

To: Spring 2020 Restorative Justice Group #32

Title: *His Name Was Larry*

Hello to Fox Lake Readers,

When I retired from the church where I was a pastor years ago, quite honestly, I never ever could picture myself quarantined for months due to a worldwide pandemic. Life still holds surprises, doesn't it? Some are welcomed and some are really..... hard.

I want to begin with a story that I have shared before in prisons (and even in a church sermon.)

It's about a man.

His name was Larry.

Dear Larry. He was 33 years old. A war-vet and now sometimes truck driver. When we meet him, he is living with his girlfriend and hanging out with his friends. His life from the outside looks everyday normal like thousands of other lives.

Yet inside for Larry, there was a gnawing question,

“Is this all there is?”

You see, Larry wanted to fly. He had wanted to fly since he was a little boy. But wherever and whenever he explored the possibility, there was a wall.

1. A wall of being too young
2. A wall of poor eyesight
3. A wall of being too poor
4. A wall of his work schedule hours
5. A wall of family not giving him loans
6. Walls, walls and more walls everywhere

So, there the dreams sat.

And there, Larry sat. In his lawn chair, evening after evening, with a beer in his hand, watching planes soar over him.

One day, Larry hooked up his chair to 45 helium-filled surplus weather balloons. He put a parachute on his back as well as a portable C.B. radio. On the arms of the chair he tied a six-pack of beer and some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and across his lap a BB gun so he could pop some of the balloons to come down.

As his two friends helped him up the roof of his girlfriend's house, the lines holding him in place were accidentally cut by sharp edges of the roof and before his friends could stop him,

Larry shot into space.

And I mean shot! Like a rocket while his two friends stood by horrified.

Was it all he expected? NO! Larry expected to hover just above the treetops. Not thousands of feet up. He had planned to head east for the Mojave Desert.

Not over Los Angeles and its international airport.

Then, not west over the ocean.

Later, when he did come down, many were surprised that he was still alive.

Had he been terrified? Totally.

The oxygen was thin.

The air was cold.

And the commercial jet coming in for a landing was huge!

When asked if he was glad he did it? "Oh yes, absolutely."

When asked if he would do it again. Larry said "NO." A lot of fame came his way.

But the F.A.A. was not happy. Many laws and regulations were broken that day. One law was you may only fly in air-worthy vehicles and no one had ever bothered to test lawn chairs.

Life for Larry was never the same again.

He never saw the world the same again.

And never seeing the world the same again happens to those who are fortunate and privileged to attend opportunities like Odyssey and Restorative Justice.

The human race sits in its lawn chairs

Some people say, "There is nothing more I can do. I am who I am. I am who they say I am. I am my number. I am all my mistakes. I will never be different. My life will always be the same."

But there are those Larrys in the world who ask, "**What can I do differently than what I am doing now?**"

"WHAT IF I BOUGHT SOME BALLOONS?"

The human race sits in its lawn chairs.

On one hand is the message that the human race is hopeless. "Even if I get out of here, the jobs are not there. Who will hire me and give me one chance?"

Then there are the Larrys of the world who begin to busy themselves reading maps, picking wind directions and thinking about what kind of sandwiches they want for the adventure.

We who write to you from the outside communities know all too well about walls. We have our own walls too high or too wide.

Walls of self-doubt.

Walls of addiction.

Walls of poor choices.

Walls of unraveling family life.

Walls of disabling illnesses.

“You’re crazy!” They mock you when you tell your backyard dreams of flying. “You can’t do that.”

Then there are the Larrys of the world. Restless. Surprised. Scared. Grateful. So glad they took a chance.

Find your own flying lessons. Learn how to buckle up for safety. And breathe deeply when the air gets thin.

If lucky enough, we have the chance to be silly and laugh together with deep joy of the moment. (Larry was given an honor shortly after his flight. He was named “Bonehead of the Year” by the Dallas chapter of Boneheads.)

May all of us continue to dream. Then when the time is right, let’s make those plans to soar.

It’s the spirit that counts. The time may be long. The vehicle may be strange or unexpected. But if our dreams are held close to our hearts and imagination is applied to what is close at hand, everything is possible.

Somewhere, somehow, there can be found in a little garage a dreamer with a gleam in her eye as she is.... scarfing down vitamins and mineral supplements while practicing the flapping of her arms, “I can fly... I can fly... I can fly.”

(Larry in his lawn chair is true story as reported in newspapers across the nation in 1982.)

~ Rev D. Shaw, Restorative Justice volunteer