

We have received a couple more letters from Sarah Peters in Romania. The first one is here and the second will follow shortly. We also hear from Pauline Brown as she settles into her new role as Safeguarding Officer at St Mary's.

6 months in...

It's been 6 months since I stepped foot in Brasov again, and as Izzy and I were doing our spring cleaning this weekend, we had a flashback to the 90's and sang along to the classics, Backstreet Boys, N*Sync and Westlife as we cleaned. As we were doing this, one song stood out to me. A song I could still remember every single word to and loved in my early teens. 'Unwritten' by Natasha Bedingfield.

It got me thinking about how this experience has changed me. So, please bear with me as I try to describe the past 6 months within the lyrics of this song...

"I am unwritten, can't read my mind, I'm undefined"

To cut a long and uninteresting story short, I grew up with a lot of insecurities, and over time these insecurities built and I shrunk and cowered and sank into my 'comfort zone' so I wouldn't have to face them. Most of the time, fear was dominant over hope and life. I was unwritten, but instead of seeing that as a positive and an opportunity to become whatever I wanted to be, I was overwhelmed by too many choices of who I could be so instead of choosing and becoming a something, I became a nothing. I focussed on my failures and other people's strengths, I grew to compare myself to others and cared too much about what other people thought of me. I pulled away from good friends, afraid they were too good for me, and I should move on before they realise that and dump me. It didn't get better and go away as I thought it might, it got worse. I became more withdrawn and lost my voice and my 'self'. I couldn't read my own mind, let alone define myself. But alone, at home, I was content, to an extent, so that's where I mostly stayed.

"I'm just beginning, the pen's in my hand, ending unplanned"

Then I came to Romania. Even growing up in the church, I had spent so much time trying to do it my way and figure things out for myself. I eventually realised that was never going to work and the decision to join the Internship Programme was the best decision I've ever made. It was a decision to step out, to make a change and to put all my trust in God and let Him take the lead in my life. From the day I sent in the application, it has been the beginning of the next chapter, a chapter not full of blank pages as I felt like before, but a chapter being written, with a pen, with God's hand over mine guiding the writing. I didn't know quite what to expect coming here, but it has been more than I could have ever imagined!

"No one else can feel it for you, Only you can let it in"

Being here has been a process. A process of learning to set aside worldly possessions and concerns, and to put my hope and faith and time into the Lord, and His promises and His desires for my life. God calls us to Him and to all of the goodness He brings, but so often we are blind to Him, at entirely our own doing. Only I could open my own eyes to see and my own heart to fully receive the Lord and all that He has for me. And each day it is something I decide anew.

“No one else, no one else, Can speak the words on your lips”

Through this I feel like a huge weight has been lifted and not only that, but I feel like all of the bad stuff has been emptied and I am being filled, sometimes with little drips and sometimes mighty pouring, with the living water of Christ. I'm no longer hiding away, I'm finding my voice again, and I'm becoming a someone. A someone here to serve and praise God. I'm finding that I have a voice and I am here for a reason. No one else has the same voice, or the same reason for being here. I not only have a need to say the words that only I can speak and share, but a responsibility.

It is a process, but 6 months later I still pinpoint my application and arrival here as a time of great change. Not just a change of physical location, but a change deep in my soul. And now, I most definitely feel like a different person, a new creation.

The world squashes us, moulds us, pressures us, we lose our voices. God brings light, life and salvation. Our definition is always and will always be in God. As long as we attempt to meet the world's requirements and figure things out on our own, we will always be inadequate. In God, we are also inadequate, but He makes us whole and gives us all that we need. Our lives are for His glory and His glory alone. What other people think about us doesn't matter, what we can or can't do doesn't matter, what we think about ourselves doesn't matter. What matters is what we think of God and the role we are willing to let Him play in our lives. It all changed when I gave God the pen, once and for all, to write my story.

And the rest, well, “The rest is still unwritten...” and that's the most exciting part!

Safeguarding

Pauline took on the role of being the first ever designated Safeguarding Officer at St Mary's Church in May 2015 due to the increasing numbers of children attending services and also the increased family and child involvement in church through Godzone, Little Ted and especially Messy Church which is held in church bi-monthly and invites children and parents into church to learn about Jesus and the Bible in a fun sort of way, in a messy way!

“My role”, says Pauline, “as the Safeguarding Officer involves the safety and welfare of children and vulnerable adults who attend our church. This includes completing and submitting the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks which is a pre-requisite for anyone working with children”. If any issues arise Pauline is responsible for reporting these to PCC and managing them to a satisfactory outcome.

Although there is no precise job description for the role of Safeguarding Officer it does help to have some knowledge and experience of working with children and vulnerable adults and Pauline has worked in Durham Constabulary for 31 years before retiring in 2004. For her last 15 years in the police, Pauline worked in the child protection, domestic violence and registered sex offender units working alongside Social Services and Probation Service on joint investigations.

Durham Diocese arrange Safeguarding Training days which Pauline has attended.

If you have any concerns at all please contact Pauline in person or call her on 01642-587800.