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