If You Need to Talk Through It; Find a Great Therapist or Two

It had to happen. I'm in therapy. And I have two therapists...Norm and Mike. They sort of tag team me. Norm introduced me to kayaking...and to getting involved in river and dumpster clean-ups. Mike was my "handyman" for projects on our home in Leelanau County...and now at our condo in Lone Tree.

Norm is NormFred, a fellow member at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, a retired dentist, and a "Renaissance Man of the Outdoors". He can tie more different knots than any Boy Scout I've ever met. If you need any length of rope, a short fishing rod, an urgent need for some wood putty, are wondering where you could find a large locking pliers—just flag Norm down as his kayak and canoe laden, red, Toyota RAV4 motors by and dig through the loot stored within. No doubt, it's in there. One caution, it may appear at first to be self-driving vehicle, but Norm's in there. He's no giant- and the do-rag, large floppy hat, and sunglasses shield him further.

Norm is also the driving force behind the Boardman River Clean Sweep. I've paddled the Upper Manistee with Norm picking cans and trash out of the river. I've picked up a ton of shingles and other trash from illegal dumpster've across Grand Traverse County. I've picked trash out of Boardman Lake with some who camp there during the summer. And darned if when Jana and I take our kayaks down the Betsie, Platte, or Sturgeon we don't now always harvest refuse as well. We are environmental activists!

It starts innocently. "You should do some kayaking", says Norm, "It's peaceful on the river." He never tells me I look like I could use some of that peace. "C'mon out to the dumpster with us", he urges, "you'll feel good about it." And despite minor cuts and scrapes, I do. Norm doesn't ask me how I'm doing, he just sees I need his help (and he would like mine). His philosophy seems to be "do some good things...and more will follow." I think he's on to something. He ends all his sessions with, "Well, I gotta get going." Enough pants kicking for now. What a technique. And his fee is modest...generally a handful of tickets for the Clean Sweep annual raffle.

Mike Hotchkiss is a painter by trade from here to Lapper. He paints, repairs, builds...and pretends I'm being helpful by asking questions, maybe buying lunch, and not knowing one tool from another.

"Hand me the hex-key wrench" starts Mike. "It's the one that looks like a bent piece of hanger" he helpfully adds. "It's right there", he prods. "Got it?" he notes as he struggles for it himself. Wait for it, then he says, "Thanks Rock, that's just what I needed." I feel like I've done something when I really haven't.

We have something of a regular schedule.

When I have a fix-it project that is beyond my talent level, and as you could tell from the above, that's virtually every fix-it project beyond changing a light bulb or sweeping out the garage, I call Mike and see if he has any "extra time". He spends time between East Bay, Lapeer, and Ann Arbor virtually every week. Or if he has a project going on the cabin he is refurbishing, I invite myself over to his "office"—which is housed completely in one of his trucks. I get to "help" with the mysteries of electricity, plumbing, and more. Mike re-wires outlets and installs new lights; I operate the circuit breaker. Mike plumbs and applies "duck tape", I point to the water shut-off...or sometimes turn it by myself. Mike operates the chainsaw; there's an understood rule that I stay a good twenty feet away...and that I stack the wood. Mike has judged me well. And again, I feel good about making even a small contribution.

Mike does ask how things are going. When I share a frustration he generally observes, "Don't spend a lot of time on that", he says. "Look at all that you have — health, wonderful wife, great family. You're golden." His admonishment is always to focus on the positive...and keep calling for more "sessions". He's teased me with a session at "The Big House" this fall.

And there's an added bonus. Mike usually brings my personal therapy dog, Paige, too. And she really lays it on.

So, if you are feeling a bit out of sorts or a little sorry for yourself, look around for a therapist or two. You'll be surprised where you find them.

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