“He was alone into his distance
He was deep into his well”
- Jackson Browne. Song for Adam

Pulling into a parking space in front of M/S cottage, I notice a young boy sitting on the curbstone, head down, intently playing with what looked like some loose stones. “Hmmm. I think I’ll go over and say hello.”

I’d just returned from a lemonade run with Kevin J., a teenager who’d been in Walter’s caseload. Kevin had been around CWS and the Children’s Center for a long time. Most adults found him challenging due to his well-documented “emotional problems.” So far I’d found him both engaging and amusing, easy to relate to one on one, especially on trips off the Center grounds like our just completed lemonade excursion.

Kevin sauntered off. I walked over to the kid and opened my mouth.

“Hey my man, what’s up? What are you doing?” His head stayed down. He ignored me.

I heard Alice’s voice in my ear. “Jim, think of what you look like to that young boy. You’re towering over him. A giant. Get on his level so he doesn’t have to look up to see you.” Alice was a strict Freudian going as far as referring to the good doctor as “Pappa Freud,” but occasionally she made use of his disciples, in this case Adler, when making a teaching point.

‘Plop,’ lowering myself to the ground, sitting on the curb about 2 feet away, I tried again. “Hey my man. Whatcha’ doing?” After a pause he looked up. Big brown eyes, brown hair, bangs falling to an inch above his eyebrows and a gap between his two
front teeth you could drive a motorcycle through. His eyes caught mine for a moment.

“Hey, my name is Jim. What’s yours?” Silence.

“Where do you live? What cottage my man?”

He offered a shy smile and pointed behind him. M/S, I figured, no surprise. With that, the conversation was over. He returned to fooling with his stones.

I’m thinking “Whoever he is, he’s got my interest.”

Albert L., age 6, had just returned to the Children’s Center after his third failed foster home placement. His worker, Donna Gunning, who had grown up two streets over from me and was a few years younger, had joined CWS while I was in grad school. Donna felt that a stabilizing period at the Children’s Center would be helpful for Albert. His last foster placement had gone bad, fairly quickly.

Donna liked the idea of me working with him. “I think it’ll be good for him to have a male worker Jim. I think he’s a really angry kid who doesn’t know how to express himself in a way that doesn’t have people running away. I’ve enrolled him at Henry Barnard.” (the lab grade school on the grounds of RIC). You’ll need to monitor that. I’m a bit worried about his ability to succeed there, but I wanted to avoid using Home School.”

I talked to Bill and arranged for Albert to be transferred into my caseload.

This first encounter with Albert marked the beginning of my crusade.