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40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

November 10, 2009

Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

Our newsletters for July and August featured submissions written by John Lusby, and entitled *"Today is the first day of the rest of your life,"* which detailed a recent illness and subsequent hospitalization and recovery. In late March, John had been taken by ambulance to University Hospital where he remained for the next two and half months, finally returning to Unity Acres in early June following a brief admission to Sunrise Nursing Home in Oswego. During his first four weeks at University, John faced multiple set-backs. For much of those weeks, he was unable to communicate, and seemed unaware of his surroundings. He stated later that he had been in a coma; and that his eventual recovery was a miracle.

In his submissions to the newsletter, John described his recovery and eventual return to Unity Acres. He promised as well to continue his story in an upcoming newsletter. Sadly, this is no longer possible. On October 1, John died quietly in his room. His body was discovered after supper: 911 was called, the state troopers responded as they do in cases of unattended deaths. It is left then to us to try to finish his story.

John had described his recovery as something miraculous: there was another miraculous circumstance that occurred during the weeks that he was hospitalized. John had not been in touch with his family for decades. When University Hospital needed to obtain authorization from next of kin to perform minor surgery, we had little information to provide, and feared that there would be no one to be found. The case was turned over to an investigator for the State Attorney-General's office. We were preparing at that moment for our big celebration of Unity Acres' 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary when the first phone calls were received: John's children had been found. They made the needed authorizations and arranged to travel to Syracuse to meet their father whom they had not seen in 35 years.

I do not know for sure if John was able to comprehend fully as we told him that his children were coming to see him that Sunday; moreover that they loved him and they wanted to know him. That already they were preparing to accept him into their lives once again, after a long absence.

John's daughter, Eileen, spoke on behalf of the family during the Mass of the Resurrection celebrated in our Sacred Heart Chapel:

*Pops, our journey to find you began many years ago when you went out to get a snickers bar ... for those many years we all did everything we could, trying to find out what became of our Dad ... After hearing many stories and coming close to finding you, we finally got the call from our local police station, saying you were in the hospital and that you were very ill... and in a coma for sometime ... When we first heard, none of us could believe it ... Could it be true? Could this man really be our dad? The man we have been looking for? Then we talked to folks at Unity Acres, who told us of a man we knew nothing about ... They sent us pictures of a man who looked familiar. We just knew it had to be the man we loved and missed for so many years ... So ... With much help from the Unity Acres family, we all packed up in our cars, and took our Journey to Syracuse, NY to see if after all this time our search for our dad could finally be over ... When we walked into the ICU and this man with a big white beard and tears in his eyes. We were speechless! We just knew ... this was our dad.*



John's children wanted to know more about his life, so we all headed north to the Acres, for lunch and a tour and to meet some of the staff and the men.

In the weeks and months that followed, John's children were able to travel from New England to see him at University Hospital and at Sunrise Nursing Home. John himself was able to travel to Connecticut to spend the week of Father's Day with his children and their families.

And in August, some of John's family were able to attend our Family Picnic.

*John and Father Jones at the Dedication of the Celtic Cross. 8.21.05*

*We are so blessed to have gotten to spend the time we did with you Pops ... In such a short time you filled a gap that we had been carrying around for so long ... We are so happy that we had the opportunity to get to know a happy and loving man, who has touched the hearts of so many people across the whole country through his stories and paintings ... Thank you for giving us a new extended family at Unity Acres.*

*Our search is over and we know you will be with us forever.*

*God Bless, Pops, and may you always paint a perfect picture in our hearts.*



On Tuesday, November 3, Laura received an urgent phone call informing us that Thomas “Whitey” Gravlin had been in the Canton-Potsdam Hospital for several weeks, and was gravely ill. We learned that he was unlikely to live out the day. After obtaining directions, Laura, Doug and Lou, headed north in order to make a last visit to their – our friend. It’s about a two-and-a-half hour trip from Orwell to Potsdam, but they were able to arrive in time to see Whitey still alive. As was feared, Whitey did not live out the day, passing away during the early evening. He was 59 years old.

Whitey had first come to Unity Acres in July 2002. During the next several years, he split his time between the Acres and Saint Lawrence County where his family lives, finally settling up north in May of this year.

During his time at the Acres, Whitey made many friends and was well-liked and respected by the staff and the men. While his health and strength last, he was willing to pitch into a variety of tasks around the Acres, and wanted to help out in whatever way he was able. He assisted in the care of the herd of cattle that we were raising here at the time, and helped in bringing in the hay from Saint Francis Farm. For a time he helped as well with the transporting our garbage and recyclables to the transfer station in Richland.

Whitey has already been memorialized in the landscape of Unity Acres. A few years ago, while hauling a heavy wagon-load of gravel, the brakes to the Case tractor that Whitey was driving failed, causing the tractor to crash into what has been known ever since as “Whitey’s Gulch”.

Whitey’s funeral was conducted up north, but his family wished for his body to be taken to our Saint Martin de Porres Cemetery for burial. He was laid to rest on Friday, November 6, in the presence of many friends and family members.

Early in the morning of Saturday, November 7, we received a phone call to inform us that another of our former residents, Mark Muniz had died suddenly. Mark had spent about seven weeks at the Acres between May and July of this year. He had been with us only a short time, but he proved to be willing to share his talents. He was known as “Mark the Mechanic”. At the time of his death the men were looking forward to his imminent return to Unity Acres as Mark had the intention of “setting up shop” and repairing their broken VCRs. Mark’s funeral will be celebrated later this week at the Acres.

*Please pray for the repose of the souls of these men, our friends. Rest in Peace, John, Whitey, Mark. May they be led by Holy Angels to a place of refreshment, light and peace. Amen.*

Stephen Dickhout

## November Prayer: All Saints, All Souls From death to life in God's Kingdom

"I saw a great multitude ... from every nation, race, people and tongue. They stood before the throne and the lamb." – *Rev. 7:9, Feast of All Saints*

"Remember, Lord, those who have died, especially those for whom we now pray: John, Whitey, Mark. May these, and all who sleep in Christ, find in Your presence, light happiness and peace." – *1<sup>st</sup> Eucharistic Prayer*

"Jesus answered, 'My Kingdom does not belong to this world. (If it did) My attendants would be fighting to keep Me from being handed over. ... But as it is, My Kingdom is not here.'" – *Jn 18: 36, Feast of Christ the King*

Eternal God, we thank You for Your word and presence, the graces You have given us. In all the Saints, named and not named, You give us inspiration and hope, to join them in being with You.

The Resurrection of Jesus, and the promise of our own, give us comfort as we mourn the "loss" of our loved ones who have died. We grieve – but "not as those who have no hope." (*1 Thess 4:13*)

When Jesus was falsely tried and sentenced to die on a cross, He said, "My Kingdom is not of this world." Lord Jesus, Your Kingdom is not of a world of: death, lies, division, sin and selfishness, injustice, hatred, war and violence. Rather, Your Kingdom is one of: "Truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love and peace." (*Preface Prayer, Feast of Christ the King*)

May we all be welcomed into this Kingdom, united with our loved ones and all the Saints, where You reign in glory. Amen.

Father Robert Jones