



*Continuing a 7-part special by Richard F. Kontz on a Vietnam Vet he met while running the Bread of Life Christian Bookstore in 2015 through mid-2011.*

So, after that first initial contact with Don I knew the following things: A - He was a recovering alcoholic; B - He had previously worked in recovery ministry in Farmington for several years; C - He had been in prison; and D – He had been in military service.

You know when I used to travel a lot throughout the United States attending and speaking at various conferences related to mortgage financing and housing one thing I noticed is everyone tended to introduce themselves via “business cards”, and they always wanted to know who you worked for and what you did. Also, as a conference speaker you had to have an “outstanding resume” with a lot of “initials” like PHD, BA, MA, etc., behind your name. Most of the time I didn’t have business cards and I noticed that would really throw people off.

The only reason I point this out is we tend to rely on our “position, our titles, our status, and our “outstanding resumes” for our identity and if you don’t have those you are sometimes considered by people to be nothing.

What would Don’s Business Card status be? I mean what would his business card and resume say: Don Smith [not his real last name] - Title: Recovering Alcoholic - Prior work experience: Volunteer helper with street ministries; Veteran; and Convicted Criminal.

Over time Don would come in the store and look at different products and sometimes he would

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ask the sales clerks the cost of a bible [say a Thompson's Chain Reference Bible] and they would accommodate him and answer his question but really no one expected him to ever buy one [given of course his look, his dress and where he currently lived-NCI].

Also, I had more and more small talk with Don and I began to notice a change in Don and in myself. He cut his hair to a shorter length and kept it well groomed. He began to come in every now and then with slacks and a nice white shirt instead of faded jeans and a t-shirt. One day he walked in and purchased several tracks and other small ministry items and he put them in a brief case and as was normally the case he would say "Oh, Man I am late - I got to go – my appointment at the VA" and he would rush out. I noticed this time he looked at his watch when before he would always ask the time since he didn't have a watch.

With me, I must admit, I finally began to see him as "someone worth knowing". He still had a scary look about him, but he seemed "decent" now [Man, talk about how prejudice we can be based how someone dresses and/or looks].

Even the sales clerks began to say "you know he looks nice" not so much as a "hey I like him" but more as an "observation". He did look nice considering how he looked before. We had all seen the change and we grew to not worry about him being in the store and constantly watched.

So, one day he did come in the store and he did buy his \$85 Thompson's Chain Reference Bible and he was like a child who was looking at a "double scoop" Ice cream cone. He carefully placed it in his brief case and left the store.

One day it was about time for me to take a lunch break and he was in the store so I went up to him and said "Hey, Don, I got to go to lunch – you want to join me??" He looked at me with those "searching eyes", and then said "Well, Rich I would but I don't have any money". I said "Don I am inviting you to have lunch with me – my treat". He said "Okay, if you don't mind – I mean I know you have all these people [meaning the street people and the NCI clients] always hitting you up for money and a free lunch, I don't want be like that." Again, he looked at me with those "searching eyes". And, I said "Come on Don, I consider you to be my friend so let's go".

And, then we walked out of the store and walked to a nearby Restaurant. As we walked to the restaurant I realized something about Don – He "was" my friend and someone who I did want to

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spend time with and have lunch with. We had both come a long way in our relationship.

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