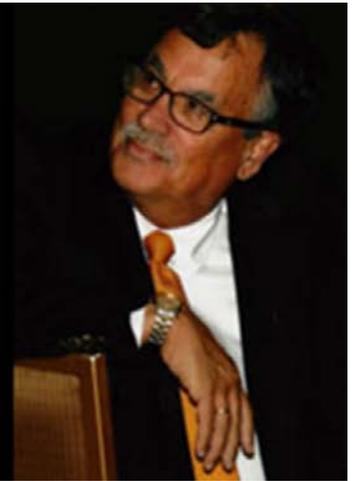


MY VIEW



Founder Wayne Fortin



AN UNLIKELY HERO

Perry has lived next door to my wife and I for about 15 years. During that time, we listened to Perry's parents talk about their struggles with their "developmentally disabled" son. And we could see for ourselves that something wasn't quite right with Perry. He was disheveled, he looked miserable and he was always alone. I'm embarrassed to say that I concluded we lived next to a young man who was condemned to living a lonely and difficult life, with no real hope of becoming a contributing member of the community.

A few months ago, I saw Perry (at least 7 years after I last saw him) who was working at a Ralph's grocery store. I didn't expect him to recognize me, but he did. He came up to me with a big smile, used my name and gave me a fist bump. He was beaming. He was obviously a very happy man. We talked for a while and Perry told me he loved his job (sweeping the floors and throwing out trash) and those he worked with. When I asked him if Ralph's paid well, he looked at me a bit befuddled and said *"I don't know what I get paid."*

As I drove home from Ralph's, I had tears in my eyes. After years of struggle Perry has found meaningful work (*"someone has to sweep the floors"* he said) and a group of coworkers who respect him. My wife who shops at the same Ralph's (and who tends to talk to everybody) told me that all of Perry's coworkers *"adore"* him. As an example, she recalled that a young cashier told her: *"Perry is my work boyfriend."*

Over the last few months Perry has become my Hero. Here is a man I was certain would never amount to anything who is now working in retail risking his health so the rest of us can eat. And he's the happiest guy I know.

But Perry is not only my hero because he works on the front lines during this pandemic, but also because of the person he has become. Over the last few months, I've gotten to know Perry. He is filled with gratitude and joy. He is a man who is humble, focused on others and resilient. Perry is still a little disheveled, and he's not very articulate. But for those of us who know him, those things are unimportant. What we see is a sweet, gentle, kind, and giving soul.

During this pandemic it seems we have broadened our idea of who is a hero. Columnist Peggy Noonan says it best *“We have applauded together, for the first time, those whose jobs kept our towns up and operating, from nurses to truckers. We have rethought not only what is essential but who is important. All of this will change us as a nation.”*

I hope Ms. Noonan is right. I hope that after this pandemic we as a society will continue to appreciate as “important people” those like Perry who “keep the trains running”. I hope that the qualities of kindness, humility and serving others which we as a society seem to value during this pandemic (and which Perry embodies) will continue to be appreciated and practiced after the pandemic.

But as the rest of us try to figure it all out, Perry will continue to sweep the floors and empty the trash at Ralphs. His coworkers will continue to adore him. And I will continue to visit him. Perry isn't going anywhere...he has found his Happy Place.