

City of Refuge

Winter 2005

A Voice from the Street

Vol. 4- Issue 1

A Path to the Soul by Greg Paul

A small, unframed painting sits on the printer in my office. Acrylic on canvas board (nine by twelve); almost half the surface of the board is bare of paint. A cheerful yellow stick figure of a girl playing with a ball holds the centre; a childish yellow sun shines upon her, the merest outline of a house, and a row of orange flowers, floating in the air above the house. You'd think the artist was a child, until you realize that only a skilful artist could portray a house with such elegant simplicity.

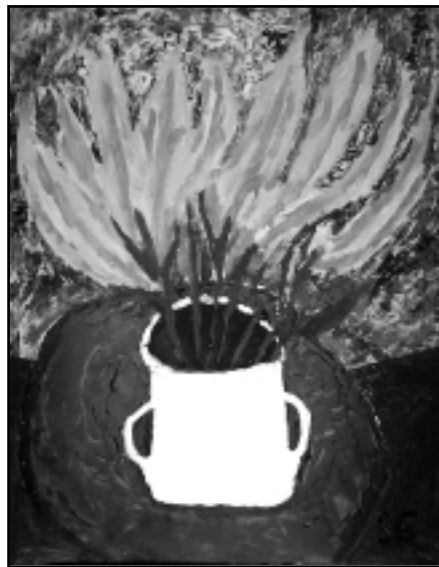
You'd think it was a happy, harmless childhood scene, unless you began to wonder about the throbbing wedge of blue and purple that drives diagonally across the panel, connecting the house and girl, flinging splashes of red as it goes. It might strike you then that perhaps the girl is running away from the house, looking back over her shoulder as if in fear that something or someone might follow her. And you might wonder why the girl seems caught in that angry flow the colour of blood and bruises.

The painting was given to me about ten years ago by a woman who was then in her late thirties. I have no idea where she is now, or if she's still alive. I do know that I pre-empted at least one serious suicide attempt, sending emergency workers to batter down her door and cart her off to the hospital to have her stomach pumped in the middle of the night. Attractive and highly intelligent, the only child of a wealthy family, she was not only an accomplished artist with her own loft studio, but had been on the mast head of no fewer than three significant Canadian periodicals, including MacLean's. For ten years, she had been spiraling deeper and deeper into a disassociative identity disorder. She'd lost her job and most of the meaningful relationships in her life, along with a firm grip on reality and any real sense that life was worth living.

I asked her for the painting – she had a hard time understanding why I'd want it – after she explained to me that it had been painted by some four-year-old version of herself. It was a barely conscious attempt to tell dark secrets she had kept buried for

years, secrets that had festered and done increasing damage until her life was all but unlivable. Almost the only part of her psyche that continued to function regularly and effectively was the part that produced painting after painting – some beautiful, and some, like this one, positively harrowing.

There's another painting in front of me as I write this. I brought it from the art supplies room that doubles as a tiny studio here. It's big (32" x 40") and bold; the paint that covers every inch of

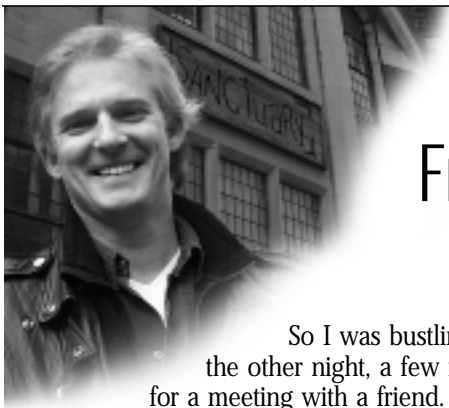


Art by Steve Grant

it is so thickly applied that the heavy cardboard surface has begun to curl a bit. I'm not a fan of still life paintings, as a rule, but the word "still" hardly qualifies in this case. A handful of yellow flowers sit, or rather, leap from a mysterious blue ocean in a squat, white, two handled jug. The petals are like long, thick, exuberant flames, licking the outer and upper edges of the painting as if eager to burst beyond its boundaries into the three-dimensional world. The jug sits on a wine-coloured platter that juts precariously past the edge of the dark green surface on which it rests, threatening to tilt flowers and jug into a busy, predominantly brown background humming with excitement at the activity in the foreground. Not even the platter can sit still; the palette knife strokes are easily evident from ten feet away – they swirl around the white jug like children chasing each other around a pole.

The artist is a gaunt, sixty-ish man with white hair and beard. He wears the same thick, cable-knit sweater and black toque all the time, and he currently sleeps behind City Hall. This wonderful painting is the first he's ever done; he's recently begun another as full of life as the first. Although I like to call him Vincent van Steve, he's anything but a tortured artist. He literally has nothing but a small bundle of clothes and the friendships he's found here at Sanctuary, yet he seems amazingly happy and fulfilled. His painting is every bit as much a testament to a vibrant, engaged, outward-looking soul as hers was to a fractured and terrified one.

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A View From Here

by Greg Paul

So I was bustling along the Danforth the other night, a few minutes late, as usual, for a meeting with a friend. The street was awash in brown slush; a tall wake of dirty snow, thrown by city snowplows, crowded the outer edge of the sidewalk. Despite a wicked, bitter wind (wet and cold, like icy sandpaper on the face), there were a lot of other pedestrians thrashing along too, heads down, shoulders up, taking those short exasperated steps demanded by slippery pavement. I had assumed that the foulness of the weather would mean fewer people abroad, but I'd been forced to park blocks away. Normally I'm happy to walk or ride my bike almost everywhere, and having had to circle several blocks a number of times (until I was late) trying to find parking (that I had to pay for, even though it was far away), then having to stumble through the sludge with my hands in my pockets and my ears stinging (I wasn't dressed for walking) – well, it all struck me as most unjust.

Judging by their grim demeanour, so did the other walkers. Nobody looked up or sideways, just plowed ahead like so many blinkered oxen. As I was trudging by the liquor store, I noticed a man sitting on a milk crate by the doorway with an old sleeping bag wrapped around his legs. His partner was stuffing her sleeping bag into a green garbage bag; the liquor store had just closed. But he sat on that milk crate like it was a throne – a native man, I think, erect and clear-eyed, with shoulder-length black hair and a moustache. He had one mittened hand raised.

He looked straight at each huddled form shuffling by, and called to each one in a cheerful, clear voice: "Peace! God bless you! Have a good night, now!"

I could hear him call the same thing over and over as I approached, then passed him, and, never slowing down, left him behind. I wondered about it later, though. At best, I thought, the man and his mate are probably living in a squalid room somewhere, eating in church basements and drop-ins, scavenging their many layers from the inevitable messy piles of used clothing at places like Sanctuary. Begging outside the liquor store on nights when everybody else keeps moving just to keep from freezing solid. And blessing the passersby with calm conviction, and no trace of the sarcasm I would surely exhibit. Where, I wondered, did that saintly demeanour come from, and how on earth did it stay intact?

Much later that same night, I was doing street outreach with my partner, Paul Baetz. We ran into a friend of ours – I'll call him Pete – talking on a pay phone on Yonge Street. Pete's a very laid-back native guy who drapes himself in the baggy clothes and scatological language of the hip hop culture. He was standing with his back against the phone booth, facing toward

the sidewalk, so he saw us coming. Since he was clearly engaged in a conversation, we didn't stop, but as we drew along side of him, he turned the receiver away from his mouth, said a delighted, "Hey, brother!" and reached out to bump his fist against mine.

Half a block later, I was just remarking to Paul that Pete is a sweet spirit when we heard exaggeratedly heavy steps behind us. It was Pete. I told him what I had just said to Paul, and he beamed.

"Got to, got to!" he said. "We all brothers, know what'm sayin'?", waving his thumbs and odd digits at us in one of those weird hip hop benedictions, and muttering something to the effect that we were swell guys too. And he hustled on, doing the twenty-piece shuffle – the peculiar quick-step strut of a guy who just scored some money and has an appointment with a dealer.

It reminded me of bumping into yet another friend a few days earlier. "Wilf" had been at our Sunday worship time that week, and when I met him on the sidewalk outside Sanctuary the next day, he told me that, although he didn't come often on Sundays (he's a regular at drop-ins), it was helpful to him when he did. He mentioned something I had apparently said months earlier – that I think God values it highly when people with addictions get up and walk on each time they fall, is heroic when they do – and said it had been inspiring to him. He told me he'd been sober for a week, and that he was spending a couple of hours every day studying the Bible at the Toronto Reference Library. His comments on the passages he was studying were insightful; they made it clear that he is no novice; he thinks deeply and often about his faith.

He'd also been studying phrenology, a 19th century "science" that predicted a person's personality and various capacities (including the capacity for murder!) based on measurements of the head. Based on his studies, and his observations of my own noggin, Wilf told me what he thought of my character. What he said was so sweet and generous I'd be embarrassed to relate it here.

People who haven't experienced our community close up frequently ask how our staff can handle working in such a desperate environment day after day. It must be hard! Working at Walmart for forty hours every week is hard, I like to tell them. I think I'm a lucky guy to be here. Why? Because, although it can come in strange forms, my people, out of their own profound poverty, bless me regularly and richly.

Do yours?

Greg signing books at the "God in the Alley" release party.



JOIN US FOR OUR

Arts Extravaganza

**Saturday
May 6th & 7th
2005
7:30-11:00 p.m.**

Art Display-Sale

Music

FUN

Food by
"Bluestone
Bakery"

The Screaming
Monkeys

[SANCTUARY]
25 Charles St. East
Yonge/Bloor

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

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And that's the thing about art: through it we say things about ourselves that are un-say-able; we uncover the otherwise unknowable. Perhaps more than any other human activity, the creation of art (music, drama, literature, dance...), merely for the sake of satisfying the creative impulse, marks us as special creations of the Creator: Made in the Image. Most works of art have little or no practical value, yet in my office, which is not large, I have at least ten "art objects" – not including the van Steve, which is only on loan. (One is a water colour done by my son Caleb, when he was six or seven. He'd spent considerable



Artists at work during Open Studio

time executing an intricate abstract that caught the attention of a kind neighbour who bought it. The light went on for Caleb – he enlisted his younger brother, moved the "studio" to the front lawn, and went into production, selling his inventory to passersby. My painting, alas, is one of the later ones in the series, and the soul-destroying effect of rampant commercialism is evident.)

In an age when production is the holy grail, and in a context where mere survival is a daily concern, the arts provide a path to people's souls, and a balm for them, that is connected directly to their immeasurable value as unique expressions of the heart of the Great Artist.

That's why, on a staff of twelve, we have two who are here specifically as artists, and to nurture the artist in others. Sharon Tiessen, artist/musician in residence, says matter-of-factly that art and music saved her life. (It's a long story.) And Lyf Stolte, actor in residence, left Saskatchewan for the wilds of Toronto – a move he never thought he'd make – to show some of our friends how pretending to be somebody else can help you learn some things about yourself. Together, they're helping clear those paths.

Sharon and Lyf are preparing another in our series of periodic Arts Extravanzas: (see the notice above) from 7:30 – 11:00pm. Maybe you'll be able to join us, take a peek into some of these beautiful souls, and see the gleam in the eye of the proud artists, actors and musicians whose works will be on display. (Much of the visual art will be for sale, too.) Maybe you'd like to display a work of your own, and give us a glimpse of something deep and true about yourself. You'd better come – you may never get another chance to see an original van Steve close up.

Items Needed at Sanctuary

We are always in need of good art supplies:

- paints- oil • acrylic, water colours
- good brushes • easels • new canvases
- a light/vacuum table for screen printing
- a good portable sewing machine
- a crock pot • an electric griddle
- light beeswax • art books
- cameras (SLR and medium format)
- darkroom equipment
- stained-glass supplies

We also need an air purifier/filter to use in the art space, capable of filtering out more toxic particles such as wax and solvents.

Please contact Sharon Tiessen
sharont@sanctuaryministries.on.ca



A Night at Grace's

*A few hours of laughing, dancing, singing,
acting, storytelling, photography,
setting up, tearing down, doing sound and lights,
munching on chips and pretzels...*

*Everything we do aims to send out the message that
the Kingdom of God is at hand - and that
it is well-worth celebrating!*

*Red Rain, 20 years later...a tad worse for wear,
but still exuberant for the Lord!
Happy Anniversary, guys!*

*If you want to know why it's called
"A Night at Grace's"
come and join the party!*

Future Date - June 4th, 2005

A Night at Grace's

SANCTUARY
COMMUNITY
CONCERT

[SANCTUARY]



Saturday, April 2 8:00-11:00pm

Join us as we celebrate **redrain's**
20th
Anniversary

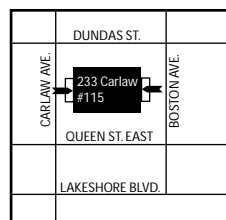
25 Charles St. East (Yonge & Bloor) • Public parking across street



FOR MORE INFO
CONTACT US AT:

416-778-0694

233 Carlaw Ave.
Unit #115
Toronto, Ontario
M4M 3N6



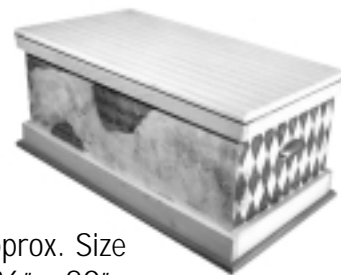
www.mustardtree.ca

SALE AT THE SHOP

April 9th, 2005 • 10:00am - 4:00pm

Trunks

FROM
\$249.99



Approx. Size
36" x 20"

Storage Boxes

CD Holder &
Letter Size Paper Tray

FROM
\$9.99



Benches

FROM **\$49.99**



Various Sizes

Faces of Our Community

Diana Marrello

Diana first visited Sanctuary two-and-a-half years ago when she came here for a 25th Anniversary Party for a couple of past volunteers. She left that night, having met a few of our community for the first time, and with a strong sense that this was a place that she needed to be.



Since that fateful day, she has become a regular and much-loved member of our community. Particularly, she has endeared herself to many of our Saturday morning regulars who have come to know her as "Juice Girl". As the juice has flowed, Diana has made all kinds of new friends in our community by her willingness to chat, share stories or just listen as the need arises.

Diana has been happily married to Hugo for 29 years, is the proud mom of two grown sons and is a regular at Spring Garden Baptist Church.

If you are interested in becoming involved with the Sanctuary community and are wondering how you might go about that, please contact Alan at alanb@sanctuaryministries.on.ca or at 416-922-0628 ext.11.

Bridletowne Park Church

Bridletowne Park Church is a congregation of about 150 located in Agincourt - part of a richly diverse community in which many immigrants begin their lives in Canada. Within this community they are embracing opportunities to reach out through small group Bible studies, an ESL Café, summer day camps, and a newly minted after-school program planned in partnership with the local public school.

Bridletowne was led into a friendship with Sanctuary through a small group of women who are committed to serving as a part of their group life. At Christmas and Easter, the group gets everyone involved in assembling gift bags for Sanctuary to distribute to women needing a boost over the holidays. Even The Knitting Basket, the yarn store at nearby Bridlewood Mall, gets involved as its owner, Farida, donates wool and encourages her customers to knit hats and scarves for the Christmas gift bags!



Both Karen and Greg Paul have visited Bridletowne over the years. Their passion to respond to their friends with God's love has helped Bridletowne to foster a growing vision for the wonderful people in their corner of Toronto.

In Memory of Blair Stobie November 9, 1964 - January 1, 2005



Blair Stobie had been a regular part of the Mustard Tree Program for the past six months. He had done very well in the shop. If you knew him, you'd have to say that he was beyond shy, more like painfully timid, but under the surface - deep as a river. Sometimes he disappeared for a couple or three days, only to quietly resurface and resume his activities at the shop.

He missed a couple of days at the beginning of November. I decided to call him at home and find out what was going on. As I looked up his phone number I noticed that it was his fortieth birthday. When I made the call I discovered that his isolation from family and the resulting loneliness were so compounded by his birthday that he couldn't find the strength to come to the shop. I asked him to go out for supper and a movie. His first response was no, but I insisted. We had big Harvs and went to see "Ray". A few days later Blair said, "That was the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me".

Blair never made it to Christmas dinner at Sanctuary or the Mustard Tree party. Sometime between Christmas and New Year's, Blair Stobie died, alone in his room. His body was discovered on the first day of the new year.

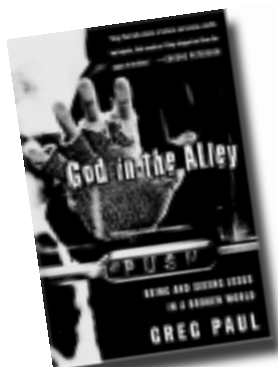
It was an honour to have worked with him. His clever wit with word and chisel will be missed in the shop and at drop-ins. I'm so glad he chose to spend some time with us. See you later, Blair.

by Wayne Rumsby, Director of Mustard Tree

God in the Alley

by Greg Paul

Being and Seeing Jesus in a Broken World



We have had a really encouraging response to the release of Greg's book, *God in the Alley*, in December. Thanks to the many of you who have bought copies, whether online, from bookstores or from us directly. We still have many more copies available and we look forward to getting those into the hands of people who need to hear what Greg has to say.

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.

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

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
 - ☐ 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 03-05

Financial Update – Thank you to our many financial partners who continue to give so generously to support both our staff and all of the work which we do here. We finished off 2004 balancing our books almost to the penny and it was amazing to watch the dollars come in to meet our needs.

As well, we are grateful for funding received under the National Homelessness Initiative program, Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, administered by the City of Toronto which will allow us to undertake some more extensive building improvements in 2005.

Mustard Tree – It is hard to believe that our Mustard Tree Woodworking Shop has been running now for more than a year. Unfortunately, our current lease expires at the end of April and we are currently looking for a new and perhaps more permanent home. Please pray for us in this process and feel free to contact Wayne at 416-778-0694 or wayne@sanctuaryministries.on.ca if you have any questions about this important program or are interested in assisting on a volunteer basis in the shop.

Out of the Cold – On Thursday, January 13th, we hosted our first Out of the Cold program at Sanctuary with space for 20 of our friends and community members to spend the night. Our friends join us for supper Thursday night at our usual drop-in, spend the night and then we enjoy breakfast together the next morning. If you have any questions about the Out of the Cold program, please contact Karen at 416-922-0628 ext. 17 or karenp@sanctuaryministries.on.ca.

Shoppers Optimum Points – Over the last two years, we have had a few wonderful donors who have regularly donated their Shoppers Drug Mart Optimum Points to Sanctuary, allowing us to provide our community with vitamins, cold and flu medications, bandages, and all sorts of other health care products. The process had been a little cumbersome but is now getting easier. If you are interested in donating your Shoppers Optimum Points to Sanctuary, go to the Shoppers website www.shoppersdrugmart.ca/donate or call 1-800-SHOPPERS. For more information about how the program works, please contact Thea at (416) 922-0628 ext. 22 or theap@sanctuaryministries.on.ca.

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www.sanctuaryministries.on.ca

email: info@sanctuaryministries.on.ca

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