

## Wayfarers' House Doings . . .

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this problem? We analyze and introspect. Most of us already know the answer; some we can control, others not. What is more fun, but sometimes harder to do is to look at those examples of a life well lived. We often talk about women like Maya Angelo, Dorothy Day, Alice Walker, Mother Theresa, Jane Addams, and Oprah Winfrey, to mention a

few examples of strength and courage. There's a song we sometimes listen to that encourages us to watch for and cherish those "changes" that are good, those little acts of kindness that warm our hearts and lift us up to be our best.

*Something changes in me when I witness someone's courage; They may not know I'm watching and I may not let them know.*

## It Began with Blackbirds . . .

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A social worker in suburban Baltimore had referred the Gordons to Meeting Ground, and they arrived with lots of expectation, yet not knowing what to expect. To his last day, Bobby spoke of the feeling he had that first night, to stretch out on a real bed and extend his legs and arms in great relief and with a heavy sense of release and gratitude.

We quickly learned that Bobby was not the type of person to passively take from others, even in his family's desperate crisis. From the beginning he energetically and enthusiastically offered his help, wherever he could, and immediately reached out to his fellow residents to see how he could assist them. In this way he began his journey from a homeless person seeking help, to a self-structured volunteer, to an official volunteer, and finally to be employed as the Program Coordinator for Clairvaux Farm.

Bobby was born and raised in New York City, on Manhattan's lower west side in the area known as "Hell's Kitchen." His parents were first generation Italian immigrants. He spoke fluent German and Hebrew, and from his humble beginnings in a crowded ethnic neighborhood he developed a deep concern for persons in crisis and families living in poverty.

He had a particular love for music, especially opera, and all 20th Century popular music. As a young man, he considered becoming a professional comedian, and actually did stand-up comedy for two years. He used his flair for humor wisely and well in his rela-

tionships and work with and among persons in difficult circumstances. He is remembered for his unfailing good nature and his ability always to make people laugh, even in tough situations. At any time during the day, and usually without warning, he would start to sing in a hearty voice, spreading cheer and optimism to everyone. He communicated well with persons of all ages and backgrounds, and took particular interest in providing counsel and direction for troubled youth.

Bobby's remarkable gift to our community was himself – his whole self. The power of his gift came home to me in an amazing conversation I had with a homeless woman who had been a new resident at the Farm for three days. Shaking her head and diverting her eyes, she confessed in utter astonishment her surprise and shock to learn that Bobby was blind. "I have been talking with him for three days," she said, "he was such an intent and devoted listener that I just assumed he could see. I just knew he could see me!"

Bobby spoke to everyone, and knew everyone. Yet, there was never a doubt that the most important person in the world was the one to whom he was speaking at the moment. That was the feeling he always communicated. So many times I could hear his conversation in another room as he answered phone calls. (Bobby was a master of the telephone...) When it was a homeless person calling for assistance, I could always tell from the kind and generous manner of the conversation. As soon as he grasped the person's situation, he would always say,

*But something changes in me that will last me for a lifetime,  
To fill me when I'm empty and rock me when I'm old.*

*Chorus: There's a change of heart any time there's someone counting  
All the lives that won't be thrown away.*

*There's a change of heart any time you join the choir;*

*Be a voice upon the mountain or*

*see a fire in the rain.*

*Something changes in me any time there's someone singing  
All the songs I've never forgotten;  
let our voices sing them strong.*

*Something changes in me any time there's someone standing  
For the right to be completely all the good things that we are.*



Bobby clowns with former interns Mike and Jen

with unmistakable clarity, "The first thing I want you to do is to relax and feel secure. You have a place now, and friends to help you, and you're not alone any more." Many a time I quietly raised a prayer of thanks to God for the heart and soul of this man.

When I would get discouraged, it was never long before Bobby could tell. He would wait for his chance to get me alone, and then begin an impassioned lecture on the importance of Meeting Ground and the community life. He had an instinctive understanding of what we are about, not only at Meeting Ground, but of the journey and struggle of persons everywhere seeking the faith of the further shore. "What does a homeless person want?" he would say, "They want what you and I want, what we all want – to have their dignity and self-respect and to be loved."

On that Fall evening in 1999, when the blackbirds parted, none

of us could then have imagined the significance of this portent. Bobby's life, and that of his family, was changed forever, but so was our community life at Meeting Ground – we have never been the same since. If it was a new beginning for Bobby, it certainly was one for the rest of us. He unceasingly badgered us to "come home again," as he had. He implored us never to forget the first love of our community, and the extraordinary power that should always be at its center.

And mostly, he reminded us without any words, always in the most gentle fashion, that we draw our greatest strength from the spirit of the One who lives in and with us. Meeting Ground's call to welcome homeless persons is not our burden, rather – it is our source. From such as these, as if freshly arrived each day, the One among us – maker of all – rekindles the knowledge of who we are, and what we surely can become.