

## **A Reaffirming Encounter, A Brief Reflection**

I had an experience yesterday that I want to share, so here goes.

Buzzing between meetings, I made a quick pit stop to a local branch of a large bank to do some banking business for my mom. I've been handling her financial affairs for the last couple of years, as our extended family works together to keep her living at home. I had a couple of questions about her account at the bank, so the teller kindly connected me with one of the bank's CSRs. As I waited momentarily for him to wait on me, I noticed his first name in big, bright orange letters on the plastic sorter container that he had on his desk. He introduced himself to me as Vernon Johnson, and when I made a slight joke about his first name being in orange on his desk, he sheepishly admitted that it reflected his connection to Syracuse University, and told me his daughter had received both undergraduate and graduate degrees from the university. That gave me the opportunity, which doesn't come often in my professional life, to regale Mr. Johnson with my extended family, the Cuddy/Mullaney clans' connection to the Big East through Providence College. As I said, it was a nice connection to make, as I don't have a chance to do it often.

About halfway through answering a couple of my questions on my mom's account, he asked me if I was connected to the real estate Cuddys of Framingham. It was a bit of a surprising question, because while the Cuddy real estate family was really well known during the first part of my tenure at SMOC, in the last ten or fifteen years the Cuddy real estate name has faded. It led to my question, "Do you live in Framingham?" Mr. Johnson said, "Yup, I've lived here for 30 years, raised our children here." So I looked at him and said, "Oh, do you know SMOC?" Mr. Johnson stopped, looked me straight in the eye, and said, "Are you that Cuddy?", and when I nodded yes, stood up, extended his hand and said, "I want to thank you for all that you do in this town. You do so many good things in this community. Sometimes you get a hard time for that, but you guys do wonderful work and I'm so proud to meet you."

I was startled. It doesn't happen very often and Mr. Johnson's gesture brought tears to my eyes. We sat back down, chatted, and I learned more of his connections to our organization through his church, etc. It was just a great conversation which ended when he again thanked me for all the work our agency does in the community.

As I was getting back into my car, I thought of Steve MacDowell, our IPS Case Worker who had just passed away. I thought of Steve at the engagement desk in the Career Center. I thought of Steve in his office, working with one of his clients or struggling like we all do with the byzantine, and sometimes baffling, amount of paperwork we're required to do, and I thought of his quick passing which caught us all by surprise. And I said, "Wow, I just wish I could have shared this moment with Steve."

I can't share it with Steve. I can share it with all of you. Thank you for doing the kind of work that Mr. Johnson shook my hand for.

Peace.

Jim