

BASKETBALL COURT, BUTTERSWORTH PARK, SOUTH FRAMINGHAM
SOME TIME NEAR THE PRESENT

"How'd you find me, Carl?"

We're standing 8 feet apart near the foul line of the south-facing basket. At the other end, a half-court two on two is ongoing.

"I looked you up on the computer, I saw a picture, I knew it was you."

He's still thin, almost skeletal, either bald or sporting a shaved head. His facial scarring still as prominent now as it was four decades ago.

"Take a shot Mr. Cuddy."

"I don't think I could throw the ball in the ocean. I'm cradling it on my left hip. It feels like a foreign object."

"You shoot, I'll rebound."

"Why, Carl?"

He's a lot better at eye contact and instead of dropping his head to his chest, simply averts my gaze.

"I need help, Mr. Cuddy. I don't want to go back inside. I need a place to live, you know, I need a job. I took the train here."

"Can you help me?"

"Try Jim, if I'm figuring correctly, you're 62, which makes me even older. Come on, let's go sit down over there," pointing to the benches sitting about 25 feet off the court.

"You remember Jeff from our team," Carl shakes his head.

"A while ago, I asked him if he knew what happened to you and he told me that you were in jail and wouldn't be getting out any time soon."

Carl simply nods and then blurts out, "I taught myself to read there."

"You want to talk about it? What did you do? How did you get out?"

He's silent for a minute and then launches into an explanation of how he turned himself around, taught himself to read and use a computer, and what happened when he went before the Parole Board.

He's stumbling around with words, so I interject, "Hey Carl, if I'm not mistaken, that sounds an awful lot like Morgan Freeman's speech in *The Shawshank Redemption*."

A slight smile passes across his face, only to vanish quickly. It's the first time I've ever seen him smile. He simply says, "Mr. Cuddy, I don't want to go back."

"Come on, Carl, let's walk back to my office. There's a couple of people I want to introduce you to."

We're about halfway back there when Carl breaks the silence, "Hey Mr. Cuddy, you remember Kenny Thomas?"

"Yeah, of course, why?"

"I knew him inside. We talked about you one day. He told me how much you loved basketball. He also told me you were getting ready to go into the Army and you were nervous. How come you never told me about that?"

"It wasn't something I talked about much then, Carl, with anyone."

Another silence falls between us, which Carl breaks again. "Hey, Mr. Cuddy, how come you don't work with kids any more?"

Now it's my turn to be silent and to put my head down. "It's a long story, Carl. You remember what I was doing back then, talking to you and a whole bunch of other people about how bad the Center was? While I tried to change it, it didn't go great."

Every time I thought about it, I would start crying. I had to find something else to do.

I wonder if I've given Carl too much information, so I switch the subject.

"Carl, I'm going to introduce you to two people. I'm going to introduce you to Darlene. She's going to find you a place to live. She's the best. Then, after you talk to Darlene, I'm going to introduce you to David. Can you do maintenance work? You got enough energy?" Carl just nods.

As we walk through the café doors and head to Darlene's office, I simply say, "I'm really glad you tracked me down, Carl. This is gonna work. I just know it."