

“Honest Abe” in a Chicago Cubs Hat?

(A tribute to Robert Tereba)



When you think of Abraham Lincoln you might envision that stovepipe hat he popularized. But, today I'm asking you to replace that topper with a royal blue baseball cap adorning a red embroidered “C”.

I've had the honor and pleasure of working under the direction of Robert Tereba (Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota) for the past fifteen years. And, there has been more than one occasion when I've had to do a double-take to ensure I was not serving under the leadership of that model of integrity we know as “Honest Abe”.

Those who know Bob are familiar with his unwavering passion and loyalty for the Chicago Cubs and his admiration for his “hero” —our sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln. When spring rolls around, it is not uncommon to see Bob sporting a “love-worn” Chicago Cubs cap. And, upon walking in his office, you will see Abraham Lincoln honored on the walls beside that famous “W” banner that signifies Cub wins.

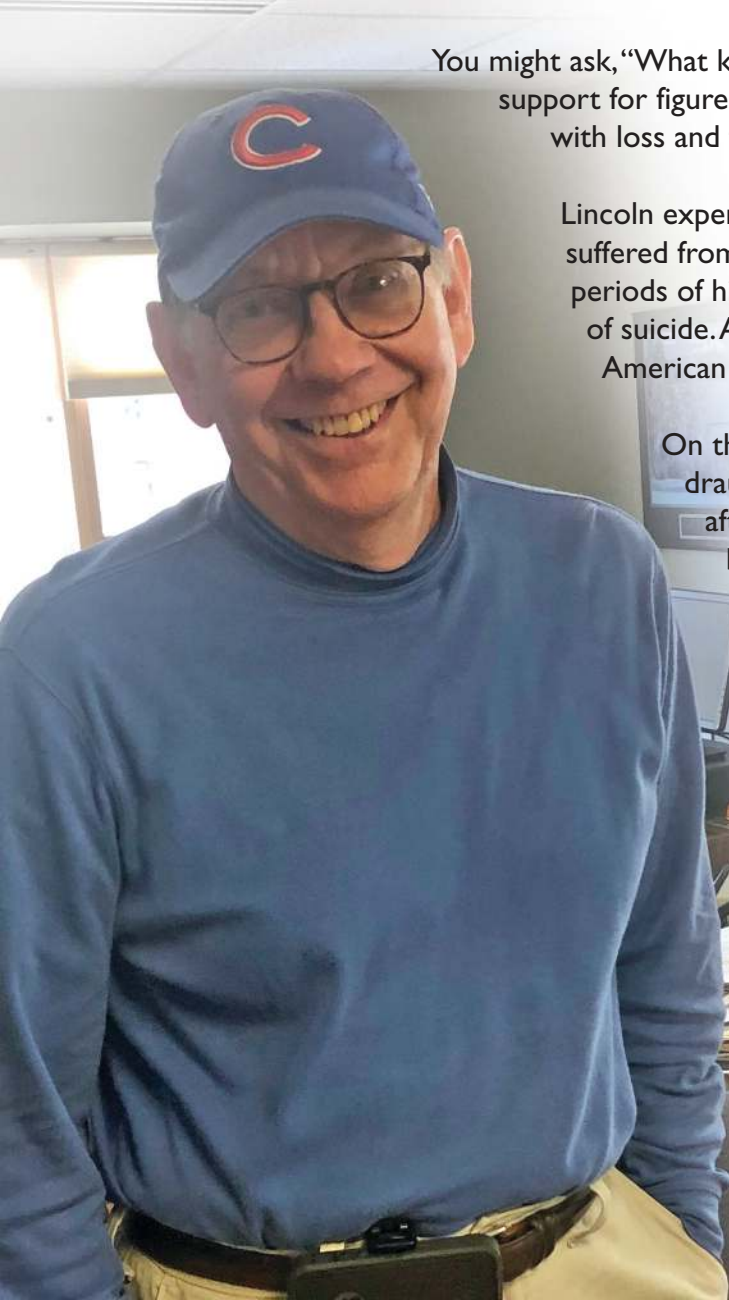
You might ask, “What kind of man would proudly, yet humbly, declare his loyal support for figures of loss and failure? Really, who wants to be associated with loss and failure?”

Lincoln experienced personal and professional loss and failure; he suffered from melancholy and depression most of his life. During periods of his life he succumbed to misery, helplessness, and thoughts of suicide. And his presidency was dominated by the biggest crisis in American history.

On the other hand, the Chicago Cubs suffered the longest drought in baseball, one that lasted 107 years. Let's face it—after viewing those defeats you often saw people staring back at the television screen with index finger and thumb creating a “L” on their foreheads. Sorry Bob...just being honest.

As my beloved director announced his eminent retirement, I'll follow Abe's example of honesty and tell you that tears began to well up in my eyes.

You see, that man who associates himself with a historical hero and a baseball team plagued with challenges and failures magnificently represents all for which Catholic Charities' mission stands. He has changed my life, along with countless others blessed with his friendship and support.



Bob has been a cathartic example for those we serve who are broken in body and spirit, those seeking transformation. He has reminded staff in word and deed by his compassionate example that God doesn't expect our perfection; he wants our perseverance. And, Bob doesn't "give up" on anyone. He looks beyond outward appearances and sees the true potential within. Bob embodies the mission of Catholic Charities; one that reminds you and me that we are made in God's image and likeness. Every human life has dignity....so don't give up on anyone.

As big baseball stories go, the Cubs might be considered the biggest in history. In 2016 Bob's favorite baseball team restored hope to all underdogs. This was a monumental development. And maybe the message of hope reflected was why it took so long to happen. Come on...we cannot blame the draught on that "billy goat" curse scenario. The reality is that the Chicago Cubs had just not reached their full potential.

Beginning in his mid-thirties Lincoln worked diligently to improve himself. His failures were the catalyst for developing self-understanding, discipline and strategies for helping others in need. These would become the foundation of his character. "Honest Abe" was a diamond in the rough. His failures were the stepping stones to glorious transformation. His life is used as a paradigm for how to inspire people to overcome life's difficulties.

Both the Chicago Cubs and Abraham Lincoln remind you and me that, while there are times when we may crawl through life like caterpillars, there is potential for all of us to reach butterfly brilliance. That caterpillar/butterfly metaphor represents the mission of Catholic Charities and the man who has led that mission in southern Minnesota for over nineteen years. Robert Tereba represents the life-changing transformation that comes when we look beyond outside appearances and see the potential for greatness in all.

There are some life stories that are so grand and so powerfully moving that they remain etched in our hearts forever. The story of the 2016 World Series Chicago Cubs that ended after storming back from a 3-1 series deficit in a 10 inning championship game win....the story of one of our nation's most admired leaders who ended slavery ...and the story of Robert Tereba, a man who exemplifies the positive change that comes when we embrace compassion, hope, and a belief that with God ...all things are possible!

Happy Retirement Bob! We love you. We will carry your example with us as we strive to inspire hope and help those we serve reach their full potential. Wait, I think if you listen intently you may hear that famous Cubs sportscaster, Jack Brickhouse's voice echoing from heaven. Hey, Hey...Bob you did it—you hit a grand slam—you changed the world!

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