

A Tribute to James Cook

James would have been 20 years old one week from today.....

When I met James about ten years ago, I had virtually no experience with persons with disabilities. And little did I know at the time that this small boy would significantly alter the direction of my life.

I met Sharon through a ministry I led here at St. Catherine's. She and Bob needed some respite care in their home and asked me to help them. For almost four years, I spent one evening a week in their home, caring for James, providing a little bit of respite for them. I have never told anyone this before, but for the first several months, each time I drove to James' house, I would feel anxious. After all, one never knew what expect with James and it took many months for me to learn how to feel comfortable with him. Sharon and Bob patiently taught me. The anxiety did not keep me away. There was something about James that drew me to him. He was a mystery, a challenge. He was innocent and vulnerable.

My fondest memories of James are the many hours we would sit together in the swing on his front porch and the sweet kiss he would leave on my cheek each evening before I left.

Before I met James, my life had nothing to do with the disabled. Today, it has everything to do with them. I work every day with learning disabled middle school students. Eight years ago, it was James who inspired me to start a ministry here at St. Catherine's' called Fun Night! The mission of Fun Night! is two-fold. It provides a time of respite one Friday evening a month for the primary caregivers of persons with disabilities. It also provides an evening of fun and

socialization for the disabled. One of the volunteers pointed out to me yesterday how special it was that James' visitation last evening was happening at the same time as Fun Night! James and another young boy were the first participants at Fun Night!

The disabled have needs and wants, gifts and talents, hopes and dreams. They can offer us companionship, friendship, and love. James started me on the ongoing journey to understanding these things.

In the last few days, as I have pictured James in Heaven, I see him in a sunny, grassy meadow. Jesus is sitting there, perhaps on a rock, with James sitting at His feet, talking, talking, talking. From time to time, James will get up and, with his arms in the air, will run through the meadow shouting with joy. He soon comes back to sit at the feet of Jesus and continues, talking, talking, talking.

One of the things James is saying to Jesus is, "Thank you for my parents." With persistence, dedication, and with great love, James' parents helped him to reach his potential. And isn't that the vocation and hope of every parent?

Bob and Sharon - Well done!

And James.... For those of us who were blessed to know and to love you, you brought out the very best in us and made us better people. And because we are better people, the world is a better place.

Thank you, James.....