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IN GOOD COMPANY

By Corin Cates-Carney

If there was ever a man who did not color between the lines of life, it was Richard Sutherland. I remember seeing pictures that he had created, and although no color would stray past the outline of the image, the image itself looked as if a rainbow had jumped into the scene of Christmas, and the illustrator couldn't decide which color belonged where. Blues, yellows, greens, and violets all collided together in ways that the eye just isn't used to. But that was Richard's style, and those close to him wouldn't have had him any other way.

I am telling you this now because Richard has died, and in a few minutes we will carry his coffin inside. His friends and family are gathered with those close enough to Richard to know that he spent his life going by the nickname 'Dicko'.

It is cold outside, and the chill air is beginning to find its way through our black suits as we wheel the handcrafted pine coffin inside the church. We remove the lid. The family has asked for an open casket. There are about six of us to bring him in.

"Dicko's last meal gentlemen," the man in front of me says, bringing a squashed McDonalds bag out of his jacket pocket. He opens it and pulls out two cheeseburgers and a diet coke. Dicko loved McDonalds cheeseburgers. After passing one cheeseburger around for each of us to take a bite, then chasing it down with some Diet Coke, the man tucks the second burger in Dicko's breast pocket. "Okay, lets take him in."

I first meet Dicko at a group home where my mom works. A home where he lived with other "Core Members," a term used to describe those in the community who need a little bit more help to get by. He lived with Ricky, a slender man with black hair. Ricky always wore a helmet and loved to sing the grace at dinner. Stacie was another close friend of Dicko's in the house. Stacie is a sassy bald woman who won't do anything until she's had her mocha. Dicko often kissed Stacie, planting his large lips on her round face.

Dicko was a short round man who would never been seen without suspenders, no matter what kind of pants he picked out to wear for the day. Dicko's two favorite things to do were to watch WWE Smack Down on Monday nights, and go to church early on Sunday

mornings. He called everyone in my family “Joe Carneys,” because my dad was the first in my family to meet Dicko. Apparently Dicko thought that since he already knew my dad’s name it would be a lot easier to just call us all by that, instead of having to learn what the rest of us called ourselves. Dicko was born with Down Syndrome. Dicko was the happiest man I’ve ever met.

A couple weeks after Dicko’s funeral my mom brought some of Dicko’s ashes back to our house. Mom was now the director of the community that Dicko lived in, and on Monday morning she will take his ashes to bury on the farm where he had worked.

“That’s Dicko,” my mom says, holding up a large zip-lock bag full of ash. That’s Dicko I thought, well, Dicko and a cheeseburger, but I don’t think he minds the company.