

TORONTO'S REFUGE

Erika Abele shares about her journey to Oasis

It was such a cold and dreary morning. I wondered if the weather reflected my mood. This was the day that my parents, brother and I were leaving Bolivia to travel to a new country, Canada which would be our new home. We had spent months getting ready for this day. So with excitement, but also sadness we headed to the airport. As I sat in the back of what I think might have been a station wagon I remember vividly looking back at “my mountains” and in my heart I said, “Good-bye”. I was only 10 years old but I knew this was an important time in my life, and wondered if I might never set my eyes upon such a lovely sight again. La Paz is a city often described as the bowl in the midst of the mountains. And it really does look like a little bowl that cups the homes and buildings that reside in it. The mountains surrounding it make it seem almost magical. One of the largest mountains is the “Illimani” and because of its height and snow peaks its appearance almost seems majestic. But it wasn't this mountain I said good-bye to. It

(Continued on page 2)



Photo: Rob Patterson

Erika Abele has been Director of Women's Ministries at Oasis for the past 13 years.

In this issue...

- ◆ Erika Abele recalls her journey to Canada from Bolivia
- ◆ 18th Annual Oasis Walkathon
- ◆ Oasis Benefit Concert

(Continued from page 1)

was the brown rocky mountain that had been the view from my home that I whispered to.

Fast forward 20 some years, and this memory comes to mind when I think of the work that I am involved in at Oasis. It is hard to believe that I have been part of the Oasis community for over 13 years. I still remember Mom (Phyllis Ortiz) asking me to volunteer for a few weeks. Those few weeks turned into months and now the years have passed. This place and its people have touched my life so profoundly and in a sense have made me who I am today. Over the years I have been involved in teaching ESL, tutoring children in a homework club, doing intakes in the food bank, and more recently counselling women. Someone asked me what I have learned in my time here at Oasis. I have been reflecting on this for some time. There are two thoughts that come to mind. The first of those is that transformation takes time, a great deal of time. When we think about the purpose of churches and faith communities, it would seem that what often binds us together is this deep desire to dream about how this world could be transformed if the truth of the One we love were to be lived out in our lives faithfully. We dream about what this world would be like if the words from the sermon on the mount were constantly filling our hearts and actions. And so we aspire to see brokenness find beauty and despair light the candle of hope. And therefore, we engage in our communities hoping to see these dreams come true. And what I have learned is that change takes time. How long does it take for someone who lived years of abuse and torment to be able to trust again? And it takes faith to believe that even when we may not see it God is at work. We must be faithful and continue to do His work even

when it is hard. The other thing I am learning involves my own spiritual journey. I was recently meditating on Isaiah 58 and what strikes me is the truth that if we spend our lives in some way relieving oppression, God will bring us healing. And we are all broken.

***"and if you spend yourselves
in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs
of the oppressed,
then your light will rise
in the darkness"
(Isaiah 58: 10a)***

So it seems like a wonderful promise that if our focus is on kingdom, then we ourselves enter this place of blessing, this place where we are also transformed.

Over the past five years I have been involved in counselling women of Hispanic descent. I have heard stories that include abuse, trauma, resiliency, hope and strength. These are stories that essentially cannot be told. I did ask one of these women if I could share a small part of her story and she joyfully gave her permission. It would seem like an insignificant thing perhaps, at first glance. It is the story of a young girl who grew up in the mountains and never learned to read or write until she came to Canada. But she vividly describes one particular scene she recalls from her childhood.

***"There was the guy that would come
around selling bread every day, and he
would call out with a loud voice trying to***

[And it] ...will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.” - Martin Luther King

get people out of their homes to buy their daily portion. But my mom seldom had money, so she would distract us, my sister and me, so we couldn't hear him. But we could still smell that sweet smell of fresh bread. We pretended not to notice though, lest we undue her good intentions. It was then I learned that some days there is food and other days none but I must learn to be content always. But my favourite activity was making the nest for the chickens. I would gather rocks and hay and eventually the hen would come, sit on the nest and lay her eggs. This would mean that some days we might have something to eat.

Knowing that I can be O.K., even on the days when the bread boy must simply pass our house, has made me strong.”

As I think about this story, it is important to me because it reflects what I am constantly learning from the Oasis community. I see that God works in people's lives sometimes in the midst of suffering, through moments of joy and most often in ways that may never be known by us.

The woman that shared this story is from the mountains. And though we may not be able to go to the "mountains" sometimes they come to us. I may not be able to journey to these places at this time of my life but I am thankful for Oasis, a place where God is at work in many ways that are unseen.

Illimani Mountain, La Paz, Bolivia



A Prayer-Walk to Remember

On October 5th we gathered with old friends and supporters of Oasis, and some new connections, to pray with us as we walked around our neighbourhood. We were guided by Terry and George (we call them our "Community Experts"); both members of our faith community who live in the neighbourhood and know it intimately. Each led a route, supported by Oasis staff members, and followed by the folks who had come from several Toronto area churches. Our guides shared

from their own experience of the struggles of the neighbourhood around issues of poverty, isolation and addiction. But they also showed us where to look to see the good, the beautiful, the brave; and the small movements of God's hand. They drew our attention to the places where people find services and support; the work of other organizations (both faith-based and secular) who labour alongside us in building a healthier community in this part of the city.



Photo: Rob Patterson

Prayer Walk Participants Taking to the Streets of Toronto.

Local Churches Showcase their Musical Talents at the Oasis Benefit Concert

"The subway was shut down with only shuttle buses running along Bloor Street West as a misty, slightly frozen rain was lowering itself onto the city. It was dark and cold and may have felt like a better night to stay snug and warm at home. But for those who ventured out into the night, things heated up under the lights at Kingsway Baptist Church into an evening of fine music spanning gospel-inspired classical, comic music hall, jazz piano standards, alternative rock and contemporary praise and worship music.

We are so grateful to the good folks at Kingsway Baptist Church who so graciously hosted our efforts this year. A special thank you to our supporters who carry us forward with their gifts and encouragement, their faithfulness and their

prayers. You are our partners in all the good work that Oasis Dufferin Community Centre is part of; something small and beautiful for God."



Photo: Quincy McColgan

Pastor Joe Abbey-Colborne Introducing the Wine Before Breakfast Band.

Read full event updates online at: www.oasisdufferin.org



Oasis Dufferin Community Centre

E-mail: oasisdufferin@rogers.com

www.oasisdufferin.org

Phone: 416-536-4431

Charitable Number: 14074 1414 RR0001