

"Thanks Charlie -- For What You Done For My Kid"

By

Adrian Waller .

The crisp, sunny morning of February 5, 1979, heralded hope of a bright new beginning for Charlie Tann. A husky, barrel-chested six-footer of 47, with light-brown hair and pale-blue eyes, he walked with measured steps from Manitoba's Stony Mountain Penitentiary. As the big iron door clanked closed behind him, it shut off a long, dead past -- 26½ years behind bars in eight Canadian prisons.

"I'm scared stiff," Charlie told the Rev. Andy Grier, minister of Stony Mountain United Church, into whose care he was being paroled.

"That's good," Grier replied. "It tells me you're not taking your release for granted."

Charlie Tann wasn't. Virtually without exception, he'd celebrated past freedoms from jail at the nearest bar, drinking himself into a stupor that led him back to his crimes: nearly 100 offenses in all, from burglary and mail theft to possessing safe-breaking tools and conspiring to rob a bank.

Now, as Grier drove him home for a two-month stay, Charlie told himself that this time, things would be different. They had to be. Alcohol, particularly prison's powerful, illicit brews, had finally caught up with him, belying his robust physique. He suffered from both severe diabetes and terminal cirrhosis of the liver. On his release, doctors predicted he'd be dead in a matter of months.

Before time ran out, Charlie Tann was determined to pay his debt and

satisfy a dream -- to help right what he felt were the correctional system's most blatant wrongs. Too often, he maintained, social workers and probation officers had given up on young, habitual offenders too easily, without questioning the reasons behind their behavior. Courts had then been too quick to put them in jail, where they learned to become worse criminals than they were in the first place.

"That's what happened to me," Charlie told Grier. "And I wouldn't wish what I've been through on anyone."

Replied Grier: "Now's your chance to help change things."

To do so, Charlie sought the help of a charitable organization called Frontier College. Two weeks after shaking the warden's hand at Stony Mountain, vowing to put back the scraps of a tattered life, never to drink, take drugs or return to prison again, Charlie took a bus 20 kilometres from Grier's house to Winnipeg. Looking smart in the gray suit the Parole Board had issued him on his release, he called on the College's Manitoba office. Since 1899, the organization has organized adult education, teaching immigrants English, for example, and illiterates to read and write; what attracted Charlie in late winter of 1979, was a local program to re-integrate ex-inmates into the work force -- finding them jobs they'd enjoy and paying their wages to do them.

"I want to stop as many kids from messing up their lives like I screwed up mine," Charlie told the program's director, Neil Webster.

"And time's running out for me."

Stony Mountain classification officers had already told Webster about Charlie. "We got a guy leaving here soon," they'd said, "who's a model prisoner -- kind, self-motivated and raring to work. We'd appreciate anything you can do for him." Grier and his wife Betty told the College how, during temporary absences, Charlie had baked pies and cakes for them, then spent hours with their three children making puppets. "The man's sincere and earnest," Grier said. "If anyone deserves a chance to prove himself, it's him."

Webster agreed. "Charlie looked every bit a winner," he recalls. "He was big, warm, friendly and so keen to work as if what life he had left depended on it." On Charlie's behalf, he phoned the Manitoba Youth Centre, a provincial government holding "prison" for juveniles either awaiting trial or serving sentences. "Could you use an experienced former inmate to counsel kids?" he asked. Replied the director, Don Gibson: "Send him along and we'll see."

Gibson was also struck by Charlie's sincerity and immediately issued him a pass to enter the Centre to chat with inmates whenever he wanted to, provided he did so under staff supervision. "Lots of other people had tried putting young delinquents on the right road and had failed," Gibson remembers. "I had a strong feeling at that first meeting that with what he knew and had been through, Charlie might fare better. It

seemed logical to at least let him have a try."

Charlie, in turn, bought himself a battered old car from his prison savings, and without asking for payment, was visiting the Centre well outside office hours -- often at night and on nearly all weekends, chatting informally with adolescents about the danger of drugs and drink and his own wasted years in prison. "He had time on his hands, of course," Gibson says, "but as the weeks rolled on, it was obvious to me and the rest of the staff that Charlie Tann really cared about what happened to those kids."

Charlie did. In the time he had left, he touched the lives of probably 300, "having a positive effect on about eighty per cent of them," Winnipeg lawyer Hymie Weinstein estimates. They ranged from child pick-pockets, glue-sniffers and runaways, some as young as six, to teenage burglars, forgers and drug addicts destined for a long life of crime. "Yet literally scores of these," Weinstein adds, "are walking our city's streets today, grateful to Charlie Tann that they never started a life behind bars." Says Frontier College's president Jack Pearpoint: "If Charlie had only kept a dozen teens from jail, it would have been a far better success-rate than many of the so-called professionals could boast. As time went on, most kids he helped were those the system had entirely given up on."

The first young people to like Charlie at the Manitoba Youth Centre,

in fact were the ones who resented being lectured to by social workers and probation officers. Recalls Gibson: "Charlie found a special way to get inside them, to find out what was really bothering them." Adds Weinstein: "He looked kids straight in the eye, honestly saying he wanted nothing from them. Rather than interrogate them for a confession, he made it clear from the start that he was there to help them as a friend. They believed him."

Thus, by April 1, 1979, Frontier College had little difficulty persuading Don Gibson to take Charlie on the Centre staff as a \$140-a-week self-taught, self-styled social worker to help inmates in whatever way he could. Gibson called him "an indigenous street worker who spoke the kids' language and was a walking example of what not to do with life." Charlie called himself simply "a guardian of youth in need."

"Welcome aboard," Gibson told him. "And good luck."

"Thanks," said Charlie. "Thanks for giving me the chance I've wanted for a long time."

He said goodbye to the Griers -- "Yours is the only place I've been able to call home in 30 years," he told them -- and rented a two-bedroom apartment in Winnipeg. Between working furiously, sometimes 12 hours daily and nearly always seven days a week, he reported to his probation officer and battled fast-failing health. He controlled his diabetes with insulin injections. To prolong his life against terrible, chronic

cirrhosis, however, he went to hospital every two weeks for a lengthy, complex process of transfusions to replenish his dying blood. "Charlie was admitted anemic, looking a horrible greenish-gray," Neil Webster remembers, "and left a few hours later less prone to infection and feeling stronger, but looking a grayish-pink."

Rather than complain about his condition, Charlie took it remarkably lightly. "We're all going to die," he'd say seriously. Then, with a wink, he'd add: "The only difference is, I know approximately when."

He invariably went straight from hospital to work. Nothing, it seemed, kept him from his "clients," as he called them. Soon he was a familiar figure in Winnipeg's Juvenile Court, either simply escorting adolescents, or speaking on their behalf. "This kid isn't totally bad," he said defending a young housebreaker who'd appeared without a lawyer. "He drinks to get attention and doesn't stop. When he's drunk, he goes crazy."

Charlie then told the judge: "Detention won't change him -- just make him more bitter than he is." The judge put the defendant on probation and told him to accept treatment from a psychologist. To ensure his client turned up for appointments, Charlie actually took him there.

On another occasion, he told a Juvenile Court: "You gotta show kids love -- and lots of it. You gotta put your arms around them and tell them when they're doing good so they'll know when they're doing bad."

One morning, though, he was horrified to hear a Crown prosecutor call a teenage thief "incorrigible, habitually bad and incapable of change."

"You can't say that!" Charlie screamed, leaping to his feet. "Every kid's capable of change! All they need is the chance to prove it!"

So convincing was Charlie in court that in the summer of 1979, defense lawyers began recruiting him as an "expert" witness to speak on their clients' behalf. They invariably wanted to tell judges about the dangers of being jailed too young and too often. Says Weinstein:

"Charlie was an in-the-flesh example of how a man turned out when the correction system failed by putting him behind bars for everything he did." But Charlie would also tell courts about his long trek back to reform. "I know it took years," he said, "but I did it." Then, referring to a young defendant, he'd add: "If I can do it, so can this kid."

He once appeared on behalf of a 17-year-old boy who'd been detained in the Youth Centre 18 times for nearly 30 burglaries. Now the youth admitted stealing jewelry and cash from a house and forging a \$400-check. "If he stays free," the prosecutor warned, "there's a one hundred per cent chance he'll end up in trouble again."

On paper, he was right. But his application, to have the boy referred to an adult court for a stiffer sentence, was to fail. The case also took on an unusual twist. Charlie spoke of his own life in prison and how he'd changed, and gave details of the boy's sad background --

alcoholic parents and a father who'd committed suicide by hanging. Then he asked Judge Jane Maurer: "Rather than lock him up, why don't you try something different?"

"What's that?" the judge asked.

"Let me take him home and work with him there. I make no promises, but it'll be worth a try. At least we won't be giving up on the kid like everyone else has!"

Judge Maurer adjourned the case for a few minutes while she considered Charlie's alternative. Returning to the court room, she placed the defendant on probation, telling him kindly: "I have a good feeling Mr. Tann can help you sort out your life. I'd like you to go along with what he says is right for you."

Charlie put the youth up for two months, found him a job as a wood worker in a furniture factory, bought him clothes and took him to Winnipeg Blue Bomber football games. He persuaded him to give up drugs, drink only socially and stay clear of people likely to lead him back into trouble. "Charlie believed in me," says the boy, now 21 and planning a career in accounting. "He made me feel I was someone special. He was the only person who ever genuinely cared for me."

He was one of literally dozens of youngsters Charlie saved from detention -- by convincing a judge it would be better if he worked with him instead of a prison counsellor. Another was a 18-year-old youth

with a two-year history of theft to fuel a drug addiction. After the court hearing, Charlie ushered him into his car and made it clear that whatever he did, how many times and got arrested, violated probation or even broke parole should he eventually go to jail, he'd always be there to help him.

"You mean that?" the youth asked.

"Like it or not," Charlie said, "you got yourself a friend. You and me are going right down the line -- together."

That, to Charlie Tann, meant at last seeing a boy or girl trouble-free and happy, having decided that the price of a life of crime was almost certainly long, tattered years. It might not happen the first time a delinquent was given a chance, or the second, or even the third -- but some time later on. "I don't care if a kid's had fifty chances," Charlie said. "He or she should be given a fifty-first, then a fifty-second." No one, he felt, should ever give up on a life barely begun -- as they had with his.

Born in Toronto in August, 1931, he was in constant trouble through his teens -- stealing mostly, and getting uncontrollably drunk. At 19, he was jailed for four years for breaking into shops and houses; no sooner was he out that he was back for six years for more similar crimes plus stealing a car and possessing safe-breaking tools. At 22, he heard prison doctors call him an alcoholic; psychologists termed him an habi-

tual criminal.

Twice he escaped from prison only to be caught, drunk, to face more charges -- and more prison. Nothing, it seemed, inspired him to straighten out. "Charlie Tann doesn't just go to jail," noted one Penitentiary Service official, "he actually lives there." In 1963, aged 32, he got another six years for conspiring to rob a Toronto bank. Psychologists described him as "strongly psychopathic." Charlie, though, always maintained they were wrong, claiming he could be justly proud of one thing: "God help me, I was never violent."

His impetus to reform was triggered one day by a prison guard Charlie met while serving four years in British Columbia for stealing cheques from the mail to buy liquor and drugs. "I'll be retiring soon," the guard said wistfully, "and it's about time you did, too."

"Yes," said Charlie. "I'd like to." He remembered: I've lived half my life with nothing whatsoever to show for it.

"Well, what do you want to do when you get out of here?" the guard persisted.

Impulsively, Charlie said: "Help kids in trouble." And the more he thought about it, the more he decided it wouldn't be a bad idea. I've sure got something to tell them, he thought. I could teach them a thing or two about screwing up.

Charlie immediately began improving his education from grade 10 to

grade 12, and told himself he would never drink or take drugs again. Shortly after his release in 1975, however, he fell victim to a moment of weakness. After a few beers at a Toronto party, he was soon drinking so heavily that he spent night after night wandering the streets aimlessly, not knowing or caring where he would sleep, parking lot or shop doorway. Several times he was arrested for vagrancy.

In 1978, he found himself in Winnipeg. "I came to in a police cell," Charlie said, "feeling weak, ill and completely unable to account for the past four months." He was on more charges, too -- having burglary tools and breaking into two houses. "The cops'd thrown the book at me," he recalled; in view of his past, he would certainly return to prison, probably for ten years. At the Department of Corrections in Ottawa, a note was added to his file: "A very bad egg, highly institutionalized, but not considered dangerous. He has committed most offenses while drunk."

Charlie's deep-down desire to reform was rekindled at his trial. Without exception, all judges he had so far stared at had bundled him off to jail, "no questions asked." And for the most part, he conceded, he'd deserved every day behind bars he got. Now he was a weak, disheveled figure before Judge Graeme Garson of Manitoba's Provincial Court, bracing himself for yet another stiff sentence. This time, there was a difference: he was encountering a judge who had not just read his

record, but studied it -- in detail.

"It's terrible"" Judge Garson said, shaking his head incredulously. Charlie knew it. "But I notice a three-year period when I strongly believe this man honestly tried to pull himself together," the judge added.

Charlie thought: That's right! I've never been out of trouble so long since I started going to jail back in the 1950s. Three years is a helluva long time for me!

"I can't set you free," Judge Garson said sadly, "but I can do the next best thing." He handed Charlie to two years in Stony Mountain for each offense, the sentences to run concurrently. He then recommended that on completion of a third of his jail time, he be paroled. Charlie returned to prison feeling he'd been handed a gift. "Old Garson considers I'm worth something," he said. "He actually thinks I'm capable of reform." He was intent on proving the judge right.

His spirit was further bolstered when he met Andy Grier, making volunteer visits to inmates. Charlie was neither arrogant nor bitter, Grier noticed. Nor did he see nobility in what he'd done. He says: "He was totally convinced he could make it back into society a new man, that everyone else around him believed it too!"

In the fall of 1978, doctors told Charlie he suffered from cirrhosis so badly, that he was functioning on only a sixth of his liver. One

doctor said he might live two years; another said: "You'll be lucky to last six months." From then on, Charlie began realizing that if he was to piece back the scraps of a tattered life and help young people, it had to be now.

Grier began signing him out of the penitentiary on day passes, taking him to his church and introducing him to members of his congregation. More and more, Charlie became aware that people outside prison both liked him and were concerned for his future. At dinner with the Griers one Sunday night, Charlie said: "Okay, so if all these folks care about me, it's about time I cared about myself."

"Yes," said Grier firmly. "It is."

From that moment, Charlie never looked back. While in prison, he'd often asked himself if he would ever do anything he could be proud of. It was important to him. He recalled: "I don't want people saying: 'I heard Charlie Tann died. That sunavagun robbed me!' I'd much rather they said: 'Thanks Charlie -- for what you done for my kid.'" At last, almost too late, Charlie's opportunity had arrived.

By the winter of 1979, Charlie had earned enough credibility at the Manitoba Youth Centre to convince counsellors and welfare officers that some of the adolescents should be given day passes -- not just so they'd feel independent, but so they could go to work. "Fine," was the response, "if you take full responsibility for all those you sign out."

From then on, Charlie was often seen driving from the Centre with as many as four inmates at a time. One was a girl of 17 who had left home to live with her boyfriend, turning to drugs when he threw her out. She was charged with smoking marijuana and stealing cosmetics. But why a kid was in detention was never Charlie's concern. "We must look ahead, not behind us," he said. He found the girl a job as a steamer in a dry cleaner's; until she was reunited with her parents, he actually drove her to work daily.

Each morning, he took a runaway girl of 13 to school and found her part-time work tending horses in a stable. She was eventually placed under protection in a group home where Charlie went to counsel her. "So long as you have ambition, a dream you can realize," he told her, "you'll be okay. The kids who stay in trouble are usually the ones without ambition." The girl gave up drugs and set her heart on becoming a hairdresser.

One day Charlie went to Juvenile Court to have another boy released in his care, then audaciously phoned Neil Webster. "I got a 16-year-old that wants somewhere to stay," he said. "Can you put him up?"

"For how long?" Webster inquired.

"Just for a few weeks -- until he gets on his feet," Charlie replied.

"Okay," Webster said. "Send him along." He recalls: "Charlie'd already got two kids staying with him and was now recruiting friends to

help him out." One of his charges was a 15-year-old Indian boy with a drinking problem, who'd stolen a car. Charlie found him a job as a laborer and let him sleep on his sofa for six weeks. One cold night when the kid came home drunk, Charlie said: "Okay, so you 're coming with me."

"Where?" asked the boy?

"Trust me," Charlie said -- and drove him to a chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous. "The way Charlie Tann shut out his long criminal past by working passionately with kids," says Judge Graeme Garson, now the Law Society of Manitoba's chief executive officer, "never ceased to strike me as a wonderful miracle."

Charlie fed his clients, lent them money and took them on picnics. Whatever they needed, he saw they got. "And if he didn't pay for it himself," remembers Neil Webster, "he masterfully cajoled Frontier College into doing it for him." Charlie soon discovered, for instance, he was helping about 100 kids on a continuing basis and needed to be accessible to each round the clock. So he leased an electronic pager, charging it to his expenses.

"Don't you think you should have consulted us first?" Jack Pearpoint asked him. Replied Charlie quickly: "No. It's better to ask forgiveness then permission." Frontier College paid the bill gladly. "We saw how many of those kids actually got to love Charlie," Pearpoint adds.

Charlie sympathized with their dilemmas and said so, telling kids he'd done far worse. "I don't know a guy anywhere that wouldn't get in- to trouble like you if the conditions weren't right," he'd say. Adolescents felt free to tell him everything. Said Charlie, proudly: "If ever they're in a jackpot, they phone and tell me long before they tell their parents. I'm their friend, remember."

He was, never losing their trust. One morning at the Centre he settled himself comfortably into a chair in a lounge area to talk to a boy when he suddenly noticed that his briefcase, which he'd deposited carefully at the side of his chair had been stolen. Without mentioning the incident to anyone, Charlie quietly narrowed down the likely culprits and, after a few minutes, approached the actual offender, a 16-year-old boy he'd remembered seeing hovering nearby. "Okay," he said. "Give it back to me." The briefcase was returned there and then.

Charlie didn't report the boy or even mention the incident again. Says Jack Pearpoint: "But had this happened to others in the system, that kid would've faced extra charges."

By April 1, 1980, Charlie's work was being administered by Winnipeg's John Howard Society, which helps male ex-inmates. "Frontier College's country-wide projects tend to be transient," Pearpoint explains, "and we felt Charlie should come under the wings of a more permanent local organization." The Society gave him an office and paid him \$327 weekly to

go onto the streets to meet hard-core problem kids -- 24 hours a day.

Charlie obliged with relish. He thought nothing of getting out of bed at midnight to pick up a drunk teen in the local bus station, or break up a fight in a pool room. He counselled kids in parks, schools and coffee shops, getting to know their names, problems, addictions and aspirations. "Pop round to my place tonight," he told them. "You and me are gonna have a nice little chat."

Called upon to defend adolescents who disobeyed their social workers and probation officers, lawyers continued to call on Charlie's expertise. He interviewed kids and put together plans that could be presented to a judge. Remembers Weinstein: "It nearly always entailed Charlie finding a kid a job and showing him a new way of life -- at his home. Remarkably, most judges went for it as an alternative to detention."

In the hurry to get things done as his death drew closer, Webster recalls, "Charlie found no time for diplomacy and even less for tact." In court once with a car thief, he was asked by the prosecutor: "If this defendant is released into your custody, can you guarantee he won't get into trouble again?"

"Hell no!" Charlie replied quickly. "I couldn't even take that risk with you!" But he added: "You've got to give this kid another chance." The judge put the boy on probation.

Parents got to know of Charlie and recruited him to talk to delin-

quent children. One couple had the police charge their 17-year-old daughter with possessing marijuana as a deterrent, then, on a priest's suggestion, asked Charlie to counsel her. "People on drugs act stupidly," Charlie told the girl. "I know. I've done it!"

At midnight one day, when her daughter hadn't returned home from seeing friends, the girl's mother phoned Charlie, frantic with worry. He went to the home immediately, staying until she finally showed up -- at 3 a.m. "What time d'you call this?" he asked her abruptly.

Over the weeks, he talked to the girl about staying out late with bad company until she wept with remorse. To help her understand the adverse effects of drugs, he took her to the Manitoba Youth Centre and pointed out young addicts, their lives in shreds. At first, she resented Charlie's help. "Then piece by piece," she recalls, "I learned to like and trust him. The best thing he did for me was make me realize that I really did have drug problem when I didn't think I had!"

Eventually the girl turned to the Church and got to work in a store's cosmetics department. "How can I thank you for helping?" her mother asked Charlie. "Just say a prayer for me," he replied. Her daughter showed her gratitude, though, by becoming one of his co-workers in a project aimed at explaining the dangers of drug abuse in youth clubs and schools. "If it hadn't been for Charlie Tann," she told young audiences, "I'd definitely be an incurable addict today."

If teens went to jail, Charlie wrote to them. One such prisoner was an 18-year-old girl sentenced to three years in Kingston Penitentiary for setting fire to a restaurant. She later violated parole by going to Edmonton where she broke into a house. When the girl returned to prison, Charlie remained in touch with her, constantly telling her what he himself had once craved to know -- "that somewhere, someone out there cares." On her release, he counselled her, winning her confidence through his kindness and reshaping her life when I couldn't," says her mother. Today, the girl is in college, having been out of trouble for two years.

Charlie's sentence officially ended on May 3, 1980. Totally free of the system himself, he spent several weeks convincing Stony Mountain authorities they should grant a few days' compassionate parole to a lifer wanting to see his Montreal family before dying of cancer. The man was granted that temporary absence -- but only on condition that Charlie Tann, took responsibility and travelled with him. Charlie did -- and was glad he went. Shortly after seeing his family, the man died.

Ironically, during a regular medical check up a few months later, Charlie was told he had cancer himself. "He took the news bravely, knowing he would die soon, anyway," says Andy Grier, "and began a private bet with himself -- on which of his medical problems would take him first." For hours on end he lay in a hot bath trying to reduce body

swelling caused by his ailing liver. But his work went on as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening to him. "Charlie never complained," says Jack Pearpoint, "yet he once confided he'd been in pain virtually every day for the past three years."

When Charlie spoke to service clubs, he often turned up in slippers instead of hard shoes to ease the pain of severe gout. Often he took a reformed teen with him, to add a few words. "I'd like to tell you all about love and caring," Charlie would begin. "If you don't have these two commodities you're not going to get anywhere with your kids."

In the late fall of 1981, Charlie arrived for dinner at Webster's home shivering. "Where is your coat?" his host inquired. "It's very cold out!" Charlie explained he'd given it to a kid who needed it more than he did, whereupon, Webster handed him his ski jacket. "If the truth's known," he says, "Charlie probably gave that away, too. I never got it back."

In days, Charlie suffered a cold so severe that he ended up in a coma in Winnipeg General Hospital's intensive care unit with pneumonia. Colleagues who saw him hooked to life support systems told themselves he'd never recover. He did, though. His first request, in fact, when he came to, was a bedside phone. He remembered having a court date with a 17-year-old girl and needed to find someone else to escort her there instead. "In Charlie's eyes, it was absolutely unthinkable for kids to go

to court on their own," says Gale Kellough, a former colleague social worker. "He knew what he was talking about. He'd done it a hundred times."

Charlie continued helping the young, even when they let him down. One 17-year-old boy who'd been discarded by his parents, turned up unannounced at his front door asking to stay a night. "Just until I get back on my feet," he said. When the kid moved out seven weeks later, he left Charlie to pay a \$400-phone bill. The boy eventually found laboring work in Edmonton; so he could accept it, Charlie paid his rail fare, making him promise to repay him. "You don't get nothing in life without working for it," he said. He never heard from the boy again.

He lent his car to a youth awaiting trial on a shoplifting charge. A few hours later, the police called. The boy was in custody for impaired driving. Charlie bailed him out and appeared in court on his behalf. "The kid's had a rough deal in life," he told one judge. "Someone's let him down. So he's drinking too much. He doesn't mean any harm. Deep down, he's a darn good kid." The boy was given a suspended sentence.

Charlie collapsed in his office in March 1982, spending several months between hospital and home -- a little white dream-house he'd bought on a quiet street in the Winnipeg suburb of St. Boniface. He tried returning to work, but was too weak. So he stayed at home, counselling kids by phone. Soon, though, he was too feeble even for that.

The end was nigh; by winter of 1982 friends began streaming in to say farewell to him. They included John Howard Society colleagues, policemen, lawyers and prison guards. Mothers arrived with some of the kids Charlie had helped.

Heartened by the outpouring of affection, Charlie announced brightly: "This is kinda like being at a damn-good party when you gotta go home early." But he cried, too, "not so much with pain, or the fear of slipping into the unknown," says Neil Webster, "but because he was bitterly disappointed to be departing with his job partially done."

Charlie Tann died quietly on the afternoon of March 27, 1983. He was 51. He asked to have no funeral. "In his final four years of freedom," says Andy Grier, "he lived fifty for others" Added a youth Charlie had re-shaped: "He never let up helping me when everyone else had -- my probation officer, friends, even my mother. If I grow up to be just half the man Charlie was, I'd be one helluva man!"

Tributes like that were expressed spontaneously by others Charlie had helped. But perhaps the fondest epitaph to both his work and the debt he finally repaid a hundred times over, came from his last boss.

Charlie's program, said Dave Kennedy, was built entirely around him -- his experience, compassion and talent for sharing his feelings. Thus, when he went, the street world lost a loyal friend. "Initially,"

Kennedy recalls, "we tried hard to find a replacement. We couldn't.

There'll never be another Charlie Tann."