



ROBERT BECKER/Lincoln Journal Star

■ **Student of life:** Adam Fletcher, a kid at heart, expresses himself to students during rehearsal for a play on HIV/AIDS at the YWCA.

## Adam's actions dispel Generation Xer myth

This could be a child's bedroom — Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet on the closet door, a metal micro-machine collection on the wall and a well-worn stuffed Garfield perched on a rocking chair.

But look some more and you'll see it isn't — Nelson Mandela's book "Long Walk to Freedom" on the night stand, a set of weights on the floor, a scrawled plea for lovemaking taped to the wall: "Voulez-vous coucher avec moi, ce soir?"

This is Adam Fletcher's room. Fletcher is 23. Born in Canada. Raised in Omaha. Former AmeriCorps volunteer. Enthusiastic student of life. Keeper of childhood treasures. Card-carrying Generation Xer.

But just try pinning the media's moniker of his peers on his broad shoulders.

A slacker? Fletcher?

Forget it.

OK, so he's slacked off on fitness. The weights are his girlfriend's.

"She's intent on staying fit, with Adam it's more casual," Fletcher explains.

Casual, as in shape, is not an issue here.

Fletcher is sort of short and sort of round and sort of bald. He looks a bit like a couch potato, a tad like a good ol' country boy, a



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smidge like a beer-drinkin' bubba.

Not true. He's wise beyond his years. Stands apart from the mainstream. Makes his own way.

He bubbles. He bursts. He points his stubby spark plug fingers and flings his Michelin arms, shouts and whispers and never stops talking — politics, religion, injustice, music, poverty, alcohol, the apocalypse, life's sweet surprises.

When asked, he tells his short life story — sitting at the kitchen table in his apartment, picking imaginary lint from a place mat, creating abstract art with a paper clip — not because he's nervous, but because energy, you know, never stops moving.

The second of four children, Fletcher was born in Calgary, Alberta, to a Vietnam vet father and a PTO-leading mother.

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Dad was an alcoholic, tormented by war demons — "You see too much and don't deal with it, it screws your noodle" — skipping from job to job.

Fletcher was a little boy when the family left Canada for Kansas City. Their car broke down 200 miles north and there they stayed.

A poor family in east Omaha. Six of them living in that broken-down jalopy before finding first a trailer house and eventually a home of their own.

"My crazy family," he whispers from across the table. "My awesome, awesome, awesome parents."

The family didn't have much at first, but his father quit drinking, started dealing with the demons. His mother took hold of scouting and volunteer work and the church, pulling her children along with her.

It was in those early years Adam fanned the sparks of a passion that became a raging fire.

He found it in moonlit walks through bogs and forests with his father. He found it in serving at food pantries and schools.

"I played Santa Claus four years straight at Miller Park Elementary, and I didn't know I was volunteering," he said.

He found it in mentors at home, at school, in the community, at church, on the streets, in social services agencies.

Sure, he's lost his way a couple of times. Been enrolled in college for three semesters — one each at Wesleyan, UNL and UNO — with not much to show for his time.

Set out for New Orleans and his fortune and ended up sleeping behind buildings and playing the harmonica for pennies.

All of that defines this young man. This be-all-you-can-be pacifist, this wanna-be singer, writer, painter, poet, halfway between Winnie-the-Pooh and Thomas Paine. And what he's been given he wants to return.

"I want to find that 7-year-old Adam who's living in a car with his family. Staying at a hotel at Christmas and getting a Garfield in a plastic bag for his only present — and I want to help him."

He's done it. Working with an addicted youth at CenterPointe, teaching survival skills at the YWCA, sharing his love of nature with kids at the Chet Ager Nature Center, teaching English to Kurdish refugees.

Fletcher is finished with his stint in the domestic Peace Corps. He's thinking about taking on another, maybe in Washington state, where the days are cool and the forests many.

Back in that bedroom, Fletcher points to a faded photograph of a scrawny white-haired man — chickens perched on his outstretched arms.

"This is crazy Grandpa Sasse," he says. "I think that's the best picture in the world."

"He spent a lot of time in the barn. Up in the rafters expressing himself, I suppose."

Fletcher is following in the Grandpa Sasse tradition, but he's not hiding in any barn.

He's spreading his wings for all the world to see.

Just watch him fly.

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