



The Spectator

Metro Hamilton - Wentworth

THE VOICE is big, the body small. "I'm 4-foot-2," said AaLia Kesari. She reached up and shook my hand. I hadn't asked the question. But she knew that, sooner or later, I would. She knows her size is what people see and remember. Sometimes they point, laugh. It used to hurt so bad she went home and cried for days. That's why she kept traveling. New people, new start. But it didn't work. Three years ago she landed in Hamilton. At first, she thought the place was a dump. Now she says this old city has given her the best days of her life. And things are going to get better. Now, whenever she can, AaLia is going to sing for us. Hush pretty ba-by. don't you cry-y-y." Snow squalls swept across the harbor, but high up in her room with a view, AaLia was finishing a smooth, strong version of



Summertime and it felt warm. Her voice was on tape and it was loud. Apparently the tenants never complain. Maybe they can't hear it, or maybe they just like it. Not long ago, there was a piece in the Now action on the New Dynes Tavern that mentioned AaLia in passing. The talent man for the bar's amateur night said she was the best he had seen I don't know her age, but she was a pretty girl She did her two songs and wowed the audience." AaLia did not tell me many things. But she did mention that she is not a midget. She was born in Montreal, with a rare genetic brittle bone disease. Over 28 bones in her body were broken at birth. After which she continued to break more than 40 bones all over her body, but mostly her legs, throughout her childhood and adolescence. When you break your bones during your growing stages you miss 7 months growth with each break. So that explains her height factor. There's a black and white snapshot on her fridge. AaLia is on the living room floor, about two years old, big smile. She is strapped, stomach down, to a board and she's in a body cast. In the early years... she was usually in a cast. Later, her sister, Geraldine, would put a parka on her, wheel her to the apartment window, then go out to the balcony and throw snowballs at her. It was close to the real thing and AaLia loved her sister for trying. AaLia should not have been in a wheelchair, but her mother treated her like a china doll. "Please put down that I love Mom. I understand now why she did it." But one day when AaLia was 13, her sister asked, "Are you going to sit here and braid mother's hair the rest of your life?" After running away from home one time she graduated to crutches, then two canes, then one. And then she and her sister went

He rose, told the crowd to shut up and rescued AaLia from the stage. They were together a time, then they weren't. AaLia wandered to a "Rainbow Gathering" in Idaho, where over 10,000 people from all around the world would squat the land for a month at a time, every summer in a new state, each year. People from all walks of life would come together in search of a soul mate or to connect in a unique way with individuals on a number of various levels for one reason or another. This Bohemian lifestyle was only one of her many unique experiences. Most of AaLia's life is inspired by serendipity, affected by a series of fortunate and unexpected revelations leading her to experiences she does not have to look for. She has a way of turning set backs and negative experiences into a meaningful and constructive purpose. Her whole life has been about "finding the purpose of her existence and being apart of the healing process to those she comes in contact with". AaLia has always maintained that "Remembering Love has remained my faithful guide, even if she loses focus, she gets herself back on track, especially through the most difficult times". She believes that "we must first recognize and then embrace our weakness before we discover our true inner strength to overcome fear, which in turn gives us the strength of character and will power we ultimately need to overcome adversity, rather than giving in to what makes us weaker, we become stronger and more empowered with abilities to survive and create our own reality, as opposed to subjecting ourselves to a reality we don't want to be apart of or don't believe in". She found dysentery instead, and her hand-built straw hut floated on a sea of mud. She joined a peace walk and traveled with a caravan of gypsies across the western states. She couldn't participate in the peace walk, but she made up for it by washing vegetables and doing food prep in the morning on the bus for everyone's daily feed. At day's end, she massaged feet and played guitar. "What really got me was that they were fighting the whole way. I said good bye at Seattle." In Palm Springs, uncertain of where she was heading next, AaLia found her way into a Christian retreat, desperately seeking for a way to deal with life changes she was going through. She found the inhabitants were pushy, but the spiritual principles started to make some sense. She became homesick for Canada. During the three years she spent in Vancouver once again, the church became a steady part of her life for awhile. After she began to

banes, then one. And then she and her sister went traveling together and alone across Canada and the U.S. many times. Much happened to the tiny woman, fresh from the cocoon. Some of it she doesn't want to talk about. More than once, she was attacked. What did she know about men and who you can trust? Some years later, she ended up in Vancouver's Benjamin Cafe, home to assorted citizenry of the night. The owner hired AaLia to sit in the front window and do tarot card readings for the customers. "I never told people their futures. I couldn't. I just listened and they poured out their hearts." Chef at the cafe was a guy named Todd, recent arrival from Hamilton. One night AaLia had a between-sets singing job at The Rose. She was so nervous she forgot the words. People started to laugh at her. She didn't know Todd was in the place that night.

steady part of her life for awhile. After she began to feel better about herself she wanted to be close enough to see her family in Montreal, with "hopes of healing a wounded past". And to settle some serious issues with Todd, who had returned to Hamilton. She has found allies here. She does personal voice coaching. She's in the process of putting a DUO together and writing songs. She is back at the Dynes for playoffs March 28 and will be in a show at Hamilton Place June 27. The street is the same. Stares, smirks, "But now I think, 'That's just how they see me, that's not how I am.'" And one day she may give those gawkers a jolt. "I'm thinking of growing my hair long again. I'll be Lady Godiva Jr. and I'll ride through the streets of Hamilton on a German shepherd."