff nurse), Jan and Marcie (outreach volunteers) have been buying birthday cakes and holding impromptu celebrations at a local burger joint for the "working girls" who take breaks there between "dates".

This September, Steve and I were out late on a Thursday night with Thea. She suggested we buy a cake to celebrate our birthdays, and share it with the women on the stroll. We stopped at a 24-hour grocery store, bought a Black Forest cake, then walked around the block dangling it in front of the women, telling them to meet us later at the burger joint to share it. I got told a couple of times I looked good for my age (I told them I was turning one hundred), we swapped the usual jokes about getting old, and most promised to show up at the appointed time.

"Alison" is a pretty, laughing, young thing who must be all of seventeen years old. She eyeballed the cake under its plastic dome and practically drooled. She wouldn't be coming to the burger joint, though – her "boyfriend" wouldn't let her. She's too new to the game, I guess, and can't yet be trusted that far off the leash. We promised to save her a piece and deliver it to her later.

The time came, most of the women showed up, we shared the cake and a few more jokes. But we saved a piece for Alison.

We found her on her usual corner, with two other women who work for the same guy. A car pulled over to the curb just as we arrived. Alison went to check it out. As she talked business with the driver – head and shoulders well into the car through the open passenger window, hip cocked, butt in the air (the classic stance) – I called out to her: "Cake is way more important than work!"

The car pulled away without her, but she didn't turn toward us. Thea moved toward Alison, and the young girl turned to

Thea, head down, and whispered something. Thea came back to where Steve and I were standing, said "Let's go", and hurried away. Alison marched past us in the opposite direction without a glance.

When we were a safe distance away, Thea explained: Alison was afraid the other two girls would report her to their pimp for accepting and eating a piece of cake on the street corner, and that she would be beaten as a result.

But Alison is just a teenager, with a deep hunger, not just for cake, but also for the frivolity, extravagance and celebration that it suggests. She reappeared out of an alleyway down the street and around the corner, and shoveled that cake into her mouth with girly squeals and giggles, as she literally hid behind Steve and Thea. She ate fast.

She left us as soon as she was done, gushing her thanks, offering a quick little finger wave over her shoulder as she sashayed along the street. Within seconds, she was swinging her hips and lifting her chin at the cars that slowed down as they passed her. Back to the real world after a stolen minute or two of being a teenager.

If you tried to do a conventional survey of the Alisons we know, you'd conclude that most had chosen prostitution for themselves, are happy in their work, even that they have a conviction that there's social value to what they do, and that none of them have pimps. That's what they'll say. That's what the pimps they don't have tell them they must say. The small handful of women who find their way out of sex work ("prostitution" and "sex trade" are politically incorrect just now) estimate that 90% of their former colleagues are coerced into it, and kept there by fear of violence, either toward themselves or their children, and eventually, by lack of any other viable options.

Providing other options is a tremendously complex matter, but that's where we want to go in the coming years. A kid ought to be able to have a piece of a friend's birthday cake without fear.

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter?

When you see the naked, to clothe her, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn...

Isaiah 58:6-8

Staff News

Since our last newsletter, our staff have had lots of occasion to celebrate God's goodness to us. Some highlights:

Zoe Elumir – Keren (Parish Nurse) and Errol celebrated the arrival of a beautiful baby sister for three year old Ekko on August 18th of this year. Ekko's birth and early days of life had been very difficult and precarious, and so we were all especially grateful to God for the gift of Zoe's health!



Ekko & Zoe

New Homes – Paul (Community Worker) and Thea (Health Clinic Coordinator) have both moved into places of their very own in the last few months. Finding affordable homes in Toronto (that are still standing!) isn't easy these days but we're glad for Thea and Paul that they found places. On top of that, Keren and Errol moved to make room for Zoe, and Sharon and Nevin moved twice (!) since their wedding...we've been keeping the real estate industry plenty busy of late!

Wedding Bells - Sharon (Arts Coordinator) married her beau, Nevin Bauman on Saturday, July 17th. The wedding was a delight and the reception was held right here at Sanctuary – a great way for our community to celebrate the occasion together!



Finally, special mention needs to be made of **Steve Martin** who has recently celebrated ten years on staff here at Sanctuary. Steve is, to say the least, an unmistakable presence in our community and his pastoral heart has made him a treasured friend and mentor to many. Steve has been responsible for the development of our Street Outreach efforts and for the past few years, with his wife Crystal, has been functioning as a chaplain for bikers with the ABATE organization and beyond. Thanks, Steve, for pouring yourself into this work for ten solid years!



“A Home By Any Other Name...”

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Recently, that group came up with this statement:

All people need homes in order to live abundant lives that enrich the whole community.

A home is more than just four walls and a roof. It's a whole life situation that means being welcomed into a safe, secure and dignified place to live; healthy, nurturing relationships; and the opportunity for meaningful work for reasonable pay, education and to worship, dream and play.

In other words, homeless people need the same normal things the rest of us take for granted. In other words, there are a lot of people who have a place to sleep inside who don't really have a home. In other words, the problem of homelessness is even more complex than we think. Throwing money at that problem isn't enough. Finding more efficient and capacious ways of warehousing people isn't a solution. Workfare, transient labour pools or McJobs are of very, very limited value.

Everybody needs a home. Creating the sense and reality of the kind of 'home' described above is what Sanctuary is all about. It's why we encourage the people who attend our drop-ins to help out in the kitchen – after a while they start to feel like 'this is my place!' It's why Mustard Tree, our employment training project, concentrates on developing a sense of participation and teamwork at all levels – life skills, not just wood-working skills. It's why Lucas House (picture - see front page), our 'home creation' pilot project, is about creating a kind of family among its four residents, instead of creating yet another rooming house. It's why one of our most dedicated street outreach volunteers is a guy who used to sleep in a bank machine kiosk. And it's why people involved in any one of

these activities are probably involved in a few other areas too.

We've committed ourselves to working hardest with and for the neediest people in our neighbourhood. Given that we believe that healthy personal relationships are the necessary foundation for all these endeavours, that usually means the generous investment of time and energy from a whole bunch of people into each individual life. And since many of our friends arrived on the street in the first place because of destructive relationships, we find ourselves more and more deliberately constructing networks of healthy relationships around the people in our community who have indicated that they want to make positive changes in their lives.

Our community needs people who don't have problems with secure housing, meaningless jobs, drug addictions or mental illness to come along side those who do. Mustard Tree, for example, needs a few dedicated volunteers with woodshop skills to coach the men who are working there. We need more solid, stable people to embrace our community, become members of it, be willing to share their lives with us – to help build home. The individuals who have done that already have usually come to the surprising conclusion that Sanctuary has become a kind of home to them also, and that they routinely receive far more than they give.

This kind of massive investment in one life at a time might not be very efficient, but we've concluded that it's the only thing that works. Besides, we think each precious, made-in-the-image-of-God individual is worth it. Well, you're worth it, aren't you?

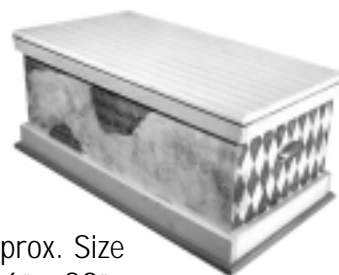
** Scott, Davey and Alvin are composite characters. Any of them could be several people in our community, and together, their stories represent hundreds of our people.*



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Art Display/Sale

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Food by
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FUN



For more information or to participate, contact Sharon Tiessen
at 416-922-0628 ext 21 OR sharont@sanctuaryministries.on.ca

Faces of Our Community

Board Member

Matthias Benfey

Matthias, along with his wife Maureen, and their four children have been connected with our community for about four years in a variety of ways. Some or all of the family are regulars at our Sunday worship service; it's not uncommon to have Matthias join us at a drop-in (somewhat easier for him given that he works just around the corner from us); and he often swings by just to hang out or to share some pastoral wisdom with one or another of the staff.

We're grateful to have board members like Matthias who do much more than simply attend a meeting every couple of months, but who instead choose to engage fully with our wonderfully broad and diverse community here at Sanctuary!



Community Member

Gerard Lavoie

Gerry has been a member of our community for nearly half a year after a friend of his, one of our regular volunteers, suggested that he drop by for a meal. By the end of his first visit, Gerry had signed on as a volunteer and he has been earning his stripes ever since! He started off in the kitchen and continues to be a regular presence there, even helping to co-ordinate meals while Don, our Kitchen Manager, was on holiday. Recently he took on the role of caretaker for us and does a great job of keeping our old building looking good!

Born and raised in Cabbagetown, Toronto has been Gerry's home for most of his life. He is the fifth of six children, one brother and four sisters who live throughout Southern Ontario.



Volunteer

Merril & Beni McPhail

Merril and Beni first learned of Sanctuary when they read an article in "Faith Today" about Steve Martin, our Outreach Coordinator and, his work with bikers called Peacemakers. Being a biker himself, Merrill decided to get in touch with Steve to find out more about what he does.

Since then, Merrill and Beni have been partnering with us in many ways. They are both regulars with our Monday Night Street Outreach teams. Merrill also does outreach on Fridays, and they often join Steve and Crystal in their work as Peacemakers. Merrill and Beni live in Richmond Hill, attend the People's Church and have four grandkids keeping them busy.



Partner

Forestbrook Bible Chapel

Forestbrook Bible Chapel is a large and growing church in a middle class neighbourhood in Pickering. Although there's nothing demographic to suggest a connection, and despite the distance from downtown Toronto, Forestbrook's congregation has partnered with us in a number of important ways through the years. Several individuals have volunteered, the most visible being Dr. Ted Kay, an original and still active member of the Board of Directors. He voluntarily offers his services as medical doctor in our health clinic. His wife Eunice issues donor acknowledgements on our behalf. Forestbrook has invited Greg and the Sanctuary worship group to participate in a few Sunday services in Pickering, and has sent Don Palmer and a Forestbrook worship team to visit Sanctuary in return. What's probably most widely appreciated is the monthly gift of a casserole dinner (shared with one hundred people or more on Thursday night) prepared by a Forestbrook women's group. And, of course, the church corporately and many of its individual members continue to be generous financial donors. Partners like this are what make it possible for us to continue!

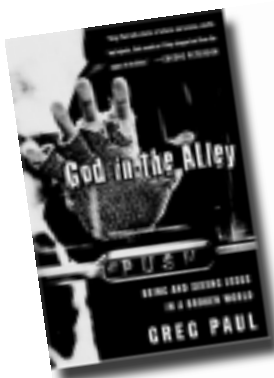
Long time Sanctuary partner
Andy Burgess ran the Toronto
Marathon on October 17, with
the intent of raising \$50,000 for
Sanctuary. We're not sure what the
final figure will be, but are happy
to report that Andy finished the
run on his own two feet.



God in the Alley

by Greg Paul

Being and Seeing Jesus in a Broken World



We have been waiting for this day for a long time and are now excited to announce the December 7th release of *God in the Alley*, a brand new book from the heart and pen of our very own Greg.

Many of our friends and supporters have commented over the years that Greg has a real knack for writing and capturing the essence of our community at Sanctuary.

In this book, subtitled "Being and Seeing Jesus in a Broken World," he unpacks lessons learned and insights gained

through his years of involvement with some of the broken people who make up our community.

God in the Alley should be available in bookstores everywhere in December, including Indigo and Chapters as well as online at Amazon.ca or through your local Christian bookstore. If you don't find it where you usually shop, be sure to ask for it by name and encourage them to stock it on their shelves.

To order a copy of "God in the Alley" through Sanctuary, please use the response form on the back page.

Items Needed at Sanctuary

Condiments: jams, ketchup, mayonnaise, relish, mustard, salad dressing, syrup, white vinegar.

Canned Goods: coffee, cream soups, fruit, stews, pasta sauce, pork & beans, vegetables.

Dry Goods: drink mixes, cake mixes, cold/hot cereals, cookies, granola bars, pancake mix, pasta, spices, sugar, coffee and tea.

Personal Care Items: blankets, deodorant, new combs/hairbrushes, hand soap, hand lotion, feminine products, razors, shaving cream, shampoo & conditioner, new sleeping bags, new socks, tooth-brushes, toothpaste, toilet paper, new men's and women's underwear.

Contact us at 416-922-0628 ext. 10 for more info.

Yes, I want to partner with you.

- ☐ I would like to order ____ copies of "God in the Alley" (Retail price \$15.00).
Enclosed please find a cheque for \$_____.
- ☐ 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
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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:

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