



REFLECTIONS

November 7, 2010

**And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor
as yourself.'**

Matthew 22:39

Picking up Butch

Sounds from the stadium echoed the chant, “Butch! Butch! Butch!” The game was underway and the chant added spirit to it. It was a part of a tradition unique to Middlebury College.

Butch Varno is the number one fan of Middlebury College athletics. He has attended every home game for more than fifty years—but he always needs help to get there. Cerebral palsy has confined him to a wheelchair most of his life. He can’t do very much on his own with his hands cramped closed, his wrists curled down, and his arms drawn to his chest. He has neither the stability in his body or the strength in his legs to stand on his own, but there is nothing unsteady in his mind and no weakness in his heart. Nor does his disability dampen his passion for sports he could never play, the college he never attended, or the players who never forget him. And the players share a passion for Butch too. His presence at every home game is an inspiration to them. That’s why every game is preceded by the tradition of picking up Butch.

It all began on a cold snowy day when a student athlete saw an ageing grandmother struggling to maneuver the wheelchair of a helpless young man. The student stopped, helped them into his car, and drove them to their home. And there was something about his deed that made the student feel good. So he returned to visit them, and as his relationship with Butch grew, he offered to take Butch to the games. The goodwill gesture became a life lesson for the student and from it the tradition was born.

Today, picking up Butch is an important part of every game day at Middlebury College. Before each game, players come to the place where Butch lives, load him into a large van, and drive him to the game. Picking up Butch is a privilege for the players because everyone loves Butch and Butch loves all of them. “They love me and I love the guys,” Butch says of it all. It is unclear who loves whom the most.

Butch Varno can’t look after himself, but he is an inspiration to the entire student body of Middlebury College; and they are an inspiration to him. One cold snowy day an act of compassion warmed the heart of a student and inspired the life of a disabled boy. Today that simple act lives on as a tradition that warms the hearts of Middlebury students and thousands of other lives inspired by it. God works that way.

Through small acts of love, He does great things. With his love *for* us God changes our lives. And with his love *through* us, He changes the world.

“You are the light of the world.”

Richard +

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Your comments are welcomed and encouraged. Richard may be reached at richard@reflectingthesavior.org.