

Because I Knew You, I've Been Changed Forever

Words of Remembrance for Brother Charles Kitson, FSC • March 19, 2016

Delivered by Brother Ed Phelan, FSC

Consider Charlie's death to be a Divine Ambush. Our God took our best, brightest, and in many ways our youngest; the one whose whole life has been service with poor families and children.

Our only hope to understand lies in grieving this human loss together. This surprise ambush only makes sense in the light of our love for each other and for the God who grieves with us and loves us so deeply today. All we can do now is to offer open hands and arms as Trudy demonstrated so well in her dance.

As the days pass, I find myself wanting—like Moses—to negotiate with God. I want to tell God that he/she needs to raise up 10 good ones for every Charlie taken. Lovers always challenge each other.

Looking back for what I would call the *Kitson Effect*, I cannot think of anything more telling than the line from *Wicked* that Sheena will soon be singing: "Because I knew you, I've been changed forever."

Charlie has had a profound lasting effect on each of us. He did it one by one and in groups. He used multimedia and simple phone calls. He played and prayed with us. He gave us time and left us on our own. He shared himself with us.

We fell for his God

It was not easy for him to pull this off. Charlie had his tricks. First, he always used the stage—for dancing and great presentations. The show biz part of his ministry was used to capture people's attention and imagination to redirect them towards God: the God of Jeremiah whose text he liked so much; the everyday God which was captured in the song he used all around the world; the trinitarian God who he so often invited people to pull up a chair with.

We learned to be fools

Deep down he never took full credit for his hard work. He knew it wasn't his work but God's work unfolding through him, counter cultural to the core. It is not surprising what Charlie wrote in his Final Wishes document. In answer to the statement:

If anyone asks how I want to be remembered, please say the following about me:

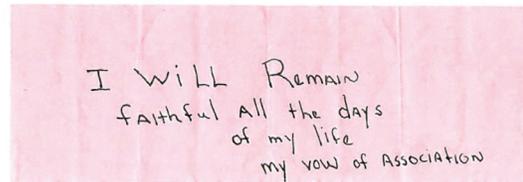
He was a fool for Christ's sake.

The word fool reminds many of us of his interest in mime and clowning. Vic Pantesco, a lifelong friend, will soon share "Foolish Remembrances."

We pulled together as a family

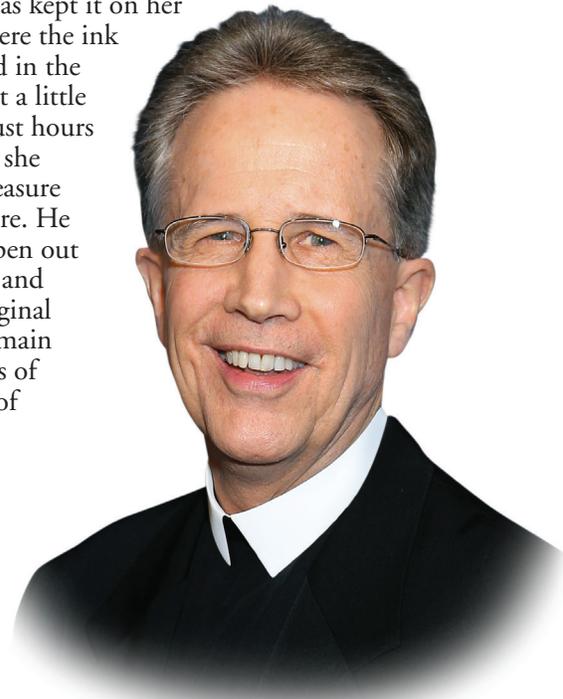
Charlie's lifetime capstone project was in 2010 to clearly explain our concept of association in terms of the Lasallian family. He worked with our General Council in Rome to capture the meaning of Lasallian Association resulting in a document, *Associated for the Lasallian Mission...an act of Hope* (or Circular 461 for short). In the years following its publication, he toured the world to spread the word. When Lasallians from all over the world gathered in Rome for six weeks in 2011 to study and share the gold of this book, Charlie was in their midst. One writing activity involved each participant anonymously answering the question:

What heroic act am I willing to live out in order to guarantee the future of the Lasallian mission?



I WILL Remain
faithful All the days
of my life
my vow of Association

The responses were put in a hat and later redistributed randomly to the participants. Heather Ruple Gilson picked the one that read "I will remain faithful all the days of my life...my vow of association." Soon she realized it's author was Charlie. She has kept it on her desk ever since where the ink has gradually faded in the California sun. But a little over a week ago, just hours before his passing, she shared her little treasure with him once more. He took that famous pen out of his shirt pocket and traced over the original message, "I will remain faithful all the days of my life—my vow of association."



Almost a year ago after spending a few days at a hermitage on the Hudson River, Charlie wrote a poem he titled...

Surrender.

Opening verse

As I pray to pray I hear heaven's laughter ...
A loving a chuckle. A Mother's sigh
Glimpsing her toddler's first solo
flight at tying a shoelace.
A loving smirk from a Dad who
steals sight of his son's
Rappelling a lazy-boy in memory of him Mirroring.

I hear heaven's laughter...
A prayer mined, an elusive diamond,
teaming with life,
Reflecting the prism face of God.

I hear heaven's laughter...
My long buried burdens burst their tombs ascending to a God
Who declared me forgiven oh so long ago...
One who revels in my frailty.
I hear heaven's laughter ...
I hear heaven ...
I hear ...
I ...

Final verse

"Charlie's Back!" ... Or is he? Is it he or another?
He's not what we expected ... HE'S MORE!

... And heaven laughed
... And I danced
... And God lovingly accepted my white-flagged surrender
... And HOPE does spring eternal. (Oh, how trite is that!!!)

+ Charlie

4/9/15

"Foolish Reflections" from his adopted family by Vic Pantesco
Soloist Sheena Mullan singing "For Good" from the play *Wicked*
Special thanks to Charlie Sr., Julie, Milly and Bill Herndon. He was the best.
Faithful all the days of his life. We have been changed forever.