



Thursday Memo – November 6, 2014

5:28

I had promised Carol “my butt would be on the way home at 5:30” and at 5:28 I was warming my truck and preparing to drive through a cold torrential fall downpour. That’s when I saw him. He was pretty unsteady (very drunk), leaning against the parking lot fence; soaking wet and holding onto a bike that seemed to function more as a 2 wheeled walker than a mode of transportation. “Crap” I thought. Crap, he’s soaked; Crap, I’m soon going to be; crap on my plan to make dinner; and crap for my being selfish enough to feel happy when he regained momentum and started wheeling his bike to the Queen Street shelter. He made it 30 feet before tumbling into the grass adjacent to the lot, and he wasn’t moving.

I got out the truck, but by the time I reached him, he was already being attended by a medical assistant and her boyfriend. “I made him stop” she added. Then another familiar face appeared to help: Harmony Caton from the Family Health Center. I didn’t know her but I recognized her face from the recent department dinner. She saw him go down and stopped her car to help. I would later learn that when she lived in Boston, Harmony would routinely check on the wellbeing of street homeless who found themselves in a similar position. A Doc after my own heart.

We loaded his bike into the back and helped him into the truck. “Who are you?” he asked. “Erik Garcia.” “You Spanish?” he asked. “My Dad is” I said. I learned his name was Dennis. I unloaded his bike with the help of Mr H., a patient I know who struggles with dual diagnoses, and as we wheeled his bike to the shelter, our path was blocked by his slightly less inebriated brother, who (like any good comic team) asked me “who are you?” “Dr Garcia” “Ohhhh, I have to see you... You Spanish?” The Marx brothers would have been proud.

Most nights I take something home with me: some lesson or observation or feeling and, when I have the choice, I try to keep it positive so I can sleep. This night I watched a homeless man quietly fall to the cold soaking wet ground and be lifted by a small community of caring. I watched a doc in our department stop her car and jump out to check on a stranger. And, despite a cold, wet butt, I was warmed and arrived home in time to make dinner.