**Unexpected Influence**

*By Brad Olson*

After hockey practice one day in high school, Terry and I were skating around and goofing off. I decided that it was time to play “Zamboni”… you know, use someone else to clean the ice. So I crept up on Terry from behind and quietly slipped my stick between his legs and sent him sprawling to the ice belly first, making a nice clean sweep of the ice in his path. Terry liked to goof off too, so I figured he’d be up for the game. He was also an incredibly patient kid. So he got up, brushed himself off with a slight irritated chuckle and skated off again. After the third time I tripped him up and sent him sprawling like a Zamboni, this patient guy yelled at me, “Knock it off, ya jerk!” I remember feeling shamed and regretful. I stepped so far over a line that even Terry yelled at me. I never heard him yell before.

Terry grew up in a Catholic family about 6 blocks away from me. He knew my family went to church, but as high school kids, we never talked about God or church or anything else too serious. In fact, his father died when we were in high school, and I never knew what to say. So we never said much of anything about it. But, we enjoyed hanging out together. We liked sports, music, the same sense of humor, and didn’t take school too seriously. He was my friend.

A few years later when I was in college, we found time for a game of tennis on a summer afternoon. In the middle of a game, an odd thing happened. As I was bouncing the ball at my feet, focusing on my next serve, Terry shouts from the other side of the court, “Hey, What kind of Bible should I read?”

I stopped bouncing the ball to check if I heard him right. “What?” I shouted back.

“If I wanted to read a Bible, what kind should I get?” He said.

I remember being stunned. We had never talked about God before. Besides, Terry was one of my non -Christian friends. Fortunately, I took God’s less-than-subtle cue to stop the game and have a conversation about the Bible with Terry. I was pleased that week to buy him a new, modern day translation Bible. I don’t recall us talking much about it after that.

Sometime later, maybe even a year later, we were playing tennis. I was surprised again. “Hey, you and Lori seem to have something different… something about you… whatever it is, it’s something that I want”, he said. Stunned at mid-serve again, and taking note of God’s less-than-subtle cue, we went back to the house afterwards and I talked about following Jesus. Praying with Terry that night changed Terry. Praying with Terry that night changed our relationship. Now we talked about God and the Bible a lot.

I wasn’t trying to be a witness to Terry. I was just playing tennis with a friend. I have no idea what he saw that made him ask about it. I was just a kid doing the best I could, living my life as I thought God wanted me to, and I was far from perfect. In fact, I was an irritable, critical and judgmental goofball. I was the guy who played “Zamboni” on him for goodness sakes! That’s what he saw that turned him to Christ?! Why did he ask *me* about the Bible? What did he see in *me* that he wanted?

*Sometimes we have no idea what our life looks like to the outside.*

*Sometimes God is at work in people in our lives without our awareness.*

*Sometimes God uses us… broken and imperfect… to touch others.*

Though we don’t talk much more than once a year and see each other less than that, I am grateful for Terry in my life today. I have fond memories of a friend who walked with me, laughed with me, and tolerated me as we both stumbled to grow up. I am more grateful that God uses crusty people like me to touch other people’s lives… or in Terry’s case, totally transform a life. All I have to do is my best at living the way God wants me to. Maybe even answer some questions when people ask. God truly does the rest.

***Colossians 4:5-6 (NLT)***

***“Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.”***