

As boys of sixteen, we high school buddies were always on the lookout for some hobo to buy our weekend beer. Among the bums we met a thin little fellow named Gary who boasted that he was related to a major league baseball player. At 19, I spent some time wandering along the way myself. I took to the road and found myself down and out in cities far from home. I took my lunches at soup kitchens. When I returned from life on the road I settled back in my home town. In a few years, I finished college, passed my Boards, and got work as an RN with my brand new license. I worked at the county Detox Center where the city's homeless alcoholics came, drunk and disorderly, to dry out from the booze. We nurses made sure they didn't die of the D.T.'s while they were sobering up. Among the alcoholics was thin little Gary. He was always drunk and getting brought into Detox by the police. I remember a few times he had some really rough D.T.'s and we nearly lost him. Some of my initial attempts at family life ended up on some rough and rocky shoals. I found myself alone and deserted in our home when the words of the Apostle's Creed came into my heart and began to grow. After a bit of time, God led me into the Catholic Church. I went on to work in adolescent drug treatment. In treatment were kids hooked on drugs and their tattered families. Within the Church my wife and I found one another. She introduced me to St. Francis and we've been wandering along with him ever since. The Lord sent us children to join us along the way. A few years with the adolescents had gotten me so worn down that I wanted something a bit more slowly paced. Shortly after we were married, I started working with the elderly and got a job working at the Old Soldier's Home. Thin little Gary was a resident there. At our parish, I volunteered to lead the

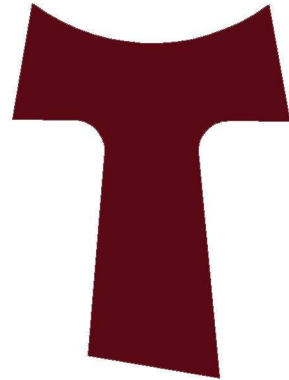
Rosary for a group of old men and women at a nursing home. Connie was an old Polish woman, a Secular Franciscan, and one of the ailing patients in that home. One time I went to her room that I might bring her to the Chapel for Rosary. She said that she was too sick and that her cancer was acting up again. I asked her if there was anything I could do for her. She knew that I worked with the old vets and asked me to get hold of some brown scapulars. She asked me to offer them to any veterans who were near death. Just a few weeks after that, Connie lost her own battle with cancer. I had gone to the Catholic store and picked up a half-dozen brown scapulars. In with each of the scapulars was printed a little ritual for offering the scapular to the dying. Not long after that, little Gary started his final battle with cancer. A lot of water had gone under the bridge since he bought us beer. Now here we were together again but this time he was dying and I was there to offer him one of Connie's brown scapulars. I only knew of one other outside person who was still connected with Gary. It was his nephew Phil. All I had ever heard Gary say about him was how much he hated his guts. I went to Gary's bedside and offered him the scapular. Although he had grown too weak to talk, he nodded to show me he wanted it. As part of the scapular ritual, there was a little added blessing available for the dying person, if they would listen to a prayer and kiss the scapular. I offered this to Gary as he lay there short of breath and dying. He seemed interested and whispered 'yes'. I held out the scapular to his lips and he gave it a kiss. It seemed like Gary wanted to drop all those years of bitterly pouring out his frustrations on everyone. He was turning away from sin and toward the Lord. I was the very privileged eyewitness to this miracle. When I came into

work the next morning I saw that this day Gary would die. The on-call hospice nurse came early in the morning and asked if Gary had any relatives. I told her about the nephew he hated. She took the phone number and gave Phil a call. Phil said he would come if Gary wanted him. We asked Gary and he said ok. Gary had never gone to the Catholic Masses at the Home. Nonetheless, the hospice chaplain came in mid-morning and got to know Gary a bit through sharing Bible stories with him. Just before noon Phil arrived. In the presence of the chaplain Phil and Gary were joyously reconciled with tears bedewing the cheeks of all. More restful now, Gary slowly slipped into a place where he responded to us no longer. Shortly, with his grateful nephew at his side Gary made his passage to the Father. So by some deep mysterious logic, still lying hidden deep in the heart of God, Jesus had been using Gary and I. He used us that we might turn back to Him. Stranger yet, for Gary, this conversion came through the ministry of Connie, a Secular Franciscan that he had never met. Truly, without the gift of Connie, Gary may not ever have been presented the opportunity to repent at a moment when he was open. Today is a day of rejoicing for our brother Gary has turned back to the Father! In the light of this experience, it seemed, that if my work meant nothing more, this one day with Gary, and the influence of Connie, had made all of it worthwhile!

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*Let them esteem
work both as a
gift and as
sharing in the
creation,
redemption, and
service of the
human
community.
Article 16*



*The Old
Soldier
Finally
Turns for
Home*