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Please remember as you read that the people written about in these articles have either given consent for us to use their story, or their name and any potentially identifying information has been changed to protect their identity within our community.

Aching Hearts

Marie has been coming over to our home now and again. We invited her once, never expecting she'd agree, not to mention come again. Marie is a solitary woman, approached at the wrong time in the wrong way can result in hostility and silence. But lately, she seems more relaxed. We boil the kettle and share a warm drink. She will always ask if we could light a candle. "A reminder", she says, "that the Spirit is present here with us". Not long ago she arrived unexpectedly in the evening. It was -15c outside and dropping, and when I opened the door she was covered in snow.

We lit our candle, shared a drink, and talked together for a couple of hours.



I don't know where Marie goes to sleep at night. She could have an apartment, she could have a couch, I fear especially on this night she has nothing at all. She prepares to leave and I try to offer her more time to rest, in a round-about way suggesting she could stay the night. I know she will refuse.

One more hug, an exchange of blessings. She goes out and I close the door behind her.

My heart sinks to the floor. I feel as though I've abandoned her to the wolves. And yet I know there is not much more I could do, maybe what she had truly needed that night had already been met by the company, by shared conversation and the warmth of our mugs and candle. Still, I am torn by the feeling of helplessness and can't sleep all night.

A friend reminded me later that we can only offer, give them the power to accept or refuse, and be present and vulnerable in return, and it is a comfort to be reminded, yet does not ease the ache. I can only imagine the ache of the heart of God. -TB

Marie represents just one of so many of our friends who, when they leave, we legitimately don't know where they are going, or if we will ever see them alive again. It hurts and it sucks. But each of these people brings a unique and important gift to our community and we are so blessed by knowing them.

Seeking Sunshine

"God's folly is wiser than humans, you see, and God's weakness is stronger than humans." 1 Cor 1:25 (NT Wright translation)

They walked into Sanctuary during a Wednesday drop in, took a look around, and sat down to wait for me. I sensed the tension in the room rise so I turned around to see these two men. They stared at me unflinchingly. I quickly finished up a conversation and walked over to our guests. I shook hands and started some small talk by asking the downtown "preachers" how they were doing. For the next twenty minutes I listened and attempted to respond to their presentation (it wasn't a conversation) about my leadership, my theology, and the "blood on (my) hands" of all the people who attend our community and who don't convert to their version of following Jesus. According to these men, we at Sanctuary are the "den of thieves" about which Jesus spoke and it is all my fault. In the end, they left, and the day settled into a normal drop in.

In some ways, I see myself in these men. I see in these men a desire to be right. To close every loophole. To KNOW who was in the kingdom and who wasn't. To KNOW who was ordained for certain roles and who wasn't. What to wear. What to do. How to interpret life, scripture, and others. All of it, so clear. No questions. No room for questions. I see me, I see the church...before I got broken...before we got broken.

In some ways, I'm still trying to let it all go. The control. Being right. The knowledge. The more I do life with folks who have known oppressive systems, the more I can let it go. And I allow a sense of wonder back into my life. Into my faith. Into the community.

Right now, sunshine is pouring into my office window begging me to stop a minute and breathe. Ten books (commentaries, Bible, Greek lexicon, historical texts) sit on my desk also begging me to study, to get ready to share more about Paul and his letter to the Corinthian church this coming Sunday. Perhaps the sunshine has more to teach me than any of these books: Just stop. Soak in this moment. Stop needing to be right. And enjoy. Enjoy the folly in my own life. My doubts, questions, and feeble attempts at godly answers. Enjoy the many weaknesses of this community I call home. Enjoy a run with folks who weren't running less than a year ago. Enjoy the ways our community members struggle to come to grips with love, being welcomed, and finding ways to welcome others when "others" have been the source of pain, rejection, and oppression. Enjoy the trees, the trails, and the many different animal tracks one can see in the fresh snow. Enjoy the sip of a cup of coffee brought into my office by my friend and co-worker. Enjoy the laughter, silliness, and love of my children.

The sunshine continues to warm the side of my face. Winter's grip will soon be lost as the hope of spring and new life creeps back into our world. Perhaps, my brothers and sisters, the sunshine can loosen the grip on our collective need to be right, to control, and to know...as we allow wonder and joy back in. -GC



Fear and Waves

I have always been terrified of the water. I'm a fairly strong swimmer, and if you chuck me in a pool, I'm perfectly content to paddle around for hours. It's the murky unknown of lakes and oceans that get me. I don't like not being in control of my environment, so I avoid it. Did you ever play chicken with big crashing waves at the beach? When the waves receded, you run on the wet sand, towards the water only to turn and run when the next wave starts advancing. If you've gone too far and don't retreat in time, you get soaked, which makes you more careful and wary the next time. While in total fear of the ocean and what lay within it, I also had a curiosity and desire to know more. Fear keeps me back.

What do you do when the person you are trying to know and love rejects it? Not out of spite, but because they either cannot allow themselves to be vulnerable with somebody else as a protection measure, or, because they simply do not see themselves as worthy. These are the people that I hurt for the most, and as it turns out, also the ones I relate to most.

When I see people in need, I immediately want to help. It's the easiest thing in the world. Somebody walks in with frosted eyelashes and soaking clothes, I want to help them be comfortable, safe, and warm. When I offer socks, a coat, food, some people accept it quickly and gratefully. It is easy to love these friends. With others, it is rejected. Why? Maybe they don't feel they are worth it. Usually they ask that it go to someone else who needs it more. It feels like they are self-sabotaging, and choosing a much more difficult path. This mindset is so frustrating for someone like me who quickly sees easy solutions. However these people have a past, usually a long list of people who have let them down, and the trust issues that lie beneath are ones that we will have to work through together.

My friend Beth explained it well, "There has to be an admitted brokenness before you can start building [trust] up again. Like with anything, the healing has to begin with an admission to brokenness." Beth explained that prior to Sanctuary, the turnover rate of those she ran into who claimed that they cared for her was incredibly high. Every time she would trust someone and open up, they would vanish, leaving her feeling vulnerable and hurt. She told me of how guarded she was

with Gil when they first met, and she assumed he would be like all the rest. Instead, he stuck around, and opened up himself. She stated that one of her biggest love impacts occurred when Gil told her he had bought a house. This small act of openness and life sharing was a flashing sign that he was going to stick around, and that he was safe to open up to. For me, the realization of how such a seemingly small act can have such huge impacts is incredible. I am beginning to see that my frustration with others is perhaps also the biggest challenge in my own life. While it is easy to love and help others, I also push away those who attempt to get close or love me. Why? Fear. Fear of being hurt. It is the most beautiful idea in the world, to be in relationship with others, one where you can be broken, hurt, heal, rejoice, and thrive with one another fully. But it's scary. It's a journey, a constant decision to face the waves, but perhaps, as a community we can slowly become more comfortable with getting our feet wet together. -BA



HOME IS HARD

Finding a place to call 'home' is extremely hard work. Especially when, for a variety of reasons, it's just not possible to live on your own. For some of our friends the reason is financial. Our friends on Ontario Works receive up to \$384/month for housing. For those on ODSP, it is \$489/month. But according to the 2017 statistics published by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the average rental costs for a one-bedroom apartment in London, ON is \$840/month, and the vacancy rate has decreased to 1.7%. For more information, visit: https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64403/64403_2017_A01.pdf?fr=1518531340081. The numbers are not good.

I would love to know the vacancy rate for fully accessible units, and my guess is that this number will be even significantly closer to 0%. I've been looking for a few different friends for a long time now. I've called or e-mailed every landlord I can find without success.

A few weeks ago I picked up one of our friends, Samuel, who was being released from the hospital who incurred some major injuries after a number of falls due to epilepsy and other pre-existing mobility issues. He was picked up by ambulance, so he did not have his walker with him. It happened to be a Wednesday, so I took him straight to drop-in and we had a great dinner and visit together. But at the end of the night, I couldn't imagine allowing him to try to get home on his own. So I offered a ride. I was in for an eye opening experience. It took about 35 minutes and every muscle and ounce of strength I had in my body to help this dear friend of mine to get from the curb directly in front of his building, up the seven steps of stairs and down the narrow hallway into his unit. "Thanks for your help and patience. That's got to be a record for the fastest I've been able to jump up these stairs in a long time," Samuel says to me, smiling cheekily.

Samuel didn't show up the following week. But he did make it, although late, this past Wednesday. "Five falls in the last three days," he shares with me. And I fear the next time he falls there may be no one around to call for help. No family to speak of. The only loved ones he ever talks about are a few workers at various drop-in centers across the city.

Even if we secure better, more accessible housing for Samuel, he needs further care. It is not safe for him to live on his own. At best he would submit to full-time supported living, although this is highly unlikely due to the pain of an earlier life of institutionalized living. At the least he needs companionship, someone to walk with him through his desperately lonely days.

Here is my question and my struggle: What is home for you? And if some of us have been granted the blessing of a safe place to call home for ourselves, how do we begin to create real places of home for Samuel and others who so desperately need it? -DR



Thanks for your love and support!

PLEASE CONTINUE TO WALK WITH US IN 2018

Would you pray with us as we discern how to continue moving forward with this community? We want to grow and learn new ways of reaching people who are "poor or excluded".

As always, we would love to hear from you. Please accept this as your invitation to join our community in whatever capacity suits you best!

"At Sanctuary, we are becoming a healthy, welcoming community where people who are poor or excluded are particularly valued. This community is an expression of the good news embodied in Jesus Christ."

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