

SANCTUARY LONDON

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See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:19)

I am sitting at the wooden edge of our Sanctuary community garden.
I am sitting among new tomato plants, beans, carrots and lettuce,
watching them grow in the dark, cool earth, under a blue-winged sky.
These plants have been grown from seed.
God is growing these plants from seed.
At this very moment, they are stirring, they are springing up.
He has planted new seeds in this garden.
I am surrounded by new seeds, deep in the earth, sprouting tiny shoots.
I am a seed, deep in the dark earth, sprouting a new shoot.
I am reaching for sunlight, thirsting for water.
I am a seed planted by God. He plants a new seed in me.
See, he is doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am dreaming of who I used to be. I am dreaming
of who I am becoming. I am dreaming of God and his many gardens.
I am dreaming of all the seeds God is planting in our Sanctuary
community,
in the midst of rain and storms.
I am facing the light, I am facing the sun. I will not turn away.
I am tempted to lower my head.
I am tempted to run.
I am tempted to give up.
But these seeds from God, these seeds in this garden—
they are alive; I am alive. The spirit of God is in me.
Do you see? Something new is growing here. And everywhere.
He gives drink to his people.
Sometimes the soil feels deep and the world, dark
but the Kingdom shines,
and do you not perceive it?
God is doing a new thing. Now it springs up!
God is making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.
God is planting a garden in me, in Sanctuary.





"Gil, what would you say is a 'success' for your friends on the street at Sanctuary?" Jack asked.

"Great question, Jack!"

Nine of us walked together that July afternoon. Six high school students from around Ontario and Michigan, Jack - their leader for the week, and Mel and I. The sun beat down hot on our backs as we walked away in silence from the bridge by the Thames River. We were on a "walk-about." At Sanctuary, we have been offering "walk-about" tours for six years. During the walk, we take a small group of folks through the downtown core to discuss poverty in London - what are some of the causes, who is helping, what is hindering, and share some stories and locations that are important to our friends on the streets. For two weeks at the beginning of July, we walked with two different SERVE groups. SERVE is a short term mission project hosted by a local church at which youth from all over come to another city to serve. This year, we worked alongside Vanastra Christian Reformed Church and our partner church, Talbot Street CRC. We offered these walks to each of the youth and leaders as a way to open their eyes to poverty. One of the most "eye-opening" moments was time spent under the bridges by the Thames river. We all saw clearly (by the blankets and other items still lying there) that someone slept there last night. It strikes us all. We all thought something like this - I was comfortable in bed last night. My friend slept there. I woke up refreshed. My friend did not. Some people see this and get angry - "We need to do more...Nobody deserves this!" Some people just hurt. Most people really do not know how to process that reality that quickly. So we often walk in silence for a while after the bridge just to give time to think through what we saw. It was into this silence that Jack interjected his question about success.



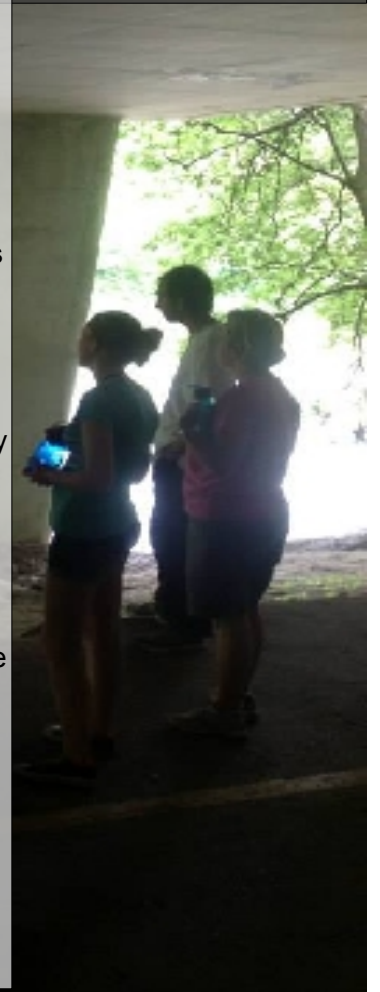
"Success is something different for each person. It is not an arbitrary line in the moral or utilitarian sand. For some, we can love them for a long time. They can begin to feel loved and may even feel like they belong. Some might have a taste of 'home.' For some, the pain of their lives have been so great, their past too challenging, their obstacles too big, that the best some people get is a sense of belonging. Some of our friends leave. Never come back. They don't want to be reminded of their past so they never return. And some of our friends see their lives changed dramatically. Perhaps not in the ways that we tend to describe as success normally (job, house, education). Some friends go on to graduate college programs. Some find permanent housing. Some enter into a long term healthy relationships. All these things we consider success." and silence followed again...

We returned to the church where we sat down and Mel had an opportunity to share her story with the group. From early life struggles in the family to hitting the streets by the time she was 16, Mel had a tough go. What might a 16 year old hearing her story feel? How might they change from knowing that this reality - Mel's reality - is a taste of what many of our friends experience? No one chooses the streets. No one thinks it's fun - after a while. It's a struggle. It's pain. And it's often without hope. Mel ended her talk with a discussion of hope - not perfect by any means - like the rest of us. But hope nonetheless.

Jack takes me aside a bit later. "You know Gil, I asked you about success...remember?"

"Yes"

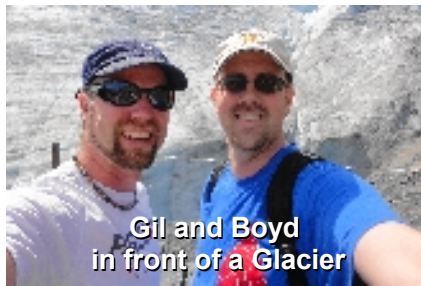
Jack continued, "Mel is a success. Her grace as we walked and saw all those things that hurt the impoverished. Her love as she shared her story...and her hope...that's success."





One of the Spectacular Views in Alaska!

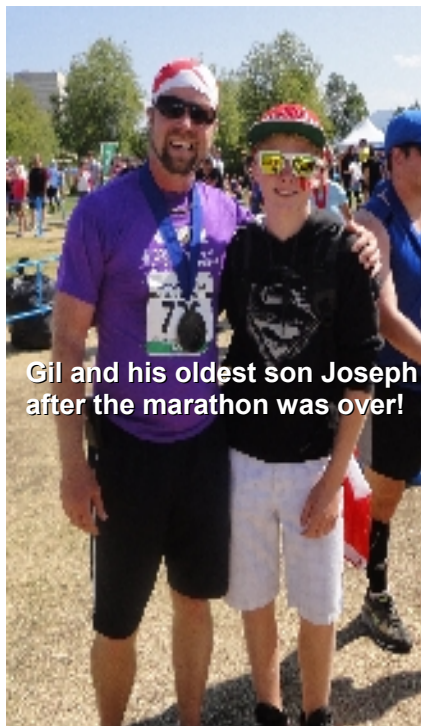
Cool Runnings: Update on Gil's run for Leukemia in Alaska!



Gil and Boyd
in front of a Glacier



Moose spotted on a day hike!



Gil and his oldest son Joseph
after the marathon was over!

It was a great start. The sun was shining on the mountains. A cool breeze washed over my face. Although I was a little tired from trying to sleep in the land of the midnight sun, I felt encouraged and refreshed at the start of this marathon. I had enjoyed a big breakfast. I was full of energy. My son Joseph watched with love. My good friend Boyd – the man I was running for – cheered me on. Boyd had been my encouragement over the training months. When training got tough, I remembered his chemo treatments. When my muscles were sore, I thought about Boyd's life on the brink a few times in the last two years because of blood cancer. Boyd and many others kept me going in all my training runs. And we were now at the start of the run!

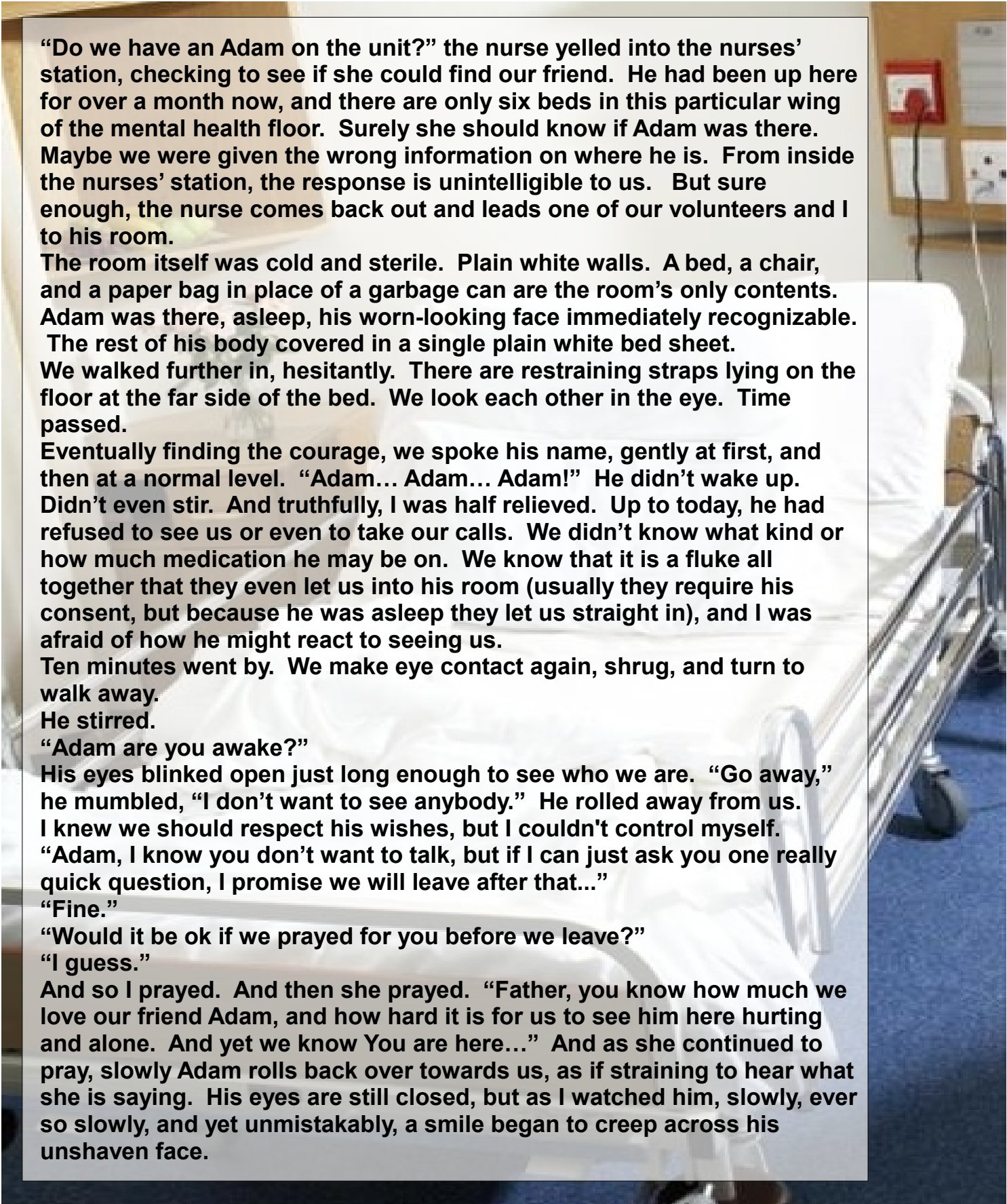
Over four months of fund raising was done. We had raised over \$10 000 for Leukemia Society and people that had gone through Leukemia. The sightseeing in Alaska was over. Kayak trips, amazing wildlife and scenery, and visits to a glacier were in the past now. To be enjoyed in photos and memories. All that was left was the run. And I was running a marathon in Alaska! How amazing is that!

The sights were beautiful. The mile markers passed with ease. 1,2,3. Done in good time. 7,8,9 miles...I was on a great pace. But we kept climbing. The trail kept going up. Gravel roads and trails kept my attention. 11,12,13...was I slowing down? Halfway. But getting tired. And two more miles uphill. I kept hearing about and anticipating the "gentle slopes downhill on the second half." By mile 18, I was done. My body was exhausted. My legs were sore and I had little to offer. The first 15 miles uphill on gravel and trail had taken their toll and I was hurting. 18 in. 8 miles to go. Nothing left in the tank. Same place I failed in a training run. I was going for 21 miles that day and I stopped at mile 18. It was too hard. I had nothing left. On this day though, I realized: either I changed my focus...or I would not finish at all.

With 8 miles still to go, I switched my goal. No longer would I see a certain finishing time (I was aiming for a sub 4:00 hour marathon). No longer would I aim to get done. Slowly. Step by step. Breath by breath. I entered into the moment. Just be present. Breathe in. Breathe out. One step ahead of the other. I didn't need to see the finish line. I needed only to take the next step. That was my goal. That was my focus. I was slow but moving. Mile markers encouraged me. Water stops refreshed me. Prayers upheld me. Two hills just near the end of the race pushed me to the brink. And somewhere around four hours and 28 minutes, I finished the marathon in Anchorage, Alaska.

Exhilaration and exhaustion overcame me. Done! Complete. Months of training. The last few months leading up to this race flew through my head. Prayers of so many. Love and encouragement along the way. Fund raising. Survival stories. Great loss of some. All flooded my mind. And I smiled. My son hugged me. Boyd ran at me with a hug and tackled me – he was so excited. What a day!

Here, I sit a few weeks after typing this out. Memories still fresh. And the lessons even more-so. How often we start out strong and run out of energy? How often we focus on the finish line so intently, we forget the moment. And how often do we go at our pace, not God's? Running long distance has changed me. I used to like the "next" thing whatever it was. I'd be distracted even bothered by the present moment. Running keeps me in the moment. Running trains me to focus on right now. God's moment with me is right now. Yes, He has a future. And yes, our past is important too. But right now is the moment you have. Whether its a conversation, a prayer, a breath, or a step...slow down, see God in the right now. Enjoy the race. We have but one!



“Do we have an Adam on the unit?” the nurse yelled into the nurses’ station, checking to see if she could find our friend. He had been up here for over a month now, and there are only six beds in this particular wing of the mental health floor. Surely she should know if Adam was there. Maybe we were given the wrong information on where he is. From inside the nurses’ station, the response is unintelligible to us. But sure enough, the nurse comes back out and leads one of our volunteers and I to his room.

The room itself was cold and sterile. Plain white walls. A bed, a chair, and a paper bag in place of a garbage can are the room’s only contents. Adam was there, asleep, his worn-looking face immediately recognizable.

The rest of his body covered in a single plain white bed sheet.

We walked further in, hesitantly. There are restraining straps lying on the floor at the far side of the bed. We look each other in the eye. Time passed.

Eventually finding the courage, we spoke his name, gently at first, and then at a normal level. “Adam... Adam... Adam!” He didn’t wake up. Didn’t even stir. And truthfully, I was half relieved. Up to today, he had refused to see us or even to take our calls. We didn’t know what kind or how much medication he may be on. We know that it is a fluke all together that they even let us into his room (usually they require his consent, but because he was asleep they let us straight in), and I was afraid of how he might react to seeing us.

Ten minutes went by. We make eye contact again, shrug, and turn to walk away.

He stirred.

“Adam are you awake?”

His eyes blinked open just long enough to see who we are. “Go away,” he mumbled, “I don’t want to see anybody.” He rolled away from us. I knew we should respect his wishes, but I couldn’t control myself.

“Adam, I know you don’t want to talk, but if I can just ask you one really quick question, I promise we will leave after that...”

“Fine.”

“Would it be ok if we prayed for you before we leave?”

“I guess.”

And so I prayed. And then she prayed. “Father, you know how much we love our friend Adam, and how hard it is for us to see him here hurting and alone. And yet we know You are here...” And as she continued to pray, slowly Adam rolls back over towards us, as if straining to hear what she is saying. His eyes are still closed, but as I watched him, slowly, ever so slowly, and yet unmistakably, a smile began to creep across his unshaven face.

PLEASE PRINT AND SHARE! Thank-you for staying updated on what’s going on at Sanctuary London. One of the best ways to continue to support us (other than prayer, love, and finances) is to print this newsletter and share it with friends!

Can you help us get the word out about Sanctuary? Thanks so much!