



REFLECTIONS

February 21, 2010

fearfully and wonderfully made;

Psalms 139:14

The Person Behind the Beard

Joe sat at his desk and told us his story. He explained that he had once been a family man with a business of his own. It was only a small restaurant, but it provided for his family and he took pride in his work. Then a violent car crash brought an end to it all. Joe's life would never be the same.

We stood looking down at Joe as he continued to describe how he lost his legs in the accident and how pain medication took control of his life. He became bitter about his misfortune and he took his anger out on his family. When they could take no more, they left him.

With no means of support and no one to care for him, Joe took up residence under an urban street bridge. He located in its darkest place in hopes that no one would find him. He wanted to be left alone in his suffering. His bitterness toward the world brought intense anger. He resented those whose lives were better. Even those living under the bridge with him could at least walk into the sunshine.

In his reclusiveness, he seldom bathed and he never shaved. He lived in the stench of unwashed clothes and behind a beard that masked his anger with life. But he was unable to escape the caring spirit of a young woman who had once lived under the bridge herself. Her compassion for the homeless allowed her to reach beyond his stench to find there was a person behind the beard.

Time and again she tried to coax Joe from his place under the bridge. Time and time again he refused. Then after two years of pleading, Joe finally consented. If someone cared for him, maybe he should care too. He began rehabilitation, his spirit returned, and so did his hope—hope for a meaningful life and hope to walk again.

As Joe concluded his story, a twinkle began to dance in his eye and a sly grin came over his face. He rose from his chair and we saw a man standing tall, and proud, and strong. His eyes never left us as he walked about the room to show off his new legs. Even an unsteady gait did not diminish his confidence.

Joe had risen from the depths of despair. He had a job, he had a home, and he could walk again. Someone had taken the time to search for the person hidden behind the beard. And they found a man damaged by the trials of life; but beyond the damage was a person—one of God's precious children, fearfully and wonderfully made.

"You are the light of the world."

Richard +

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