

## SEEDS OF PEACE

### BRONWYN LEE AND THE JOURNEY OF PROMISE



'But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.' (Exodus 11:10)

*Have you noticed a hardening of hearts in recent times? (What if we replaced 'out of' with 'into'?) What are you going to do about it?*

- these were questions posed to a group of 30 young Muslims, Jews and Christians in January 2004 as part of the ***Journey of Promise***. The *Journey of Promise*, organised by national bodies of the three Abrahamic faiths as part of the *Decade to Overcome Violence*, was in part an answer to that last question. For the *Journey of Promise* was developed as a process - supported by the Australian Government's *Living in Harmony* initiative - to enable young Christians, Muslims and Jews to discover more about themselves and one another, and to explore together the common elements of their different faiths, re-affirming their acceptance of and respect for one another.



The central part of the inter-faith *Journey of Promise* was the week long camp together at Elanora Heights on Sydney's Northern Beaches, from where visits also took place to a Mosque, a Synagogue, Churches, the Sydney Jewish Museum, the Wayside Chapel, Malek Fahd Islamic School, and a range of other places. **Bronwyn Lee** - an Arts student currently studying history, Arabic, French and sociology - was one of the participants. Bronwyn has become actively involved in cross-cultural dialogue, and here are some of her reflections on these steps on her journey...

*'I joined the **Journey of Promise** group at the Aboriginal Catholic Church in La Perouse. I think it was only my second conversation with another participant when a Jewish girl asked why we allow Aboriginal Christians to include elements from their Aboriginal spirituality in their services yet don't speak of the Rainbow Serpent in our own—a difficult question. I had just returned from a three week stay in an Aboriginal community. In that program, I had been expecting to ask lots of questions but came to understand that sometimes it's better to take the time to get to know people, to just hang out, and that you can learn a lot by observation.'*



*One standout moment followed our visit to a Mosque. Lutfi, one of the Muslims, agreed to demonstrate and explain the prayer that is used as part of daily prayers. We watched quietly as he showed us each movement, spoke the appropriate words in Arabic, and then translated them for us. It was very touching and I felt privileged that he would share something quite special for him with us... over the course of the Journey of Promise I was struck by people's ability to experience God through such actions.'*

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*At Malek Fahd Islamic School the atmosphere was very open and friendly and at the end of our tour were introduced to a group of year 12 students. I talked to one girl for a while, and I was amazed at how keen she was to tell me about Islam, how she didn't shy away from anything, and also how easily she could explain her faith without feeling threatened by anyone else's. Throughout my visit, I reflected*



*that it would be a very positive experience for someone like me to be educated in such an environment. There are the obvious benefits in terms of a better understanding of a particular minority (and one that is regarded with much suspicion at present) but more important, I imagine, would be development as a tolerant person able to identify with the marginalised. As I was wondering how I would feel being in the minority amongst Muslims, one of the Jews asked me, 'Thinking of sending your kids here too?'*

***'I was surprised at the similarities between the Jews' and the Muslims' ideas about women... What does it mean in practice when people talk about considering women as precious diamonds... Does such an attitude result in placing restrictions on women, or on men, and can that be a good thing? I thought I'd sorted this out!'***

*I found that over the Journey I developed an understanding of the three Abrahamic faiths on a number of levels. There's what I find a more superficial level, which can be easily*



*found in textbooks—such as the rules or customs or some set of beliefs by which followers live. The kind of understanding I came to is deeper than that and sometimes needs to be experienced rather than discussed; I think of it as a 'feeling' that runs like a thread through the religion and which may be difficult to express. In addition, though, there is some kind of understanding in which you can connect with the other person... it was through hearing my new friends' stories of struggles with their faith, or perhaps difficulties they have had in accepting the official line, or what they get out of going to, say, the Mosque, that I felt I understood them and to some extent their religion in a profound way.*

***You often hear, 'Jewish (or Muslim or Greek Orthodox Christian or whatever) people are people too'. Coming to an understanding of the similarity of our experiences has made me feel that as truth more in my heart than in some intellectual capacity, and this sort of understanding is the most meaningful for me.'***

### **Sources and more information:**

Eremos magazine: August 2004, No 88

(for more information on the Eremos Institute, go to [www.eremos.org.au](http://www.eremos.org.au))

[www.ncca.org.au/special\\_projects/dov/key\\_issues/journey\\_of\\_promise/intensive\\_jop](http://www.ncca.org.au/special_projects/dov/key_issues/journey_of_promise/intensive_jop)

and for more information on About F.A.C.E (the Aboriginal program Bronwyn took part in.)

go to <http://aboutface.unitingchurch.org.au/>