

HOME IS WHERE THEY TAKE YOU  
WHEN YOU HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO

It didn't really matter whether their warrants were good...the explosives, weapons, and exotic collection of drugs they found made headlines. Into the breach stepped my mom, the only one who'd stand by me. With the aid of considerable political leverage and a bond restraining me from alcohol and drugs, I was remanded to her custody so we could save the farm.

She hired a tough manager to get the "crops in and creeps out" before my institutional time began. Hasty plans were laid to study my behavior in a "drug free environment," and so came my meeting with you in the asylum as I awaited my dole of justice like a refugee in a chowline.

The love and concern of my family was hard to accept after twenty years. Long nights beneath those towering mountains gave me time to take my journey apart, but it was impossible to cure the grave anxiety following me from birth. Into the second month of isolation, severe paranoia set me thinking my parents were part of some conspiracy to keep me there forever. Then came my messenger...

He was worn by his passage through life more than its elements. Around his aloha shirt collar was the clerical band of a priest, yet his downtrodden stoop and befuddled manner made him seem like Charlie Chaplin. I knew he was the one...a cross between Saint Francis of Assisi, Father Damien of Molokai, and Zorba the Greek.

"You don't remember me, son? Is it too far back now?" He smiled with an almost familiar grin.

I tried to look away, even turning around to see if he was looking at someone behind me, but the beacon of his concern shown from a few feet away. He'd missed a few spots shaving, seemingly several days in a row, for his whiskers were of different lengths, and when he spoke he made reference to his demeanor so as to dismiss such thoughts, and take notice of who he was.

"My name is Father Du Tiel, and I'm an alcoholic," he said, without the least diminishment of his twinkling eyes. "You may recall when you were nine, and I still had my flock to care for at Saint Christopher's? I remember when you crashed your bicycle coming in late, and left the church because the congregation laughed at you. Well, I had to leave for other reasons. My work is with the street people now and, at times, someone like you."

I looked around again. This strange, old man was making me squirm on my chair. What could I say? It occurred my mom had put him up to this, and I asked him if this was so. Sure, he said he was a friend of the family, but had a

special interest in me because he was a member of a fellowship I should know about, and he told me about his life in Alcoholics Anonymous.

"But I'm not an alcoholic, Father," I blurted out. "I'm hanging off the edge on some of the strangest drugs you can imagine...alcohol seems like nothing to me."

"I've been told of your blackout drinking and violence, and a little about the case they're building against you. It seems to me, beyond your self-important research, that you're just another alcoholic like me. If you can look at the truth, I might come see you again. In the meantime don't give me any shit...I've heard it all before."

Whoa, so ended my first recognition of truth in action, and my first halting steps on the long path of what would turn out a temporary recovery. I did hear him say I'd lost the right to drink...along with the privilege to abuse just about everything else in life, for my obsessive nature seemed driven to do only that with whatever it got hold of.

In the lonely incarceration ahead, I would consider his message often, and coming so blatantly from such a pure source, it began to register. Maybe drugs and alcohol were the problem. Somewhere out there, groups with similar histories were meeting in a fellowship he said had taken him in when he'd lost all hope. As far gone as I considered myself, he just grinned when I wondered if they'd have me. It was simpler than that, he said. "Would I have myself?"

My family visited their basketcase in the nuthouse, displaying a unified strength of spirit to even go to such an embarrassing place. I was struck by their loyalty enough to confide I was going to recover by virtue of ceasing substance abuse. The law, waiting outside like a shark for me, would have to come second. I became engrossed in recovery, not even interested in my defense.

It didn't matter if I was given thirty years to unravel this, did it? I read the big book of AA, and wondered all along what it would be like to get out some day and go to a meeting.