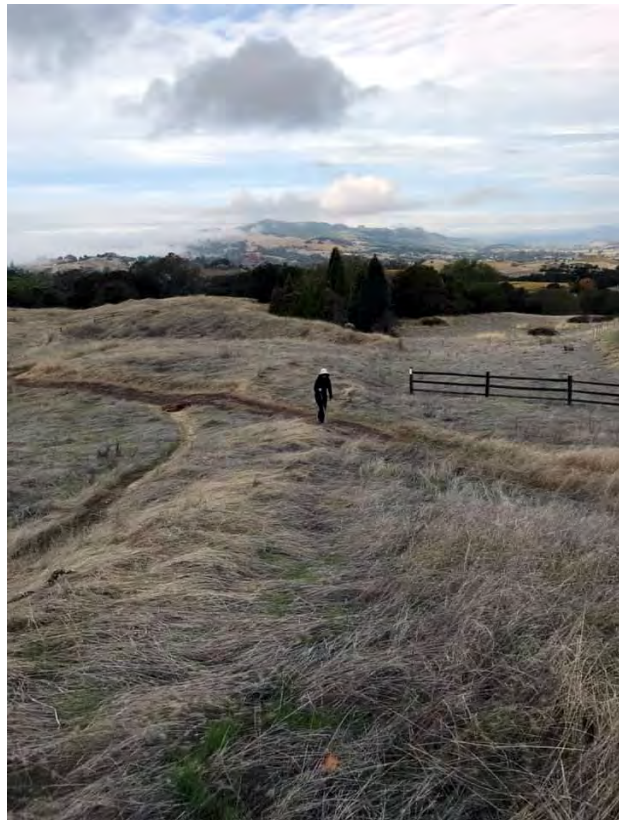


My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 100

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October 20, 2021



"Perfect Plus Attracts Perfect Minus"

The very welcome return of rain to Northern California paused long enough for me to meet with my Catholic Men's Group for a morning hike on a convenient trail. The drop in temperature has turned the leaves to their fall colors all along the creekside and the fresh rain amplified the natural smells and brightened the autumn tones. Each Wednesday, I hike with my two black labs about a mile to meet up with the rest of our small group who drive to the trailhead.

This morning, only one other hiker showed up. Our Dante scholar, Blaise, was in the emergency room with atrial fibrillation and the remainder of the usual hikers were traveling. So, just Frank Girimonte would join me. As so often happens, Dr. Yong's words of guidance this morning seemed to have anticipated our conversation.

Frank recently finished reading Atul Gawande's book "Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End." An 88 year old widower and Korean War veteran, he has seen his share of suffering and

death. Blaise's medical emergency, Gawande's book, and the overcast skies, set the direction of our conversation as we took off down the path. We spoke of death and we both lamented the medicalization of the final moments of many, especially in the time of COVID. My son has noted this phenomenon as a second year medical resident in Providence, Rhode Island: One of the most tragic consequences of the pandemic has been the isolation of so many from their loved ones in their final painful moments. This crop of medical residents have seen more death on the wards than any since the Spanish Flu of 1918.



After 26 years of marriage, Frank's wife passed away from cancer leaving him with their seven children to raise. All of his children successfully "launched" but over the years he had been too busy to notice the

distance that had grown between himself and his six daughters. After retirement from business, Frank had become deeply involved in the community life of his Catholic parish. He was president of both the Italian Men's Club and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. He organized and led the parish "Bereavement Group" and offered his services in the parish as a lector and group facilitator. In a nutshell, if the parish priest needed something done, he called Frank.



When COVID hit and the lockdown came into place, Frank's calendar suddenly opened up as all of his activities ground to a halt. The absence of busyness provided him with the space to reflect on his family and the distance between himself and his six daughters that had emerged. At this juncture of the conversation, the purity of Frank's heart emerged. He did not blame his daughters for ignoring him, rather, he realized that he had ignored his children causing them to withdraw. So, instead of demanding their attention and acting as an entitled family patriarch, he called each of his daughters and apologized to them and took responsibility for the emotional distance in their relationship. I thought Frank must have been listening in to Dr. Yong this morning, though I knew that to be highly unlikely. I took the opportunity to recount the essence of the guidance we had received on subject-object relationships, the importance of humility and attentiveness, and how, "a perfect plus will attract a perfect minus."

Frank's seventh child was his only son. Frank Junior--or "Frankie"-- grew up with serious learning disabilities. Though he had more than

normal challenges in navigating life in a competitive world, Frankie always tried to stand on his own and be successful in his work. He found his niche at Scandinavian Designs, where he worked his entire adult life without missing a day. He never could assume responsibility for anything more than an entry level job, but he was an exemplary employee who assisted others and always volunteered to do the extra work. He lived on his own in Marin County, about 40 minutes from his father's home in Santa Rosa.



Usually, he called his father before going to bed. One night, Frankie phoned and said that he felt terribly ill with the flu and his Dad encouraged him to stay home from work the following day. Frankie agreed.

The next morning, while he was working at Saint Vincent de Paul, Frank received a phone call from his son's employer. They were concerned: Frankie had not shown up to work for the first time ever. Frank Senior related the conversation from the night before and the secretary at Scandinavian Designs said they had called numerous times and Frankie had not picked up. Really not too concerned, thinking his son was deeply sleeping, Frank jumped in his car and drove south to Marin. He had an apartment key and could easily check on his son's well being.



Upon arrival, Frank opened the door to a strangely quiet apartment. He walked to the back bedroom and saw Frankie peacefully at rest, with his eyes closed, arms up, fingers laced, his hands supporting his head. He walked over to touch his arm and wake him but Frankie's body was cold. Frank called 911. The EMT arrived within seven minutes and confirmed that Frankie had died during the night.

The corporate president of Scandinavian Designs, and three of his vice presidents attended the funeral. He had prepared a eulogy but was too overcome with emotion to read and one of his vice presidents delivered it for him. Before the services began, an elderly Hispanic grandmother rushed into the church and asked, "Is this for Frankie?" She walked to the front and looked into the open casket and started to weep. After the Requiem Mass, she approached the family to express her condolences. She and her husband owned a Mexican Restaurant in nearby Cotati and every Friday evening they had a live band playing Mariachi music. Frankie would come to the restaurant for dinner and he never failed to dance with her. At the end of the night, he would stay and help clean up the restaurant so they could open early for breakfast Saturday morning. Frankie had been doing this for years.

Frank related how his daughters are all accomplished professionals--senior business executives, accountants, and one doctor, a graduate of Stanford Medical School. As we came to the end of our walk, he stopped and turned, looked me in the eye and said, "But, I am most proud of my son."

We parted until next week and, reflective and prayerful, I began my walk up the hill to my home. It struck me how Frankie's "disability" had been his grace. So often, we allow our ego and our intellect to become obstacles to our heart. Mr. Kamiyama used to say to me, "J. -san! You think too much!" How true. In the world of heart, my capabilities have often been my disabilities. I don't mean to romanticize Frankie's condition, but I do believe that there is much here for each of us to learn about "going to zero," surrendering our own will, and allowing our hearts their full expression. Maybe, we can even learn how to create the "perfect plus."