

# Grace under pressure humbles this volunteer



**ANNIE MACINNIS**  
LET'S CHAT

My family and I volunteer at Inn from the Cold. We started working at Inn from the Cold to teach our children but again and again we receive so much more than we give.

In a roomful of homeless men and one frail young woman, unaccompanied, the men ask her to be served because ladies go first. A young man asks to briefly interrupt supper to go outside to view a comet. A young woman asks if there is turnip puff like last time.

It's easy for us all to forget when thinking about the homeless that they are not a faceless group, that they are individuals and they are among us.

They are a young native woman, visibly pregnant, with four children, girls aged 4 to 12.

Without conscious thought, without any malicious intent, for a moment I judged her for having that many children and being homeless and pregnant. I was immediately ashamed of myself; it's so easy to judge without meaning to, isn't it?

I was humbled by her grace under pressure that evening. Over and over she humbled me. She and her children were clean and well-groomed. The girls were polite, kind to each other and not fussy about what they were given to eat. During supper she asked each of the girls about school. She checked who had homework and suggested they work on that right after supper while she took a half-hour nap. She directed one girl to wake her promptly. One sister offered to help a younger one who was having trouble with an assignment so the mother could have that brief nap. The oldest girl had been sick the night before and both mother and daughter had been up most of the night so the daughter was instructed to plan to go to bed early. When asked, the mother said she and the sick girl had walked around downtown all day because the girl was too sick to be in school. When the youngest girl lost a baby tooth just after supper, I watched the mother surreptitiously check her pockets and come up with one dime.

I went home haunted by this mother's ability to cope. With nothing but the clothes they stood up in and a small knapsack each, this family continued to support each other; to provide love and a sense of home.

I went back with my healthy children, to my comfortable paid-for home full of stuff, to my kind husband, my well-stocked fridge, comfortable beds in our own rooms with closets full of clothes and I made sure to thank the powers that be for all my boons and to say a prayer for that family that they, too, will soon again have the blessing and security of a home of their own.

Thank you, Calgary, for your oh so generous support of the Calgary Christmas Fund and thank you to everyone who makes Inn from the Cold possible.

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# Synagogue move to restore historic role

PETER GREEN  
FOR NEIGHBOURS

A little-known chapter in southern Alberta's pioneering past is one step closer to coming to Calgary for good.

Little Synagogue on the Prairie, a non-profit group aimed at the restoration and movement of a historical synagogue from its eastern prairie roots to a permanent home in Heritage Park, hopes to have the building in place and ready for the public by next spring.

"It's coming along quite well," said Trudy Cowan, the group's vice-president and project advisor.

"People seem to believe that this project is important, that there has to be a way to make people comfortable with other cultures and other religions, and this is certainly one way to do that."

Cowan said the group is nearly halfway to raising its target of \$1 million, which will be used for immediate



Calgary Herald Archive  
The Montefiore Institute served as a synagogue, school and community centre for Jewish settlers.

costs such as renovation and moving the building, as well as an endowment

for ongoing maintenance.

"We think it's very important," she said.

"Jewish people have been in southern Alberta for about 120 years... so it's just part of the story of the West."

Built in 1913 by settlers in the Jewish community of Montefiore, just north of Sibbald, the humble one-room synagogue was used as both a place of worship and a community focal point, both for Jews and their non-Jewish neighbours.

By 1927, poor farming conditions led to dissipation of the community and the eventual migration of local Jews to Calgary, other prairie settlements and even California.

The building was vacated, and subsequently served as a farming storage facility before it was moved west in 1937 to its current role as a private residence in a small town east of Calgary.

Organizers say the building will be renovated as closely as possible to its original condition. Equivalent items

from the same period are currently being collected, and a search for the synagogue's original Torah is also underway.

Once established, the synagogue will be open for both historical education projects and religious events.

Jack Switzer, a research member with the Little Synagogue group, said the Montefiore colony was one of three Jewish habitations established in Alberta in the early twentieth century.

The two other colonies, located near Trochu and Rumsey, were more successful than Montefiore, which faced frequent drought, Switzer said.

All were created when Russian and Eastern European Jews came to Canada to escape persecution and begin new lives.

"Many jumped at the opportunity here," Switzer said.

"They were optimistic."  
For more information, go to [www.littlesynagogue.ca](http://www.littlesynagogue.ca) or call Heritage Park at 268-8524.

## FROM N3 ETHIOPIA

A third notable group is the Hamar people. Our work was with a Hamar community, best known for their traditional cow-jumping ceremony, which is the rite of passage for a man before marriage. The Hamar women wear hair that is twisted with a clay-coloured substance and have scars that are inflicted during the cow-jumping ceremony, while the men wear clay buns in their hair after they have killed an enemy or dangerous animal — a few of many very interesting cultural aspects of these people.

From afar, where this community lives is a desolate-looking land, but the Omo River running through the valley brings life to the area. It was amazing to sit down with the community elders, and through a translator discuss the irrigation project that had begun in the community. The community has started an irrigation scheme with water from the river, and is on their second harvest of maize, pumpkins, bananas and other crops since the initiative started three months ago.

To a community of pastoralists, this project means food security through

the almost guaranteed drought each year, and additional income from the leftover produce sold in the market. This is a huge improvement from their traditional coping mechanisms, which included using the blood of a cow to mix with milk to provide enough nutrients, migrating to a nearby town to work physical labour, and simply "waiting for the rain."

The trip included other places like Borena and the famous "singing wells" (30-metre deep wells for livestock built up to 500 years ago) and the "house of salt" (a huge crater with a black salt deposit), but none were quite like sitting with the tribal people of Omo. Going for work and not as a tourist gave me an interesting perspective into the actual lives of the people, making the painful 2,700-km drive more than worth it. It was a memorable experience, and one I would love to repeat before my time is up here.

BURKE VINDEVOGHEL GREW UP IN WOODBINE AND IS CURRENTLY ON A SIX-MONTH YOUTH IN PARTNERSHIP (YIP) INTERNSHIP THROUGH THE COADY INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE. THE COADY'S YIP PROGRAM, FUNDED BY CIDA, PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECENT CANADIAN UNIVERSITY GRADUATES TO GAIN EXPERIENCE LIVING AND WORKING OVERSEAS WITH A COADY PARTNER. BURKE IS WORKING WITH OXFAM CANADA IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA.

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