

Lasallian Commencement Address  
January 2000  
Presented by: Robert Fell

As tempting as it might be to concentrate on that which lies before us, my purpose is to invite us to look back to a significant experience when we were profoundly affected by another person, a person who changed our point of view by allowing us to experience the best they had to offer. This phenomenon is called transference: the ability of each and every one of us to significantly impact another by sharing ourselves. Such transference can be quite unintentional. But in its most influential state, transference serves to provide us with the experiences and feelings from which we can derive our deepest beliefs.

In my second year at Lewis, I was heading to class from my house in Lockport. I am always running late. I knew exactly how many minutes I needed to arrive at class on time. This was just one of those mornings when everything seemed to go wrong. I woke up late, my brothers had used up all the hot water in the shower, and I had no chance to grab breakfast. When I finally got to my truck, I discovered that my gas tank was empty. But, even with gassing up, if everything went perfectly, I just might make it. Then I turned the corner and up ahead was a stopped school bus. Still, I figured that by the time I got to the bus, it would be moving.

No such luck. The bus just sat there and I was stuck behind it for what felt like an hour and I found myself getting aggravated and angry. I turned to my right looking down the sidewalk to see if I could locate the stupid kid who was holding everything up.

It was then that I saw a young boy, about nine or ten, and his mother making their way toward the type of crutches that you knew he had had for a long time, the kind that lock onto the forearms of a little kid, as I was sure most of those on the bus did everyday. But instead of being embarrassed, he greeted the people on the bus by propping his forearm on his crutch for support and waving, to sort of say, I'm coming.

I felt sad and pretty foolish sitting in my truck staring at this kid thinking how he would

probably never drive easily, never play sports the way most kids do, and even have a hard time going to a homecoming game or a prom. I really felt sorry for him and then suddenly he captured me. The moment it happened it was as if everything had shifted into slow motion. As he dragged his legs up the sidewalk, I thought to myself that his arms must be getting tired, and what an enormous pain it must be to have pull yourself around as he had to. But, then he looked my way and he smiled, a smile bigger than I'd ever seen anyone smile. I knew he wasn't smiling at me. We never made eye contact. But never in my life has a look captivated me as his did. Here was a kid who could have been embarrassed at being the focus of so much attention, or angry that he was stuck with those crutches, or just tired from the long trip from his house to that bus. Instead, he was obviously happy.

I was so self absorbed by my own minute problems and by my foolish anger that I had forgotten about that which was really important. Of the two of us, I was the one with the real handicap. Of the two of us, I was the one who was letting the little things get the best of me. Of the two of us, I was the one who was not happy with all that I had and, more importantly, all that I was.



