

THERE'S THE RUB

(Chapter Eleven)

As I reflect on my recent as well as distant past I can't believe how far I have come. So, I can certainly appreciate when someone else has made that same journey. It's a testament to the very hard work one must do to change their self-awareness. One such person is "Woody".

Woody grew up in a nice quiet town with his older sister, mom, and dad. Both his parents worked but it was his mom who always made home feel like a good loving place to be. One of the values his parents instilled in him was that he had to earn what he wanted in life. So, at the age of nine he began mowing lawns and rough landscaping to earn a few dollars. His dad was a stern man who didn't bend on how things were to be done, while his mom was just the opposite. Needless to say, most of his days had both ups and downs.

When he turned ten his parents confronted him with a truth that would both shock him and change his life forever, they told him he was adopted. Sadly, the hurt he felt manifested into anger and stayed with him right up to the night he committed the terrible crime. "When I was 26 years old I did the worst act of violence that a person could ever do," he explained, "I am so very ashamed that I took my girlfriend's God-given life. I was a selfish person who committed a very selfish crime."

From the first day of his sentencing he blamed everything and everyone else for his crime. For ten years he continued to live life as an angry person with a lot of unresolved issues. Until he finally decided to look at himself and "drop the denial crap".

"I knew that I needed to do a lot of inner work," he said, "Once I became honest with myself I began to open my mind to programs, church and therapy. I now have a much better rational belief system that translates into a non-violent thought process. I've had to do a lot of inner work but I now talk with other people instead of holding onto it and getting angry."

Woody's dad was an educated man and his family stood for getting all the education that he could in life. "I always had a good work ethic," explained Woody, "and that worked well for me." So, it is certainly no surprise to anyone who knows him that he has become a mainstay in practically every single program offered at MCI Shirley. Everything from Operational Safety Health Act (O.S.H.A.) training to A.I.D.'s Awareness. From Anger Management programs to Christian based programs like Residents Encounter Christ (REC). All told his institutional programming participation spans over 35+ programs including two programs started by him and co-facilitated by him. These programs afford him an opportunity to give back by helping others learn how to better themselves and stay out of prison.

However, it's his role in the Companion program that has allowed him to experience a restorative-life. His role is to, in effect, assist the Certified Nurses Assistant (CNA) in the Skilled Nursing Facility and Assisted Daily Living Units. "It's a great way to help care for human beings," he explained, "who need to be genuinely taken care of."

I really love the way this program offers me the ongoing opportunity to preserve the dignity of these sometimes forgotten men. The men [who live in these units] are worthy of proper treatment and consideration on every level. It is essential to treat these men with true compassion, empathy, understanding, kindness, love, respect and patience for me. This is all about giving NOT TAKING!

Some of these men do not have any support from their family or friends. We become their support system! After awhile we earn the trust of these men and there is no room for taking advantage of their trust."

In the past many companions have taken advantage of the patients but recently more men like Woody have slowly integrated into the Companion Program making their roles a strength rather than a liability.

Five days a week Woody cares for over 15 men and goes above and beyond what is expected of him. He summed it up best when he said, "we all become better people as we work together for the good of human kind. When there is good being done, then there is good happening."

And there's the rub in spite of all the personal pain it can be overcome by helping others overcome their pain.