

Gifts

This is a meditation on gifts
not the ones we receive
but the gifts we give to others
from ourselves.

Gifts we are born with. Gifts
we develop as we move thru our
life experience.

I always thought that it is not
a question of how many gifts we carry
within ourselves, but what we do with
the ones we are blessed with.

So anyway I'm heading back to
the Dennison complex from lunch one, recent
frigid afternoon. I cross the tracks
turn left on Howard
drive alongside the building, aiming for
the parking lot off Grant Street.
I glance over at the BHS entrance
and spot a heavy set woman of undetermined
age sitting on the steps, black watch cap
pulled low to her forehead
hugging herself against the cold
puffing on a butt.

For some unknown reason a long ago memory surfaces.
I'm reminded of "Tuggy,"
futilely trying to negotiate the few steps
up to the entrance of the Planet
to cop a free meal that Henry 77 was
inside preparing. "Tuggy," same black watch
cap no matter the weather, purple
blotches festooning her face, a gin blossom
for a nose, an alcoholic fog spewing from
her mouth.

I play patrolman. "I'm sorry Tuggy but you
need to be sober to eat with us."

"God will get you for this Jim."

I think he already did, Tuggy, my silent response.

The next day I'm in Boston, walking
across the Common, baseball cap and
sunglasses just the right attire to observe the
scene as I head for my destination.
My path takes me toward a group of
adults with backpacks, bedrolls; a shopping cart
congregating around a bench.
Homeless folks, I think and
scan them. One catches my eye,
a woman, fortyish, black hair, rail thin
high cheekbones, beginning to sink into her jawline.

I slow and nearly stop myself "It can't
Be." "Sandy" - one of the first kids
I ever worked with as a therapist
nearly 30 years ago.

Reflexively, I take off my sunglasses
slow down, sub vocalize her name and try
to catch her gaze, our eyes meet,
there is a momentary vacant stare.
Unrecognized and unsure of myself I continue on.
Sandy, her body grew, her spirit disappeared.

You see I possessed a gift once
I could connect with troubled and needy kids
the more troubled or "f"ed up, the
more my gift worked, girl, boy, 5 years old, 7,
12 or 17 didn't matter.

I was just learning the healing part
when I put this gift away,
for reasons I won't go into here
locked it in a closet, hasn't
been out since.

Really screwed me up for a while, took a long
time to find a substitute.

When I get back to the Dennison
later in the day I'm out of focus,
ruminating, obsessing of course, so
I take a walk thru the building.
many sights greet me,
several matter much.

In the Career Center, a SEE client
hunched over a computer, learning to use the
mouse, Kelly on his left side
quietly instructing, hand on his shoulder.

In the WIC waiting room, Morena,
a smile on her face,
guiding a young mom holding a sleepy infant
to her office.

At the reception area a group of middle aged women
speaking a foreign tongue sharing a
laugh with Elizabeth as she points them
to the Fuel Assistance office.

Each demonstrating the gift that comes from the heart.

These scenes are repeated countless times
everywhere in our building.
The people who come to us
are often tired, scared, confused
and vulnerable. They need the many things
that our government funded programs
offer.

They also need the gift that comes
from the heart of those there to help.

So here's the message, the kernel
embedded in this reflection.
It's twofold.

First, of all the gifts we can
be given, the most important is
the ability to open your heart to
others. All things flow from this.

Second, and I say this from experience, use your gifts
don't lock them away, ration them
hoard them or hide them.
They need to dance in the
social world at the
intersection of the self and others
cherish them, polish them,
just don't admire them too much.
They'll tarnish a bit.

And most importantly,
use them with an open heart.

James T. Cuddy - December 2002