

Speaker for the Dead

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Introduction

In his award winning book, Ender's Game, Orson Scott Card describes an alien race so different from our own as to be incomprehensible to humans, and whose actions could only be interpreted as seeking the complete destruction of the earth. Humankind is forced to fight to save its very existence. The hero of the book is Ender an eleven year old boy who, through rigorous training in strategy and expert manipulation by those responsible for protection of the earth, orchestrates the destruction of the aliens. Card tells a gripping tale that is fascinating and troubling both because of the intensity of the narrative and because of the situations he places the 8 – 12 year old protagonists. But at the end of the book, the author does something unexpected: he introduces an idea that has the potential to lead to understanding and even reconciliation between humans and the alien race.

Ender is given the opportunity to see inside the collective consciousness of the defeated creatures and through that experience discovers that we share common aspects with all living things: we know pain and loss, joy and belonging, we make mistakes, we want to be remembered. To personify this, Card describes a "speaker for the dead"- an individual willing to stand by the grave and say what the dead person would have said about their life, "with full candor, hiding no faults and pretending no virtues." In serving as a speaker for the dead the individual makes a statement that despite flaws and failures the deceased was a person of value with a story worth sharing.

Frederick Curtis died at 1:15 pm on Saturday August 24, 2013. He was 60 years old. He died without possessions except for a few small items given to him by others, one of them the cross I am wearing. I imagine the coroner listed the cause of death as heart failure but it would be more accurate to say that he died of abusive living, abuse caused by his own hand and the consequence of a lifetime of choices. There was no family present when he passed, none could be found.

Frederick Cletus Curtis III, to give his full name, lived a life quite alien to my own. We shared little in the way of context for our lives or in how we chose to live and interact with others. But Freddy J, as he was called by his friends, was a man with a story worth sharing. Tonight I will attempt to be a speaker for Freddy. Some of his story is known well or corroborated by trustworthy evidence. Some of the story is probable, given the consistency with which it was told; some likely because the events surrounding the story are known. Some I admit is fiction, but plausible given the context of Freddy J's life.

Early years

Frederick was born to Ida Belle and Frederick Curtis Jr. on February 27, 1953. Freddy was not the offspring of a happy home or stable family; he never spoke of his father and his mother was an alcoholic all her life. His mother's parents lived on a farm in northern California and it was there that the boy Freddy grew up. While not in the more verdant portions of the central valley, the area on the northwest fringes was still a productive agricultural region. The farm was small but sufficient and the almonds and apricots were both delicious and a reliable source of income. It was good to be a boy on a farm in a land of farms; opportunities for exploration were nearly endless. Orchards and fields to be discovered; streams needed to be waded or followed until they joined the Sacramento River; farm ponds had fish and frogs that wanted catching.

There was work to do as well but much of it allowed Freddy to spend his days outdoors and barefoot. Seed time and harvest, weeding and watering, mending and building – all these had a place in his life and all taught him about rhythms and diligence. His grandpa was quiet with the strong hands and weathered face of a man who knew dust and sweat and joy in his work. Grandpa could get exasperated at Freddy's wanderings when there was a full day's work to be done, but he understood; he had been a boy once, too. In addition to teaching Freddy how to hoe a row and work on diesel engines, Grandpa taught Freddy to play bridge and horseshoes and how to chew tobacco.

While not overly religious the family did attend the local Methodist church. Freddy was baptized in that church and learned the Lord's Prayer and the traditional hymns of that

denomination. He developed faith in a God of creation, a God of compassion and a God of redemption – these made sense to a boy growing up amidst farmers and with a grandmother who was always providing for others.

Freddy reveled in the outdoors and the freedoms of the broad California landscapes. He developed not so much a wanderlust as a need to be outside with wind, sun and rain on his face. Maybe it was partly because of his Cherokee heritage but the indoor environment was more confining than comforting. Whether it was just a reflection or the years in the sun were absorbed into his soul he sported a twinkle in his eyes that he would keep all of his life and define him as a person.

Freddy turned out to be a fairly bright boy who had an aptitude for both chemistry and literature. He grew tall and played basketball; he didn't have the single-mindedness to excel at the sport, but at 6'4" he was chosen first for any pick-up game. He was one of those kids who did not distinguish themselves in any singular pursuit but rather took in a variety of experiences not understanding how anyone could limit themselves to focus on any one academic or athletic endeavor.

Freddy was not the only person the family took in or helped with navigating life. When a fire destroyed the house of a neighbor the family spent a month with them. Several times the church sponsored refugees and a number ended up at the farm for 3-6 months. A daughter of a friend spent many weekends at the house when the girl or her parents needed space to calm down and avoid ugliness at home. Freddy saw his grandma welcome each of these individuals and he watched as she found common ground and common humanity with anyone in need.

If there was one area in which his grandparents failed to provide for him it was in the understanding of responsibility. It's perhaps a common failing in those who care for children who have had a troubled childhood. It was difficult to hold him accountable since his parents had let him down so often. His grandparents hoped that the nurture and example they provided would be enough.

At 17 Freddy bought his first vehicle – a beat up old Harley Davidson which he used to increase the range of his wanderings. He used this to explore the Whiskeytown National Recreation area and the waterfalls around the forests. He had a particular affinity for the loop that included Iron Mountain Road along Boulder Creek, Spring Creek and through Slug Gulch, to the split at the old Lookout Road finishing on Miners Gulch Road. His hair was growing out and he looked the very essence of youth, lean, tan and mischievous. By necessity he learned how to make minor repairs and the locations of friendly mechanics who were willing to share tools and experience with the boy with the infectious smile. Freddy loved the bike and the freedom it gave him.

Freddy discovered some unexpected things during these teen years. Despite what he was told he found that school often got in the way of learning and he found he very much liked to learn. Books and libraries held treasures he rarely found in the classroom. He discovered that girls were attractive and as a tall, lean boy with long hair and a rugged complexion they were attracted to him. He discovered that getting away with things was great sport – it felt like independence. He became practiced and skilled at pushing boundaries, which given his family situation, was not particularly difficult. The alcohol consumption of his mother and the absence of his father meant that it was only his elderly grandparents who were trying to keep track of him.

College Days

His natural intelligence coupled with the curiosity he had satisfied through prodigious readings landed him as an undergraduate at Berkley in 1972. It's not where his grandparents wanted him to go, the free speech movement, the rise of feminism, and the emerging middle-class drug culture were as evident at Berkeley as anywhere in the country. These were confusing times – you could listen to Elvis Presley and Ziggy Stardust on the same radio station. Our trust in elected officials may have been at a historic low with President Nixon denying knowledge of the break in at the Watergate hotel and Governor Reagan deploying National Guard troops on college campuses. But they were also exciting times. Dylan may have released “The Times

They are a Changin” in 1964 but change was what was happening in Berkley throughout the decade of the 70s.

Berkley was the place to be to see history emerging and it was the place to be if you wanted to learn – both in the classroom and in the community. Freddy was enrolled in the chemistry program and he’d never met so many smart people in all his life. His high school preparation was adequate, but he’d never had to really work before so he found himself struggling. If for no other reason than he wanted to be there, to experience all that Berkeley was in the 70s he learned to study and to budget his time between activities. He also learned to party. It was like having a non-stop rave with the entertainment provided by Cheech and Chong. No need for details, not that he could remember them anyway. Freddy claimed he could name the producing region of every bag of weed on campus by the time he was a junior. Happily it turned out that he also had the mental acumen to memorize the nomenclature of organic chemistry and he could visualize molecular structures in his head. His friends claimed this ability with organic materials was a byproduct of Friday night “study” sessions while listening to Janis Joplin.

When he needed to clear his head from equations or excess he would head to Grizzly Peak Blvd or Wildcat Canyon Road on that Harley he had managed to keep running. Grizzly Peak at dusk with the San Francisco skyline and Bay in the distance is stunning. There were other times on those foggy mornings prevalent in Strawberry Canyon when he should not have been on that bike. There was no way to see that dog – or its owner. The bike went down and Freddy slid for 20 feet. He was lucky – he had slowed down enough and his motorcycle leathers did their job though he kept the scar on his arm for the rest of his life. The dog wasn’t so lucky.

A Working Man

Freddy did well enough to be asked to stay on to do a graduate program. Why would anyone want to leave? So he stayed and worked on a Masters in Biochemistry. Research however proved not to be his strong suit. As he had discovered as a teen he was not one to have a singular focus on any activity particularly one that required him to be in a lab 8-10 hours a day. And while he didn’t mind the spartan nature of a college student’s existence there were other

options. He had a collection of business cards of recruiters who had been on campus the year before and he started to make phone calls. He was surprised at the positive reception he got and at the income that was possible. He was even more surprised at himself – his friends told him he had sold his soul when he went to work for Dow – a manufacturer of agent orange and napalm. But as he was working in the agribusiness sector he could at least partially deflect their criticisms. With connections to a secure supply of good pot and the means to purchase it, his friends learned to overlook his apparent lack of a soul.

With a steady income he could afford a new bike. He stayed with Harley and opted for the FXR Sport Glide that afforded an extended range and sufficient room for saddlebags that allowed him to have overnight excursions. He could be in Tijuana or Las Vegas in under 8 hours –there was a lot of territory to cover and vices to be explored. He met Carol during these days – though she lacked his formal education she was bright and free spirited and more of a hippy than he. Freddy also kept his connections to his grandparents and their farm – he was self-aware enough to know that he owed these opportunities to his grandparents and he enjoyed having meals with them and drinking beer with Carol and his grampa.

Whether it was the open road on the bike, the growing drug use, or his reaction to confining spaces in the corporate world he began a steady decline from a “productive citizen with a party habit” to someone who began to rail against “the man”. He wanted a change and more excitement. It turned out that his motorcycle was the bridge he needed - Freddy became associated with the Hell’s Angels. And it didn’t take long for the group to realize that Freddy’s background in organic chemistry and his experience in the lab could be put to good use. He left Dow and for the next several years he did some first rate chemistry - not for big oil or big ag - but for small and well connected pharma; the Hell’s Angels had a well established and robust distribution network for hallucinogens and other mind-altering drugs.

Carol thought all of this was “cool.” They got married in Tahoe in 1984 – having ridden the motorcycle to the justice of the peace. She worked as a waitress so between them they had enough to live on and enough to occupy their days. Over the next few years they had two sons and the semblance of a normal life by biker / drug culture standards; but this didn’t last.

Slipping Away

The debate continues (we can ask Joe Deters to weigh in) - is pot a gateway drug that leads to use of more powerful, more dangerous drugs? One thing was certain for them ... Carol went from regular pot smoker, to LSD to heroin. Whether the California culture, the association with the motorcycle gang, boredom or a lack of a sense of belonging, she slipped further into dependency. Freddy was content getting drunk and getting high and in his own way he tried to get Carol to limit her drug use, but addictions are demons that are not easily exorcised. And Freddy lived in the moment, he was content when he had a full belly and a buzz; planning and understanding potential outcomes was not something he chose to concern himself with or perhaps was unwilling to face. However, in a moment of terror-induced sobriety - after a week when she couldn't remember coming or going - Carol found her way to a rehab program. Recognizing that she needed to change her setting if real change was going to occur, she convinced Freddy to move to Dundee Scotland where she had two aunts and several cousins her age. There was work in the shipyards that Freddy could do given the skills he had picked up from his grandfather. Freddy was ready for a new adventure so in 1989 they packed what they had and headed to Scotland. The boys stayed behind though, the families didn't trust them to make substantial change and they didn't trust themselves either. And if they were honest they were happy to shed the responsibilities of parenting.

The change had a temporary beneficial effect and the family a helpful influence. They had work and some nice outings to the highlands and the Hebrides; they particularly liked the ferry rides and treks along remote Lochs. Freddy added a few scars to arms and legs on a near fall during a scramble up Ben Nevis, the highest peak in the UK. In two years they also had two more boys. They had structure and rhythm to their lives. For many of us, that is a good thing, a centering feature of life. For them though, it was not. As he had at Dow, Freddy began to see structure as confining and Carol the responsibilities of motherhood overwhelming. Dundee is not California but beer and whiskey were abundant and pot easy to find. And they found them.

It didn't take long for the relatives to say "enough". Freddy and Carol went back to the states and as before the boys stayed behind; again that seemed best. Carol and Freddy went to

Louisiana where a friend had said he could get Freddy a job as a handyman for a number of bars in the French Quarter. They celebrated Mardi Gras in 1992 in New Orleans. Freddy could be handy just not reliable. Fortunately, that combination was fairly common in the Cajun community. As long as he showed up often enough to get work done, he would get paid for the jobs. It wasn't steady or predictable income but it was sufficient for their needs. Freddy and Carol both acquired several tattoos during their time in New Orleans. A dragon, a skull and a cross all found their way to Freddy's chest and arms. He had no recollection of why or when the skull showed up. Carol was slipping further into addiction. She had a few stints as a waitress but couldn't be counted on to show up for work two days in a row. Prostitution was a reliable way of getting enough money for a fix and demand was sufficient to feed her addiction. Freddy didn't like this arrangement; there were arguments and ugly confrontations that did not end well. They did care for each other but neither would or could shed their personal demons so no real resolutions were found. In 1994 Carol died of a heroin overdose

Freddy mourned her death as he knew how which is to say he cursed the day and went to Mass that weekend. He felt lost but he didn't know exactly why.

Cincinnati

Freddy wandered north panhandling and hitching rides. He met Mary at a bus stop in St. Louis. She was working to earn enough change for a bus ticket back to Cincinnati where her father lived. Mary was weather beaten like Freddy and had the raspy voice of someone who sleeps outdoors a lot. He followed her to Cincinnati but he was not welcomed by her father. She'd brought other strays home over the years and Dad knew the baggage they carried.

Freddy had never heard of the Iron Horsemen but in 1998 a transplanted Hell's Angel recognized him on the street and stopped to talk. Seems that the Horseman had a nascent drug business in the works and they could use Freddy's help. They had a chemist / pharmacist on the payroll but he needed help and Freddy had the necessary job qualifications – he knew chemistry, he was easy to manipulate and he knew the cash economy. Freddy spent several years working this trade again in a more minor role than before. He had enough money that he could afford a modest apartment and decent whiskey. Turns out though that even motorcycle

gangs have professional standards and being constantly drunk didn't fit their expectations for employees.

He spent the next two years floating between homelessness and friends' couches. He and Mary spent about 6 months of that in an old tent under a tarp in a small stand of trees a few feet away from the I-75 / Seymore junction. He made a few bucks at the nearby gas station cleaning restrooms and hauling away trash. He turned 50 and eventually got hooked up with Job and Family Services, got a new ID, a subsidized apartment and food stamps. He had also learned enough of the city to know favorable traffic patterns and intersections where panhandling earnings might be maximized.

Paths Intersect

Runners are as habitual in their routines as anyone and the preferred route of the UC runners takes us (Richard, Jim, myself and 3-4 others) from UC, east on Taft, east on Madison to O'Bryonville or Hyde Park depending on the run du jour. We first met Freddy on this route sometime around 2005 – 2006. Freddy was working the street corner at the exit ramp from I-71 South to Taft. If any of you drove that route between 2005 – 2010 you certainly saw him, tall and lanky, long hair and with a seasonal beard holding the tool of his trade – a cardboard sign reading "homeless – anything will help". Of course there were other variations of the sign: homeless vet, lost my home, kids are hungry. The honest approach had as much success as any of the marketing campaigns – why lie, I need a beer.

For several weeks we simply acknowledged each other – the group of runners who were constantly bickering with one another and the disheveled man plying on the kindness of strangers. Freddy was friendly and curious and he had that twinkle in his eye he had developed as a boy. Because of training routines or work constraints there were times on the run when it would just be Justin and I. Both of us were, and are, active in Christian communities and are constantly wrestling with (perhaps to a fault) what it means to live a Christian life. We discussed at length the question of the parable of the good Samaritan as it related to Freddy. Our conclusion was that we were not called to feed his habit but we were called to treat him with kindness and respect.

This began by simply treating him as a person we were happy to see. How's your day? Or How's business been? Freddy was pleased to engage with us and most days business was better than I would expect. By noon, when we would be at the corner, he typically had a tall boy of Steel Reserve in the standard issue brown paper bag and enough money for a pack of cheap cigarettes. You can buy packs of what are called cigars but imitate cigarettes for under \$2 at select UDF's and Walgreens. Over time I would stop for a bit longer and talk to him about the day or music. Freddy was interested in how far we were going and if we were training for any particular event. He introduced us to Mary, usually as she was coming back from reinvesting his earnings into the local economy at \$2 a transaction.

He began to talk about his life, his growing up in California, that he was part Cherokee, his motorcycle, the tattoos and the fights. He showed me several scars put there by knives and to tell me how long each put him in the hospital. He wasn't homeless, he had an apartment, a caseworker and a monthly check. He also had a top hat and a pretty fine leather jacket which had both been given to him. I asked if he could use anything. His requests were simple: Cheerios, bananas, milk, cookies. He lived in the section 8 housing in Avondale but he had trouble keeping his apartments for many reasons. When he was forced to leave one, Justin and I worked with our churches to provide furniture for the new place. I'd say it took no more than 2 months to go from OK to a place most of us wouldn't want to step foot in.

But while the living conditions were squalid the sense of community was much greater than our manicured suburbs will ever see. Need a place to stay? you can sleep on the couch. Need something to eat? if I have it I'll share it. Need a cigarette? I'll take the one I'm smoking and give it to you. The lessons of hospitality and generosity that he witnessed in his grandmother stuck and this drew people to Freddy. Now life is messy and this openness also leaves you vulnerable to having even the little you have taken by someone who thinks they can sell it to get money for a fix. But that's the way of it; you curse at the misfortune but go on.

A couple of times in these years Mary ended up behind bars for too many minor infractions – open container, or failure to appear, or disorderly conduct. Freddy asked if I would go visit her – they wouldn't let him in or if he showed up he would be arrested for the same infractions. So

remembering another parable about “visiting me in prison” I went. The first time Mary was pleased to see me; we talked awkwardly about what Freddy was up to and her family. The next time I came to visit it was apparently in the middle of her favorite TV show; she came to see who it was, saw me and concluded it wasn’t worth her time. As Richard Gass likes to remind me – I’m so pathetic even women in prison have more interesting things to do than visit with me.

Then Freddy went missing for longer than usual. After about a month I started asking about him from individuals I recognized as people he hung out with. One sent me to a nursing home near Washington and Forrest but they had no record of him. Over a year went by with no sign of him. Then on a run that took me through Northside I saw Mary at a bus stop. She directed me to a nursing home in Westwood. On visiting I found that Freddy had gotten robbed and stabbed and along the way contracted Guillain-Barre syndrome. This condition causes the body's immune system to attack the nerves resulting in weakness in the extremities. This weakness and tingling can spread and may even paralyze the whole body. The exact cause of Guillain-Barre syndrome is unknown, but, as in Freddy’s case, it is often preceded by an infection.

There's no known cure for this condition, but several treatments can ease symptoms and reduce the duration of the illness. Most people recover, though some individuals experience lingering effects, such as weakness, numbness or fatigue. Freddy was now in a wheel chair and undergoing physical therapy to increase his mobility and strengthen his legs. His hands had also been affected; the fingers were curving toward the palms and he couldn’t grip a pencil quite right.

I had not spent much time in nursing homes, particularly ones populated by the indigent. My reaction was a mix of amazement, (I’m ashamed to say) horror, and gratitude. To be able to cheerfully work in that setting – as some of the staff were – is amazing and a blessing. The condition of human bodies that are neglected and abused over time can be disturbing. I observed the better angels of human nature in that setting, certainly in some of the staff but also in Freddy. Regardless of the physical or mental condition of a resident, Freddy talked to

the individual as a person who needed a friend and deserved respect. Perhaps because he had experienced great need and great loss many times, Freddy knew what it felt like and how to respond. His ability to implement the golden rule in such a setting was remarkable to me.

If he displayed the better angels of his nature in that setting, Freddy was no angel; there was too much mischief in him. I'm quite certain the singer Greg Allman knew someone like Freddy when he wrote (quoting)– "No I'm no angel, No I'm no stranger to the street, I've got my label, So I won't crumble at your feet. And I know baby, So I've got scars upon my cheek, And I'm half crazy, Come on and love me baby. Come and let me show you my tattoo. Let me drive you crazy, Come on and love me, baby."

Freddy had a knack for driving the nursing home staff crazy. He was poor at following through with physical therapy. Specialists were sent to work on his legs and hands but he put forth little effort and less time into following through. His greatest form of mischief though was his ability to wander away from the facility and to acquire beer in sufficient quantities to allow he and any new friend he made to be intoxicated on regular occasions.

He was essentially kicked out of the nursing home in Westwood and ended up at a facility in Blue Ash. Since he was essentially in a form of "sales" most of his life, he was quite competent at dealing with people (when he was sober) and had no trouble with first impressions at the new place. They all loved him, at first. But just as he had experienced all his life, he was not content in any place that feels confining and it wasn't long before he was in trouble again. He got a notice that he would be expelled and required to go to the Drop Inn Center. How could a nursing home send a man in a wheel chair with Guillian Barre to the street? I engaged a mediator through Job and Family services. He explained that this was their way of getting his attention but that indeed he could be discharged if he wasn't compliant but to a different facility.

Blue Ash was a convenient spot for me. I lived just two miles from the facility so it was easy to visit. During his time there I invited him to go to church with us. If nothing else this provided an opportunity for an outing – a time to get out of the confines of the nursing home. It was a bit tricky – he was in his wheel chair and he now had a catheter bag in tow. He could stand and

back himself into the seat in our van, then haul his legs up into the van. He enjoyed going to church and being part of the worship service. He was quite an unusual addition to our middle class suburban church – long stringy hair, hand-me-down clothes, reeking of at best cigarette smoke and at worst alcohol and urine. I admit I took a bit of delight in making some of the parishioners uncomfortable with his presence. The teenagers though were really good with him, they enjoyed his stories and the rebel image he embodied.

He would participate in the worship service – he knew some hymns and worked to learn others. He liked going to the Sunday morning adult discussion class though he would rarely speak. He would offer up some opinions on the way home though. He found a spot to smoke outside the church and did engage other smokers in lively conversations particularly if a sporty car or motorcycle drove by. We incorporate a variety of musicians and musical styles in the church service and Freddy got a real charge out of the jazz saxophone. During the postlude he would sit and listen until the music stopped and offer a loud “you rock” as his amen.

I brought Freddy to our house on several occasions. I know his favorite visits were the two Christmas Eve’s he spent with our family sharing in the traditions every family has. We gave him gifts and he also produced gifts for us – items he had won at bingo or secured from people who visited the nursing home. Most of all, he enjoyed sitting at table, sharing a meal.

Within 18 months at Blue Ash he managed to get kicked out of that facility and was living at Garden Park nursing home in Avondale. If nothing else this facility was more familiar with the Freddys of the world and their particular antics. Interestingly even though it serves an indigent population Garden Park was in many ways as nice as the facility in Blue Ash – the nurses and aides treated him with respect and knew how to banter with the residents. Freddy was sporting a beard and could be found parked in front of the Avondale car wash (and carryout) or the A to Z market on Reading road. He would wheel himself or have another resident push him. Freddy was best at panhandling so if someone pushed him he’d need to earn enough for two tall boys. Steel Reserve, Dog Bite, and Big Daddy J to name a few contain over 8% alcohol by volume and a 24 oz can is under \$2. (Jerry, **please** don’t let the lads at Rhinegeist compete in

this market!) Getting back to the nursing home was often harder and several falls – yes you can fall out of a wheel chair - occurred over the time he spent at Garden Park.

It was harder to get him to church now since this meant driving 10 miles in the wrong direction and there were numerous occasions that once I got there he was either in no shape to go or simply wasn't in the mood. But there were times he did go and he relished those outings. As many of you know, this sort of service can be messy. First there is the physical mess of, oh say a leaking catheter bag in your vehicle. There's the emotional mess of wanting to provide opportunities for this man stuck in a nursing home when it is just darn inconvenient. And there's the ethical mess of an indigent person in the hospital and a doctor asking you if you're related, do you have power of attorney, can you sign for him? Freddy contracted pneumonia in 2012, spent a week at University Hospital, but seemed to recover well. We talked a bit about hospitals and interventions and what quality of life meant. He had always lived robustly and he had no desire to have machines keep him alive. Honestly I was surprised at how healthy he seemed to be given all he had experienced by his own choices and by the circumstances those choices had caused.

He was in and out of the hospital again in the spring of 2013 with another bout of pneumonia. I had a discussion with a social worker who assumed I was his son. In August he was back, this time because of cardiac arrest; he was in a coma and on life support. Another social worker and another discussion about who I was and our relationship. Within days it was clear hospice was the right setting. I confirmed that he should be taken off the respirator and not resuscitated. Freddy was transported to Hospice of Blue Ash on Friday evening; I went to see him on Saturday morning. As an aside hospice is a wonderful place where everyone was treated with dignity. His breathing was labored and difficult and the hospice nurse seemed to think Freddy had only hours to live. I spent an hour or so reading scripture to him and praying over him. He died early in the afternoon.

A story also has something to say about the storyteller. As this is my first paper I'll be explicit so perhaps you have a bit more insight into my thinking. Why did I form a relationship with

Freddy; why this particular man among the various strangers we see on a daily basis? Three reasons: First frequency – we saw Freddy 2-3 times a week, more than I see some of my co-workers. Second – conviction, or if you're comfortable with the language of the church, I felt called to a relationship with this man. Third – I hoped to learn something about people on the street. I had no illusions that I could "fix" or save Freddy. The conversations with Justin helped me to understand that.

If I am honest I did hope that what I saw as my positive influence would be beneficial to him - taking him to church, having conversations around topics other than drugs and alcohol, inviting him to family events. I cannot say if I was a positive influence other than being an occasional companion but he did get to experience a broader range of activities than he would have otherwise.

In befriending Freddy I was taking a risk I'd never taken before and making an uncertain investment. Spending time with Freddy and getting him to and from church was a bit of a chore – sometimes a real chore. I asked my saint of a wife once if she felt it was interfering with our family and our relationship. She was honest and said there were times she was resentful but that she was proud of what I was doing.

In retrospect I believe I did have a positive influence but not in the way I intended. The influence was more on my family and my church community. By being willing and making the investment in time and attention I demonstrated one way of making a difference in the life of someone who could not pay me back, except in friendship. I provided an example of responding to a call.

And I did learn something about the life of another person and so I speak for Frederick Cletus Cutis III. In speaking for Freddy I would highlight several attributes; I'll leave it for you to decide if these are characteristics to be admired, despised, just descriptors, or as I conclude best practiced in moderation.

Freddy would not be confined. He loved to explore and was most comfortable outdoors and on his own. He was a man of "coulds" – of possibilities - not "shoulds."

He was generous. If he had enough he would share what he had.

He was hospitable and approachable. He welcomed strangers, extended friendship to many who needed a friend, and helped build community in many difficult settings.

He lived in the moment and could be content with what he had. This serendipity was arguably the source of his greatest joys and his most significant grief.

Freddy was an addict who lived most of his life taking advantage of the generosity of others or dependent on the social safety net. But he was also a child of God who understood his dependence on God's grace and love. He was an example of resilience and showed me how to be content with few possessions. He taught me how to reach out to others and to see that kindness can be displayed in any setting. And so gentlemen I speak for Freddy J, a man who became my friend and helped me to understand the worth of every individual.

Thank you.

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