

Click

Category: Connections

written by Sandra Relyea | February 1, 2024

He shunned the sunshine. He also refused to come into the mobile medical van where we saw patients. He'd been sitting on the curb, across the street from the van, in the shade, every day for a week. The van's male physician and nurse had been unable to entice him to step into the van for an exam, to talk with them, or to accept anything from them. Maybe a woman would have more luck? So I went over to him.

As I approached, he appeared to be wearing black leather pants, shoes without socks, and a filthy sweater. His black, unkempt hair hung in greasy strings and a few dreadlocks. His fingernails were overgrown and his hands were stained with grime, accentuating the cracks in his skin. I approached carefully. When it seemed I'd crossed a personal distance boundary, I took a step back and asked if I could sit on the curb near him. He looked at nothing in the distance and nodded.

He was thin and perhaps dehydrated. I offered up the granola bar I'd carried from the van. He eyed it hungrily but didn't reach out, so I set it on the curb between us. After introducing myself, I asked his name. "Click," he said. His side of the ensuing conversation was a bit of a word salad, but I gleaned that he had loose stools and itchy skin. He rolled up his pants leg to show me where he'd been scratching. I was startled to see that he was actually wearing a pair of tan cotton dress chinos. The pants were just so filthy they had appeared black from a distance.

I looked more closely and could see that his sweater was expensive wool. His shoes were leather loafers. All his clothes fit him well and, I suspected, were probably not from a shelter rack or a donation center.

When I asked where he was from, I think I could decode from his answer that he hailed from somewhere in the San Francisco Bay area—a three-and-a-half-hour drive away. That was all I was able to accomplish.

When I looked out the van window later, he was gone. The granola bar sat untouched on the curb. I wondered who he was and where he had been when he'd had his psychotic break. I wondered who out there, somewhere, was worried and looking for him.

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