

THE SUIT

Early Monday morning, sit down at my desk,
boot up the computer, scroll through the e-mails,
up pops this:

From:
To:
Date: 6/14/04 8:26AM
Subject: For your information.

For your information, on a sad note, Dwight Bennet a 43 year old gentleman died last night after being stricken at Turning Point. He was given emergency treatment by EMTs at the scene and transported to METRO WEST HOSP where he passed on. Mr. Bennet had serious medical issues, both Cardiac and Diabetes, but no substance abuse or mental health issues. Just a guy struggling to put his life in order. Margaret told me was father of three children, all 12 and younger, who lived here in town. He was involved in their lives and help to care for them.

.....Jeff

CC: Margaret Davitt

Dwight dropped like a freakin' stone in the day room
living room, meeting room, whatever
the EMTs arrived, paddled him
Didn't do jack
He was gone
Bad genes, bad luck, bad food, bad timing
Who knows
And something else

That nite on my way home I dial up Margaret
wanting to learn about Dwight
Why, I'm not sure - I paid no attention
to Dwight when he was alive.
Now I want to understand him
when he's not.

"Oh Jim, he was the nicest man so thankful for anything we did for him. He was devoted to his kids." Then Maggie makes a 90 degree turn. "He loved cooking fried food. Couldn't keep the weight off. His pressure was off the charts. In fact he saw the doc at the clinic on Friday." I must be relating 'cause I feel the pressure in my chest building.

When I learn from Margaret that Dwight had been at the shelter since January, was still in the general population and hadn't even gotten to Margaret's Place (transitional beds) I start bumming. Learn from Margaret that his health prevented him from working and one of the local Legal Services attorneys was trying to get him on SSDI.

"Jim he had nothing. All he had was a suit. Some rich guy in Hopkinton donated it. You should have seen him in it. He was so proud when he wore it."

Of course I start riffing. Thinking maybe we should organize and march through Hopkinton, Dover, Sherborn, Weston. You know like Sherman on the way to Atlanta. No guns, just placards.

"Forget suits. We want subsidies."
Yeah right

I wonder if the suit was anything like the ones my friend Philip the Abolitionist wears as he flies around the country trying to cajole elected officials into giving the Dwight's of this world a shot at the brass ring.

I remember Philip telling me about a journey he had taken to the Middle East several years ago. He found himself in a monastery with a 2500 year tradition. On a tour he was taken to the cell of a monk who had just died. The cell had not been touched. The only articles in the cell were a straw mattress and a woven burlap sack. Philip's guide told him that this monk had been "very holy". He owned nothing.

I'm thinking the monk, Dwight, Philip, Margaret . . .

The Margaret whom I've known for 20 years as a true compass. You know due North, right to the heart of this and most every other matter, says something that startles me. "You know Jim. It's so sad up here. There's so much

sadness. So many sad tales. I hear them every day over and over again. Dwight was a sad man. He just couldn't get it together. He tried and I always listened."

You know as much as I've read, as much as I've written, as much as I've talked, sadness is not a term that gets much use. Maybe because it's like a deep impenetrable well. What do you do with it?

The next day Dwight's estranged wife comes to the shelter to thank Margaret and her staff for their kindness and thoughtfulness. She tells Margaret that she and Dwight had been "together" since they were 12 years old. She wants Dwight buried in the suit.

Later that night I'm visited by one of those waking dreams. I'm standing on an arid plain, Dwight's off in the distance tryin' to push a boulder up an incline. He's wearin' the suit, using his shoulder for leverage.

Gettin' nowhere

I start yellin' at him "Yo Dwight. Walk around it, climb over it. Find a stick of dynamite and blow the freakin' thing up. - Come on man."

He looks at me, smiles, leans his shoulder into the rock, loses momentum and gets himself rolled over.

The suit is a deep rich blue. Right after getting it Dwight hauled his butt down to the Salvation Army and picked out a light blue shirt, matching tie and wing-tipped shoes. My great-aunt would say he felt like the cat's meow in that outfit.

I don't know what I would say.

Jim Cuddy
July 2004