

It was St. Valentine's Youth Retreat. College and Career kids from all over the province were arriving in the dining hall to be registered. The big round tables, loaded with stacks of rice-crispy cake and pitchers of hot chocolate, were slowly being crowded with energetic rowdy kids. I sat in front of the huge fireplace which had been stacked with three foot poplar logs. Over 100 kids were expected. The noise would soon be deafening but pleasurable. Bright, vibrant, happy, healthy kids are always a delight - provided they don't stay too long. Most were students at a University or Bible College; some were working, but all appeared to be accomplisners. There was friendly jostling, practical pranks, teasing and tugging, horse-play and hugging. Many had been my campers previously at various retreats. "You don't remember me Henry? I was your favorite camper eight years ago." How fast they change in a few short years! They had just been boys and girls a few summers ago - now young men and women.

There was a gradual crescendo in noise level as tables filled up and each one out-shouted his neighbor. When the din was at its climax, a sudden and unexpected dramatic hush cut my conversation with those around me. All eyes turned to the door and stared as Terri came in to register. It took some will-power not to stare. My heart went out to her. She was simply not a lovely girl. She had so many strikes against her. She was immensely overweight and swayed from side to side as she walked - throwing her massiveness from one side, then to the other as she labored toward

the registration table. "Poor girl," I thought to myself. "She must have been the target of many a crude and vulgar joke. Kids (and adults) can be so unintentionally cruel sometimes."

"A friend is one who knows all about you, and loves you anyway. I would like to be that kind of a friend to you. Will you permit?"

As usual, Friday night was a "get-acquainted night". Crazy games, lots of impromptu skits and lively boisterous singing put everybody in the right mood. To end the evening, the speaker was scheduled to throw a wet towel in the merry-making with a brief devotional. Accordingly, the week-end retreat was kicked-off to a good success.

Saturday night has got to be a roaring good time at every college/career retreat, otherwise consider the week-end a failure. Everybody there was expected to have a talent to contribute. There were trombones, trumpets, violins, flutes - almost every instrument of an orchestra, including a percussionist. There were piles of guitars - whoever heard of a retreat without guitars! A singing group from Steinbach Bible College arrived to put the icing on the whole evening - an extraordinary sensation. Finally, to conclude the evening, I was scheduled to speak on "whatever I would like to speak on." After that it was refreshments and "go to your cabins - lights out in 30

minutes."

I slept soundly . . . but not for long. It was after 1 AM when I awoke, and I was wide awake. I was finished sleeping. I turned on the light. What better time to prepare for a Sunday morning message! To my dismay, I had left my Bible in the chapel. How neglectful. No Bible. I needed my Bible. My outline was in my Bible. I needed my outline. After a bit of a struggle to brave the cold and wind, I pulled my pants over my pyjamas, zipped up my parka and set out across the campus. It was dark, but snow outlined the path and I got to the chapel. Luckily, it was unlocked. I walked in. There, silhouetted in the darkness, sat Terri. She never stirred, nor did she speak. Like a sphinx, she sat, motionless and quiet - just staring into space. "Oh, oh," a thought flashed into my mind, "Might she be the reason I woke up at this unearthly hour and forgot my Bible as well?" I went and sat beside her. "Terri, any girl who sits here all by herself in the middle of the night, needs a friend. May I be your friend? A friend is one who knows all about you, and loves you anyway. I would like to be that kind of a friend to you. Will you permit?" Only after considerable repeated coaxing did she respond. Her response tore me to pieces.

She stood up, stepped in front of me, turned, and faced me. She was so massive, with an equal amount of bitterness as I was to discover. "You ask me what's wrong," she exploded, "Just look at me. All my life I've been taunted and mocked and jeered and ridiculed and tormented by kids and teachers, brothers and sisters, nephews and

nieces - and you ask me what's wrong. Tonight you said we all should set goals and use our gifts, and . . . and you want to know something, I don't have a gift. I can't sing a note, I was a wash-out at school, I couldn't do sports, I couldn't do music, I couldn't do academics, there wasn't anything I could do. I was never welcome, always an annoyance, an inconvenience and an embarrassment. I despise the church, I loathe my home, I hate everybody's hypocrisy and most of all I hate myself. No one wants anything to do with me - nobody, I mean nobody would ever want to be a real genuine friend to me. I'm a mistake. As a matter-of-fact, my parents would rejoice if I disappeared. You ask me what's wrong? I was born, that's what's wrong."

"Chosen before the foundation of the world was laid, Paul lists the blessings that the Lord has lavished upon his children, that we might be (Eph. 2:10)

"His Masterpieces, for tasks that he prepared beforehand for us to do in the lives of others."

How does one reply to a girl like this? I'm so grateful that the Lord has given us the scriptures. They are the foundation on which one can safely build and find hope and purpose and give encouragement and strength. They point

to the one who has the answers. I wouldn't even attempt to give counsel based on any other premise. It would amount to so much meaningless conversation. It was too dark to read my Bible, so I quoted Eph. 1: verses 4,5,6 etc. Chosen before the foundation of the world was laid, - Paul lists the blessings that the Lord has lavished upon his children, that we might be (chapter 2:10) "His Masterpieces, for tasks that he prepared beforehand for us to do in the lives of others." "Terri, you and I were on God's drawing board long before our genes and chromosomes ever came together. We are not mistakes, nor are we accidents. We are preordained by God Himself for preordained tasks." The words spoken in that dark and empty chapel sounded hollow even to me. Terri and I shared for some time. We prayed and we cried, we prayed some more and cried some more, but finally we concluded and she went off to her cabin.

One dozen years later, I was speaking at a retreat in the USA. My seminar was one of three being conducted simultaneously. I was told by the kids in my class that one of the other seminars was being taught by a huge lady. She was absolutely dynamic on Outdoor/Survival Camping. Her classes were overfull. All day Saturday I heard about this huge lady, whose vitality and vivacious exuberant teaching was captivating the whole student body. She was the theme of every conversation. "She's something else Mr. Unruh - kids say they have never experienced a teacher so professional in her field and such a pile of fun. She's sure sold them on her field of study."

I was to meet this lady Sunday at the wind-up dinner and was transfixed when I saw her. When she saw me, she came and wrapped her arms around me and buried me. Those who watched said I momentarily disappeared. I also discovered that a sealy posturepedic is not the softest thing on the face of this earth.

"So you remember me Henry?" It was Terri. "How could I not remember you? What in the world has happened to you Terri?" "Well, look at me. Don't you remember what you said, that 'I was a masterpiece, preordained for special tasks, . . . and having received a special gift, I should employ it in the lives of others as a good steward of the manifold grace of God.' I am a masterpiece. That's what you preached, and you did indeed get that right out of the Bible - I looked it up. I have proven the truth of those scriptures. They are absolutely true and they have been the strength and power of all my goal-setting and aspirations. Come, I'll show you some of the courses I have written. My expertise is Outdoor/Survival Camping. My schedule is jam-packed for the next three years. Even the military is using my material."

"By the way Henry, I'm so glad you came to the chapel that night." . . . I'll confess to you, I was thinking some pretty ugly black thoughts. I was engineering a way by which I would remedy all my problems once and forever. And then you opened the door and told me I was chosen of God - not a mistake, not an accident, but a Masterpiece with special gifts. I sure didn't buy that at the time, but the

scriptures you quoted invaded my heart and mind. God's Word sure is the best solution to all our problems! Its been the focus of my life ever since. I graduated from Indiana State with a Masters in Phys Ed., but knowing the Lord, is what makes me a Masterpiece. There is no greater joy in all this world, than to discover that one can be a blessing in someone else's life. That week-end was God's perfect timing for me. Thanks for being my friend that night."

And she buried me again.

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as told by Henry Unruh
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