

WOMEN In touch



WOMEN'S BIBLE
CONVENTION 2008

“You knit me together in my mother’s womb,” Psalm 139:13.

How many times have I read Psalm 139 and missed the significance of this verse? And yet, it was only in the past few years that it struck me as being crucial to my understanding of my own identity and cause for thanksgiving to God. I am my mother’s by nature and in large part, by nurture. So by way of introducing myself to you, I must first introduce my mother.

Winnifred Gladys Cooling was borne in Coventry, England, at Stoneleigh Abbey, the illegitimate child of a maid and a British lord. She always believed she had blue blood in her veins. She was adopted as a child and at the age of 17 moved with her parents and siblings from the lush grandeur of the English countryside to the mining town of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada. She married Charles Bond, a coalminer and coalminer’s son, and changed her Anglican affiliation to join The Salvation Army, the church home of my father. She bore 13 children, but two died as babies. Of the 13, there were seven girls and six boys. I am the 13th and last of her children, born when she was 41 years of age.

My mother was the centre of the home, with her strong convictions and infectious sense of humour. Times were very tough and just feeding the family in our small miner’s cottage became a particular challenge in times of economic depression. While there may have been lack of food and we wore second-hand clothes, there was never a poverty of ideas or values, or common courtesies. Her political astuteness and speaking ability positioned her as a woman whose views were respected not just in small groupings but in the political landscape.

My mother’s spiritual awakening was a real experience she referred to often. The first time I heard the word “sanctified”, it was from my mother. I clearly understood from her comments that Christian profession required an exemplary behaviour. She would have been the first to admit that she was not perfect but her commitment to Christ was evident.

I never recall feeling second-rate because I was a woman or limited in my right to have my own opinions. In fact as a child, there was no mention of “children must be seen and not heard”. Because I had a brain and a tongue, and dignity as a person, I had a right to speak. The idea that a woman was restricted because of her gender never came to my mind until years later. It was a non-issue in our home. My mother modelled leadership and expected it from her children. She encouraged and exhorted us to think for ourselves, speak up and be involved with people. This approach to life was underscored by involvement in our small Army corps where every opportunity was given to me, even as a Junior Soldier, to be fully engaged in Christian witness and service.

Sometimes looking at our mothers is like looking in the mirror. The very things we didn’t like, we now see in ourselves. As a friend used to say, “what’s in the cat, comes out in the kitten”. But the person who has walked through this door of opportunity for ministry in the Australia Eastern Territory, is the daughter of a woman whose DNA I share but one who has been nurtured, shaped and prepared to be a spiritual leader. Yes, there have been many others who have impacted my life and numerous experiences that brought me to this point in my life, but the earliest and most profound influence has been that of my mother.

I therefore honour the One who “knit me together in my mother’s womb” by honouring this very, very special woman in my life.



Linda Bond, Commissioner
Territorial President of Women’s Ministries

WOMEN In touch



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WOMEN In touch

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King's Companions

The moon rises over The Salvation Army's Collaroy Centre on the Saturday evening of the Women's Bible Convention in Sydney. Photo: Carolyn Hide

The Women's Bible Convention is always a highlight on the Women's Ministries calendar for The Salvation Army's Australia Eastern Territory. Over two weekends in February this year, more than 500 women gathered at the two conventions, in Brisbane and Sydney respectively, for a time of great fun, great fellowship, and great teaching.

Major Kathryn Trim, The Salvation Army's divisional leader in the Canadian province of Quebec, was guest speaker for both weekends, which shared the same theme, King's Companions.

Major Trim captivated convention delegates with her unique style of presentation as she encouraged them to focus on the reality that they are a companion of the King, Jesus Christ.

Women In Touch dedicates much of this issue to the Bible convention, drawing on the personal reflections of some of the women who enjoyed the privilege of attending the event.



King's Companions

Women's Bible Convention 2008



Trim-taught and terrific

Major Kathryn Trim is very familiar with Bible conventions. In demand as a speaker for The Salvation Army internationally, this type of event tends to dominate her engagement calendar.

It would be understandable, therefore, if the recent Salvation Army Women's Bible Convention held in Brisbane and Sydney respectively, was just another appointment for Major Trim to tick off her busy schedule. But the Canadian-born officer saw something in the women of Australia Eastern Territory which she drew particular encouragement from.

"Conferences like these are valuable experiences. They enable people to get outside their normal environment and get uninterrupted time with God," Major Trim said.

"Often a different voice can get something across to someone. It may be the same message they've heard several times, but at an event like this they can hear it from a different perspective.

"I've been speaking at these things for about 10 years now. This is a well-run event, that's not always the case, and I've been encouraged by the ladies I've met here."

Major Trim, who shares divisional leadership with her husband, Kester, in the Canadian province of Quebec, also drew encouragement from what she described as an exciting new generation of Salvationists emerging across the Territory.

"It's been great to see a good number of younger people at the conventions in both Brisbane and Sydney," she said.

"I've sensed a lot of healthy stuff is happening here with youth. Overall it's been a positive experience for me."

Accompanying Major Trim on her Australian trip was Brigadier-General Linda Colwell. Hers is not a Salvation Army title but, rather, the high-ranking position she holds in the Canadian Armed Forces.

The two became friends when Major Trim was Corps Officer at Ottawa Citadel, where Linda is Corps Sergeant-Major. Linda was in New Zealand on military business around the time of the Women's Bible Convention and decided to extend her stay Down Under and join her friend in Australia.

Speaking at the convention on the subject of King's Companions, Major Trim encouraged delegates to focus on the reality that they are a companion of *the* King, Jesus Christ.

"God practically always makes me live through what I'm going to preach through," she said, "And more so for this kind of event because it is an honour, a privilege, to speak at these things.

"So I don't take it lightly, and neither does God. So when I am speaking, God is also speaking to me."



Major Kathryn Trim (right) with close friend Linda Colwell at The Collaroy Centre

On reflection...

Christelle Pearson — Brisbane

To be a companion of the King means that I am in a relationship and on a journey with God. It is a journey that involves obedience and making the right — and not always the easy — choices.

Over the weekend I realised I need to trust God for where he is leading me and be willing to follow his promptings even if I do not know why. I do not need to feel confined by what other people think, or even by what I think, but that I can safely rely on God's leading.

I am discovering there is enormous release in living without dreading other people's judgment, but instead relying on the Holy Spirit and God's Word for making the right decisions. When I make poor choices or find myself in frustrating circumstances, it is my responsibility to not allow myself to become bitter but instead live in continued obedience to God.

It was also a great but humbling experience to put human beings into perspective by looking at the magnitude of the universe that God has created. It was awesome to realise that our Creator who made the heavens also created and wants an individual relationship with me. I am on a journey with a companion who is willing to guide, love and sustain me and to whom I want to be obedient.

On reflection...



Cadet Bronwyn
Barkmeyer
— Sydney

I'll be honest, the thought of going to the Women's Bible Convention at Collaroy filled me with dread. Being a second-year cadet in the *Witnesses for Christ* session at the training college, I have a pretty heavy workload. Combine this with being the mother of four — two of whom are preschoolers — and I felt I couldn't afford this time away from my responsibilities.

God had other plans for me on this weekend, one of which was the realisation of my God-given responsibility to myself as his companion. This brings me to the theme of the convention which was King's Companions, giving me permission to be and not just to do. I think I fall into the trap that many women do and that is defining ourselves by the roles that we fulfil in our lives.

For me, that is a wife, a mother and a cadet. I was, however, encouraged to reflect on my first calling, that of companion of the King, a position of honour, a position of privilege and a position based not on who I am and what I have done, but who God is and what he has done.

The guest speaker for the convention was Major Kathryn Trim. She was both honest and allowed herself to be vulnerable in her ministry to us over the weekend. She did so with her own unique brand of humour, and created such colourful imagery in her teaching which was most evident in her presentation of a first-person narrative sermon, telling the story of David's first wife, Michal.

In her portrayal, I was drawn into the experience of Michal and saw the story form

her perspective, enabling me to relate it to my own life. This was the first of three sessions on Saturday, each delving into the experiences of three of David's wives and looking at the subjects of bitterness, revenge, bad choices and fresh starts. Though the characters were from the Old Testament, their struggles were not unlike those each of us face today, hence there was much to learn and to be challenged by.

I have to say the highlight for me was the screening of the DVD *Indescribable* on Sunday morning — looking at the extent of the cosmos, the sheer magnitude of God's creation and gaining something of an awareness of how small we are in his creation. Through the message of this, I gained a renewed sense of God's majesty. In this way, I was able to put things of my own life into perspective while being humbled by the knowledge that God loves me and chose me, tiny little me, who isn't even a speck in comparison to all he has created, much of which mankind has yet to discover. Yet I have been chosen as a companion of this King, a King whose kingdom is unfathomable.

The weekend concluded with a session entitled "My Beloved: Being King's Companions", which was a time of deep sharing with the opportunity given for ladies to go and pray with an officer. The Holy Spirit moved during this time as the auditorium was filled with the sound of voices in prayer to the King.

I felt God's presence over the time of the convention in many ways and on many different levels. I laughed like I hadn't in a long time and the opportunity to take time out for me and to share with so many other women was a real blessing. What I appreciated most was being able to soak up the presence of God without interruption. God touched me in a way relevant to my needs and situation by all that happened over the course of the Women's Bible Convention. I left revitalised and eager to fulfil that to which God has called me with the knowledge that I was the King's Companion and I wouldn't be doing it alone.



King's Companions

Women's Bible Convention 2008



On reflection...



Envoy Glenda Brown —
Sydney

Growing up in The Salvation Army and being a Christian since the age of seven, means that I have had a very blessed life and have no memory of not being a child of the King.

However, for a lot of my life being a Christian has been a lot more about "doing" than "being". I knew that being a Salvationist meant "doing" service for my King and this was good, but I wanted to have a more intimate relationship with God.

I read a book by Neil T. Anderson called *Victory Over the Darkness* and it helped me to see who I really was in Christ. It made the Bible come alive for me and I started claiming Scriptures as real truth. I began to live like I believed the Bible to be true. Verses like, "You are a child of God"; "You are a saint"; "I will never leave you nor forsake you" took on a whole new meaning for me and it changed the way I thought about myself and the way I thought about God.

I realised that I could have a personal, deep relationship with the Creator of the universe and that when he told us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" meant that he wants to have the same intimacy with us here on Earth as we will have in heaven.

Each day I am growing in the experience of "being" with Jesus, resting in him, and knowing him. It also means that my service for my King has much more significance and meaning.

On reflection...

Glenys McIldowie —
Sydney

Having been welcomed, signed in and presented with my gift bag by the friendly Women's Ministries team, just standing out on the deck at the Collaroy Centre for the Women's Bible Convention on 22-24 February, and taking in that panoramic view of the ocean and headland — what a vista! — I immediately started to unwind and relax.

I was happy to find that I was in a cabin with two ladies from my corps (Dulwich Hill) and two friends from Queensland; it was so good to catch up with our visitors. There were gales of therapeutic laughter as we prepared for "The Royal Treatment"; the Friday evening event which took place outdoors in the amphitheatre and on the terrace.

The evening got off to a swinging start to the sounds of On Fire big band. This was followed by the comic bantering of Major Beth Twivey (Associate Manager, Hunter Region Recovery Services) and Major Michele Terracini (Corps Officer, Tuggeranong Corps) in their inimitable style as they got the audience involved, inviting each person to take a seat on the "Royal Throne" and share with us. We heard some inspiring, and some truly tragic tales.

We were then introduced to our guest speaker, Major Kathryn Trim. She was asked questions on her background and family and before long had the audience in the palm of her hand and roaring with laughter.

On Saturday morning, we were inspired and led in song and prayer by

Sandra Koutnik (Eastlakes Corps) and her talented worship team. Major Kathryn then spoke to us, focusing over the weekend on three companions of King David: Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba.

Major Kathryn had done some remarkable research and through her talents as an actress and singer, brought these characters alive for us in a most meaningful and special way.

On Sunday, the revelation of Louis Giglio's DVD *Indescribable* was a mind-blowing experience. "The heavens telling the glory of God", greater than every thought. It gave a whole new meaning to Alpha and Omega.

Hats off to Commissioner Coral Strong (recently retired Territorial President of Women's Ministries), Major Glenys Holley (Territorial Events Secretary) and the Women's Ministries team for their in-depth preparation — the whole presentation was so professional.

We came away from the weekend with the knowledge of being King's Companions and just what our part is in our relationship with God. The song by Eugene Greco sums it up:

*Whom have I in heaven but you,
There is nothing on earth I desire beside you,
My heart and my strength, many times they fail,
But there is one truth that always will prevail,
God is the strength of my heart forever.*

This was a truly cathartic experience. Thank you.

Testimony of Bev Gilmore given at Territorial Women's Bible Convention in Brisbane on Sunday 17 February 2008.

Good morning, everyone. To honour my King, and bear witness to God's saving grace, I'd like to share my testimony with you this morning.

Four years ago, I was the partner of an alcoholic; caught up in a typical merry-go-round of denial and dependency. I lived a lonely life of shame and isolation, tolerated abusive and offensive behaviour, and became just as sick as the loved one I obsessed over. I desperately wanted to rescue him from self-destruction and restore dignity and respect back into our lives. As I focused on his habits and shortcomings, I became blind to my own. I blamed him for my misery and saw myself as a helpless victim in an uncaring world. Nicotine, alcohol and anti-depressants relieved bouts of anxiety and depression. Life was an empty struggle and I could see no light at the end of the tunnel.

But God had a plan — a salvation plan. He chose a Nigerian-born Christian doctor to sow the seed. When I asked this new doctor for my usual script for anti-depressants, he courageously confronted me. "You don't need these pills. Your problem is simply a lack of hope and faith," he concluded.

I bristled at this suggestion and his offer of counselling, but the seed had been sown. "Lack of hope and faith" kept circulating in my mind, challenging me. I knew in my heart that he was right, but I wasn't ready to swallow my pride and admit that my problems stemmed from my bad choices, attitude and apathy.

I hit rock bottom several months later when the relationship ended and I had no-one left to judge or pity except myself. In desperation, I reached out to an Al-Anon (alcoholics anonymous) support group. A spiritual journey began as I tried to follow the suggested steps to recovery. I began to acknowledge that I was powerless, that my life was unmanageable and that faith in a Higher Power could restore me to sanity.

In October 2004, the Lord guided me to The Salvation Army in Hervey Bay. The corps officers led me to Jesus and showed me more kindness, compassion and respect than I had ever been able to give myself. My walls finally came tumbling down and I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. When prayers to free me from addiction and dependency were answered, my faith soared.

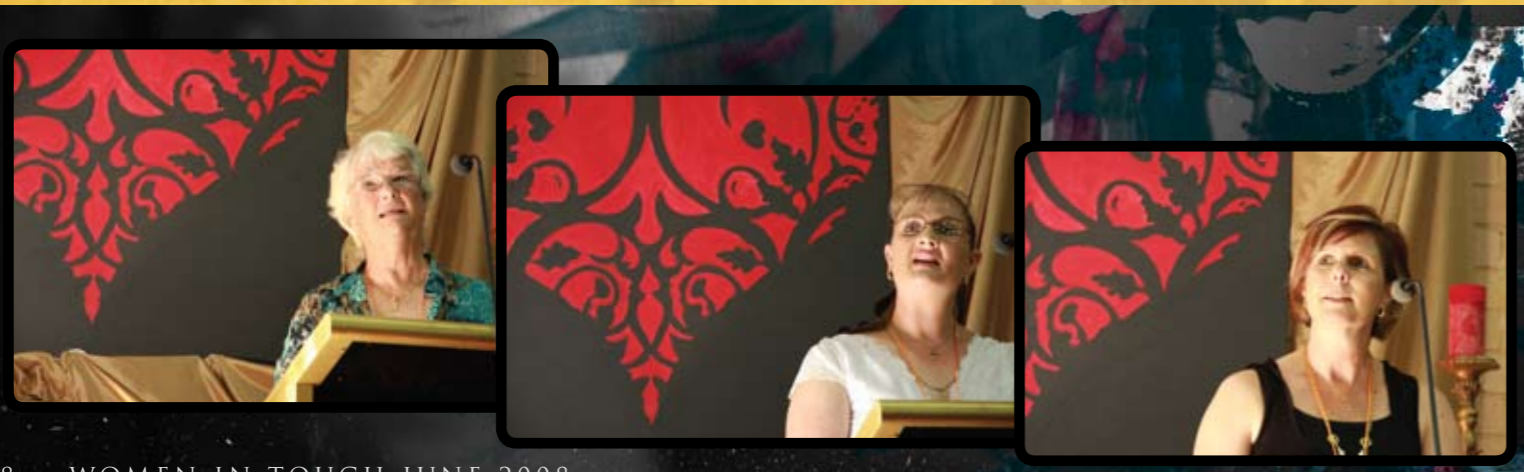
In November 2005, at the age of 56, I signed the Soldier's Covenant. Part-time employment in corps administration followed, confirming God's loving care and provision. I love my admin work, service work and hotel ministry, but for the past year I have been unsettled by a growing call into full-time service. Satan would have me believe that I am too old in age, too young in faith and too short on experience; that at 58, I should be winding down, not winding up. But I've learned not to pay attention to any of his lies. I believe the Lord is already preparing the way.

I accepted a scholarship this year to study for a Certificate IV in Alcohol and Other Drug Work as an external student through Bundaberg TAFE. Before the end of the year, I plan to sell my quiet retreat on the outskirts of Hervey Bay in readiness to go wherever the King may desire to send me when my studies are complete.

By the grace of God, I've been freed from the shadows of my past — ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven. I have a firm and secure anchor of hope as I move forward in faith, rejoicing as a companion of the King.



Bev Gilmore, who gave a stirring testimony at the Brisbane convention.



Pamper and praise in the Pilliga

Majors Peter and Jean Ridley are The Salvation Army's Rural Chaplains for North NSW, visiting farming families, drovers and communities in the outback. It was during one such visit that God planted a seed in Jean's heart, for a Farm Family Pamper Weekend. By **MAJOR JEAN RIDLEY**

Many, if not most farming women can't afford the time or the money to pamper themselves, not that they have the desire to as many have lost all self-worth. Farmers are stressed to the limit and this, in turn, has an effect upon their children.

There had been talk of no less than six suicides in one area since Christmas and this was only mid-January (when we had the idea for the pamper weekend). We desperately desired to bring some hope to these precious people and to let them know that they are loved and precious to God and us.

Whilst visiting down on the Pilliga (west

of Wee Waa, NSW), we just knew that this was where we were to have our first pamper weekend. Tracey Stokes, owner of the Cuttabri Wine Shanty, was so encouraging and open to having it on her premises and for us this was confirmation that it was God's plan.

So we set about contacting people to help us and volunteers keen to minister in this way gladly offered their services. Sally Hall, from Gunnedah Corps, closed her massage business for the weekend to offer free massages to the farm ladies. Carrie Levine came from Sydney to be our beautician. Major Joy Harmer, Commanding Officer of Gunnedah, gave her time to do manicures and hand and foot massages. Marie Bennet-Anderson gave the

ladies beautiful hairstyles that turned their husbands' heads. Susanne Kelly (Armidale), Michaela Mallows (Narrabri), and myself massaged and treated the ladies to foot pampering. I also shampooed and massaged ladies' hair. Val Mallows (wife of Lieutenant John Mallows, Narrabri) and Barbara Atkinson, from Gunnedah Corps, welcomed the ladies as they arrived, with a cuppa and some home-cooked slice and biscuits. We had planned to commence our Pamper Salon at 12.30pm but the women were so excited that they started arriving at 11.45am.

We commenced the day with prayer together, offering our hands and ourselves to God, asking that we should be Jesus to these



Some of The Salvation Army pampering team with Wine Shanty owner Tracey Stokes (centre) and her mum, Elaine.

lovely women we were ministering to and that through touch, word or deed they would see Jesus in us and desire to know Him. Many opportunities were given to us by God to share his love and a timely word of witness, sowing seeds of hope into the lives of these women.

The Wine Shanty was filled with laughter and joy of a different kind to what is usually heard. Farmers who brought their wives for pampering sat outside on the patio sharing yarns and encouraging each other. Their children passed the time in the playground in the safe enclosure of the backyard.

Families stayed for the whole day just enjoying the atmosphere, not wanting to go home to reality. One lady, having her feet massaged, sat with a permanent smile on her face, saying "this is unreal, this is wonderful, we never get together like this, we don't see each other from one year to the next."

Comments such as "I've never experienced anything like this before", "I just feel so special", "I think I'm in heaven," filled the room as the women lapped up all the love we could lavish on them. Many of them had never had a facial or manicure before and would never dream of having a massage. The hairdresser was kept busy rectifying home hairdressing attempts, ("no money for hairdressers, not that there is one out here!")

We were kept busy pampering women until after 6pm. Our planned finishing time was 5pm, allowing time for clean-up and preparation for the evening events, but the women, whose number was continually being added to throughout the afternoon, just didn't want the pampering to stop.

A sausage sizzle, cooked by Colin Atkinson from Gunnedah, was enjoyed by all, then followed movies in the great outdoors. *Veggie Tales* was shown for the children followed by *Evan Almighty* as our family movie. Popcorn and cordial was served by the Tamworth Corps bandsmen during the movies and families went home at the close of the day weary and happy. One farmer was heard to say "this is the best family/community time I can ever remember here", while another said "it's been like a public holiday, we can see the change in our women".

What a blessing the Lord had poured out upon us to see our people — the farmers of the Pilliga — happy and smiling.

Sunday morning came and the Wine Shanty was alive again with chatter and laughter as the farming families arrived for "Church at the Shanty", with guest leader and speaker Major Julia Metcher, from Coffs Harbour Corps. Julia spoke from her heart, to the hearts of the farmers; she had the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon her as she shared from her personal

experiences. Farming couples could relate to her message, acknowledging their own personal pain. Tracey, owner of the Shanty, was all smiles and visibly moved as she and her mother, Elaine, shared in the experience.

Bandsmen and women from Tamworth and Gunnedah Corps made up an ensemble of seven to assist with the singing (this little band had also played in the Wine Shanty yard for some time on Saturday afternoon, entertaining the farming families, then also went down the road to the Pilliga Pub to play for an hour or so. They were welcomed with great enthusiasm).

Morning tea was served by our volunteer supporters following the Sunday meeting, giving the opportunity for a quiet word and/or prayer with individuals as they sought us out.

When all was over and the team had made their way home, Peter and I were attending to the last-minute details when a couple invited us to their home. The Lord opened a wonderful opportunity to witness and pray with these precious people who have been and still are going through some tough times.

We pray and believe that God was glorified and many gospel seeds were sown on that Palm Sunday weekend. We also pray that we will be blessed with a bumper harvest as the reign of the Holy Spirit continues to fall on our people in the Pilliga area.



Australia Eastern Territory
Women's Ministries
Project 2008
Karibu Centre Appeal
Kenya



The project is to build a community centre where The Salvation Army can love and support some of Kenya's most vulnerable women and children.

Money raised will be used to transform a number of Salvation Army owned disused buildings in Thika, Kenya, into the Karibu Centre. Here, women and children will be able to access medical and government facilities in a safe and loving environment.

The renovation of the run-down buildings to be able to house 40 women and children is a big job and we need your help. Please support the Karibu Centre Appeal.

Having ears that hear

By Lieutenant-Colonel Margaret Martin



My daughter has given me a most interesting book, *Musophilia* by Oliver Sacks. In one fascinating chapter he writes about perfect pitch. Quoting from *The Oxford Companion to Music*, he relates a famous story about Mozart (who had perfect pitch), which took place when he was only seven years of age. Comparing his own little violin to that of his friend Schachtner, Mozart said: "If you have not altered the tuning of your violin since I last played on it, it is half-a-quarter-of-a tone flatter than mine here."

Dr Sacks gives further examples from *The Oxford Companion to Music*. One tells of a professor of music at Oxford who, when a boy of five, said: "Only think, Papa blows his nose in G? He would say that it thundered in G or that the wind was whistling in D, or that the clock (with a two-note chime) struck in B minor." And he was always right!

Another tells of a Finnish entomologist who had perfect pitch and became an expert on the sounds of insects in flight. For example, he asserted that the sound pitch of a certain moth was a low F sharp.

To such gifted people, writes Dr Sacks, "every tone, every key seems qualitatively different, each possessing its own 'flavour' or 'feel', its own character. Those who have absolute pitch often compare it to colour — they 'hear' G-sharpness as instantly and automatically as we 'see' blue." Apparently, transposing a piece of music to another key, for some, can be like "painting a picture with all the wrong colours".

"Absolute pitch is of special interest because it exemplifies a whole other realm of perception," says Dr Sacks. A "whole other realm of perception"! Wow!

And he goes on to say that it also involves "recognition" — being able to label precise pitch differences. Perceiving and recognising —

hearing at another level altogether. A different kind of hearing.

In thinking about all this, I have begun to realise afresh that to truly hear, not only in the world of music, we need to perceive and recognise. For example, my husband Jim has told me that his father would only have to hear an engine running in order to identify the problem and know how to fix it.

I guess most of us hear sounds and words but don't always truly hear — i.e. perceive and recognise as well.

Jesus spoke to his disciples one day about this kind of hearing: "Blessed are ... your ears because they hear," (Matthew 13:16). In describing some people, he said: "... though hearing, they do not hear or understand," (Matthew 13:13b).

The Pharisees lacked this ability to truly hear, for they heard the words of Jesus but had no understanding of what he was on about. They were not tuned in to his wavelength, so they heard the words but could not perceive their meaning.

How necessary it is for us to have this spiritual perception — to be so tuned in to God that we truly hear what he is saying to us. For example, as we read God's Word, to not merely read the words but to perceive the message in it for us at that moment in time. To recognise God's voice and the meaning of the words for us individually.

And perhaps this thought can be extended even further, to "hear" people around us. To perceive what they are really saying — not only the words being spoken but also "where they are coming from" — and be able to empathise and support.

A prayer: "O Lord, I long to hear with this kind of perception, to hear and understand. Help me to be tuned in to you and to others, and so become the person you need me to be."



In the eye of the storm

In June last year, the Hunter region of NSW was battered by devastating storms. Lives were lost and thousands of homes suffered significant damage. Donna Jenkins was employed by The Salvation Army in the wake of the storms, to help those affected by the disaster to rebuild their shattered lives. This is Donna's story ...



Flood devastation in a suburban street in Newcastle during the height of the storms in June last year.

I was contracted by The Salvation Army Community Services Centre in Newcastle, for a period of six months, as a Storm Emergency Relief Fund Advocate — or as I called it, SERFy chick. The position was created out of the increased need for more manpower to aid in the disbursement of donated funds to the victims of the horrendous flooding and storms of the long weekend in June 2007.

The funds had been drawn together from what was left over from the Newcastle earthquake (1989) funds and donations from the business community as well as individuals, as implemented by the Newcastle Permanent Building Society. The money had been evenly allocated between The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and Samaritans to be disbursed to those who had suffered from the storms/floods.

The main role for myself and my colleague Vanessa, who was contracted for three months, was processing Regional Relief Fund applications. This meant interviewing applicants either in the office or by phone, and occasionally in their own home. We were to request supporting documentation from applicants to verify claims for expenses that arose as a direct result of the storms/floods, such as the purchase of new household items, property repairs, excessive bills, writing-off of cars, temporary accommodation and other such things.



Donna Jenkins

Once applications were complete, Vanessa and I were to take the applications before a panel and advocate on behalf of our clients. The panel met once or twice a week and at these meetings the decision would be made as to whether the applicant could be assisted from the funds and how much could be given.

The role of advocate was new to me and very educational to say the least. Prior to taking applications before the panel, we were required to go through the applications with our manager. This was an enlightening experience as I began to observe, experience and appreciate the difficulties that come with responsibility to an organisation, a community and one's personal values.

Although a lot of time was spent in the office processing applications and reporting, this was very much a hands-on role. Meeting with individuals and listening to them was a big part

of the job, and one that I found very satisfying.

Many people came from a “hard-luck” upbringing and continued to live in that environment, while others had worked hard to improve their circumstances and the floods had returned them to a state of poverty and emotional devastation. I worked with the aged, the young, the single, the married and those with families. I worked with people who suffered from long-term illness, disability, no employment, little income, poor housing or lack of permanent accommodation. There were also those caring full-time for a disadvantaged or elderly loved one, and people who had experienced abuse, emotional stress, mental health issues, relationship breakdowns, disengaged families and those who were struggling with long-term addictions of many kinds. The storms had only added to their burdens and the need to differentiate between a person's life story and how they were affected as a direct result from the storms/floods was one of the difficult areas for me.

To be privy to somebody pouring their heart out about their tragic life circumstances and then have to decline their application, knowing that a bit of financial assistance would help to put a smile on their face, was a real challenge. However, I grew to appreciate learning the weight of responsibility to assess fairly, every individual application and to not be governed by my own heart and feelings.

It seemed necessary at times to visit



A large tree crashes down on cars at a supermarket during high winds whipped up during the storms.

individuals and families in their home, to hear their story and to see with my own eyes the damage and loss they had suffered. Sometimes meeting face-to-face with people gave me a better sense of the person. Again, one of the difficulties in such a role is that of having to make a judgment as to whether an individual is genuine in what they are expressing. I struggled with my right to make that call. The requirement of paperwork to support people's claims helped to alleviate this responsibility to a degree, although there were certainly times when people were simply unable to support their claims with paperwork due to it being lost or not kept.

There were some clients who just really needed to talk. I found my counselling skills and training very handy at these times. There were a small number of elderly clients who lived alone and without any family nearby, who had suffered

great stress from their homes being flooded and simply needed to talk about their experience. The odd home visit with a cup of tea and a biscuit was a rewarding part of my job.

At times it was necessary to just listen and talk with people over the telephone as they tried to come to terms with the shock and devastation. People broke down in tears, some were angry over the sense of helplessness and loss. Others were singing the praises of those who had rallied together to help and support the community.

Those who had also lived through the Newcastle earthquake in the late 1980s indicated that the devastation of these storms ran much deeper. Of course, those who lost loved ones in the floods and storms certainly related to those who lost loved ones in the earthquake. This was a tragedy beyond belief for these individuals

and families and it was difficult to not have the facilities and resources to help some of these in their specific areas of need, as financial assistance for replacement of whitegoods was hardly what they required.

Vanessa and I embarked on what we affectionately called a "pub crawl" through the lower Hunter districts of Greta, Abermain, Cessnock, Weston and Heddon Greta. We had contacted the hoteliers to line up "open meeting" times with members of their communities to hear their stories and inform them of the funding available. This was a fun day. It poured with rain, which made us all laugh, and we were accused of "bringing the storm with us"!

It was heart-warming to hear stories of how communities had rallied together and taken the initiative to clear overgrown river banks and creek beds and open their homes to one another. One hotel owner opened up his pub for locals to bunk down for a number of days which, for some, became several weeks.

Along with processing applications, my colleague and I did letterbox-drops and door-knocked some streets in local areas, as well as in the lower Hunter and some Central Coast suburbs. Door-knocking streets gave us plenty of opportunity to hear how people had been affected by the storms/floods at ground level.

Again, many were grateful for the interest taken to check on how they were travelling and what their needs were. Even six months after the storms people had stories to tell of delayed insurance settlements, continuing financial debts, fears of recurring flooding and inability to return to their home which was still in disarray.

We also visited the Premier's Department in Newcastle and Gosford in an attempt to be more informed on community needs and action that was taking place. We attended



An underground car park in Newcastle resembles a swimming pool during the floods.

community events such as the Chamber of Commerce meetings in Greta, community BBQ at Wollombi Tavern and Togetherness Day in Hamilton North. At these events we spoke with locals and when possible made announcements about the available funding. It was very encouraging to see communities rally together and sense the strong community spirit. This was

these individuals and they certainly paid off. We came across a number of people who had done all they could to help themselves but were now unable to manage.

As I write this story, it is April and I only have three weeks left of my six-month contract. Applications and stories are still coming in. The look on the face of some people spells out the

I was fortunate enough to attend The Salvation Army "I'll Fight" conference recently, which looked at issues of social justice. It was extraordinarily informative and enlightening. I was also privileged to attend a meeting with the Samaritans and St Vincent de Paul representatives and sense the cohesion between agencies whose purpose is to help the less fortunate.

Jesus said we will always have the poor with us, and I have seen first-hand how true this is. It has been humbling and enriching for me to see how people from all walks of life try their hardest to manage against many, if not all, odds. I have seen how one devastation upon another can occur in people's lives and deplete them of energy and spirit, and understandably so. Some fight, some give up. Some give, some take. Wealth and status can be lost overnight. Character and inner strength, faith in God, a purpose beyond oneself, can help to overcome the tragedies that are thrown in our direction. Disaster can befall anyone and can make or break us.

I certainly do not wish for another natural disaster to befall the people of the Newcastle, Hunter and Central Coast areas. However, I have greatly appreciated and respected the opportunity to participate in and witness the work of those who actively support those in need.

I count it an absolute privilege to have met the clients who have come through The Salvation Army and to have worked with the fantastic staff and the many wonderful volunteers. My time with SERF has blessed and enriched my life.

"People broke down in tears ... angry at the sense of helplessness and loss"

another opportunity to hear the reality of how people were affected by the storms/floods.

There were stories of people being rescued by a young man on a boogie board, people spending the night with strangers in their home, sitting on tables in the dark until the morning came and the waters had receded, people saving terrified cats and dogs and people devastated over an elderly neighbour unable to return to their home because of the trauma.

A big part of the job was to locate those who were still struggling to get back on their feet financially and perhaps were unaware of assistance available. The door-knocking and letter-drops were carried out in the effort to find

weariness and desperation almost 12 months on from the disaster. Some are still trying to find permanent accommodation — landlords have restored their homes and subsequently increased the rent to the point where people cannot afford to return. Some are still waiting for insurance settlements or fighting for their claim to be approved. Some are still not back in the workforce after losing their job when their place of employment was forced to close. Many are still suffering the shock and trauma of the storms.

One of the many satisfying experiences in this job has been being part of an organisation whose heart is for the people of the community.



The storm contributed to the stranding of the container ship Pasha Bulker at a Newcastle beach.



Passion for God takes flight

Natalie and Simon with their children Isabel, 4, and Joel, 2.

NATALIE STEELE reflects on a life journey which had led her to becoming a Flying Padre

When I was growing up, I would often wonder if God was passionate. The whole Christian thing seemed pretty easy. Read my Bible, pray a bit, be nice to people, go to church — that about summed it up.

But inside I had such big feelings, dreams and desires. I wanted my life to overflow with music and colour, passion and adventure, to be fearless and fulfilling!

Christianity, however, seemed so full of things not to do.

As the years passed I travelled overseas, studied at university and had boyfriends, all the while searching for new and meaningful experiences. But as life led into regular disappointment and heartbreak I began to wonder if I was doing a good job of directing my own life. I was going around in circles.

The year after I returned from a stint overseas God spoke to me twice. The first time was a promise. He promised to show me what love really is, what it is to love and to be loved. The second time was a challenge. God had a plan for my life, it wasn't going to be easy, and that I had to choose this path. His message to me consisted of the promise of love and the challenge of choice.

The first step towards God unfolding his promise and challenge came later that same year, when I met Simon and his two daughters, Natasha and Halley. Simon is now my husband, and while Natasha and Halley no longer live with us — Natasha, 18, is studying at The Salvation Army's School For Youth Leadership at Lake Munmorah and Halley, 17, is completing Year 12 at Murwillumbah — our family has grown with the addition of Isabel, 4, and Joel, 2.

I am now learning what love really is and how to choose to walk in God's plan, even when there appears to be an easier way. The most wonderful thing is that in the process God is showing me that he is deeply passionate and far from life being mundane and predictable, following him has led to a life more fulfilling that I ever imagined.

So now, as Simon and I take up the position of Flying Padre based in Mt Isa, I've had many people ask: "Why would you move from the beautiful, lush Tweed Coast to somewhere so hot, dry and remote?" It's because I desire that everyone has the opportunity to know God and just how exciting life can be.

As Flying Padres we will have the privilege of offering support and be messengers of God's passionate love to those living in remote and outback Queensland. All from a four-seater Cessna!



Golden morning at Maitland

On a beautiful autumn morning in May, more than 150 women of the division met at the Monte Pio Convention Centre at Maitland for a Celebration Morning Tea and Meeting.

The division was glad to welcome Lieut-Colonel Jan Condon, Territorial Secretary for Women's Ministries and a former divisional leader, as the guest speaker.

The theme for the day was "Go for Gold" and in her message, Lieut-Colonel Condon challenged the women of the need to run the Christian race with perseverance in order to receive the ultimate crown of eternal life. She emphasised that it is not coming first that matters but running the race to the end, faithfully and patiently.

Envoy Karyn Kingston, Corps Officer at Long Jetty, shared some of the experiences of the spiritual race she has run and continues to run each day. She acknowledged how God sees her as a person of value and worth.

The day was enhanced by the contribution of the worship team, and Captain Lenore Johnson, Captains Laithe and Kaelene Greenaway (Tuggerah Lakes) and Major David Palmer (Gosford).

During the meeting, Major Jan Laws, Divisional Director of Women's Ministries, acknowledged the work and ministry of the Divisional Silver Star Secretary, Major Noreen Clanfield, who retired from the role after giving seven years of caring and keeping in touch with officer parents who live within the division.



(From left) Envoy Karyn Kingston, Captain Lenore Johnson, Lieutenant-Colonel Jan Condon, and Major Jan Laws

Mini ministry through music

There is a real buzz at the Dulwich Hill Corps hall when it's Mainly Music day each Tuesday.

A steady stream of mums, dads and carers, all pushing strollers bearing beautiful children, start to fill the community centre, in anticipation of fun and fellowship.

The group commenced in October 2006 under the leadership of Majors Bob and Geness Garven, who believed this ministry was just right for reaching into the Dulwich Hill community.

Parents who were regular customers at the corps' Holy Grounds Café were informed of the new program and so from a small group of people, we have witnessed the group blossom. While some mums have found the location of our group through the Mainly Music website, most have been

invited by a friend or relative. Mums have told us how much their children have grown in confidence and in early development skills since joining the group. We celebrate birthdays, Mother's Day, Easter and Christmas and sometimes other special events in the lives of those who attend.

When you see the children and the parents so excited to come, it is a reminder of just how special this group is for them. For some of these parents, their extended family unit is overseas and so the bond of friendship with others in the group plays an important part in their lives.

We are indebted to our team of helpers who serve by way of hospitality and kindness. They share words of encouragement to the mums and endeavour to support them in their parenting.

We are excited to participate in such a beautiful ministry and to share in the lives of the families who attend. We pray that God will continue to bless this ministry in every way.



The photograph is of Maya Strong, Elijah Lewis and Maya's father Jason Strong.

Rhoda Mitchell is the winner of our "What Makes a House a Home" competition. Rhoda picks up for herself a copy of Bronnie Masefau's new book *Australian Vintage Living*. The Women's Ministries team at Territorial Headquarters judged Rhoda's "A house



only becomes a home when it is filled with the love, laughter and caring of the family that resides there" to be the best among a flood of entries received for the competition. *Women In Touch* would like to thank all those who took the time to write and submit an entry.

HEART SONGS

Late last year, Majors Peter and Jean Ridley led a mission to drought-affected areas in outback NSW. During the trip the mission team helped a widowed farmer, May McKeown. The following is a poem written by May and given to the team.

A Place That I Know

*There's a place where my heart will forever be
A place where I know every acre and every tree.
Where I have seen the grass waving high
And the ground when it's bare and dry.
A place where life has been wonderful and bright
And when sometimes it's been a struggle to fight.
I have seen the cattle fat and sleek
And times they've been poor and weak.
I've mustered in the early morning light
And ridden home under the stars of the night.
The thrill of a ride with the wind in your face
On a good horse at a galloping pace.
These are times that I'll never forget
In the years that I'll never regret.
This is the place where as a child I did roam.
This place in my heart will always be home.*

May McKeown