

A Simple Lesson for the Ride Home

It had been a long day in Mrs. Sieck's second grade class. I had sat at my desk wearing a flowered dress and lacy socks learning cursive and was ready to go home. The fall sunshine was a welcome comfort at the end of the day. Careful to avoid all cracks in the sidewalk, I eagerly walked down to the bus pick up to board number 15, with Gus at the wheel. To my surprise, when I arrived at the pick up spot, my dad was there, standing off to the side and ready to pick me out of the flood of children going by before I boarded my bus. Dad was smiling, and his eyes revealed just a bit of the fatigue he and my mom experienced from having two-year-old twins at home. As we walked together past the buses toward the parking lot, Dad waved to Gus and motioned that he'd found me. Dad was prepared; if he hadn't caught me, Gus knew to turn me around.

Once Dad's little black Datsun pickup was in view, my focus shifted. Dad, the softie, was driving me home. We'd pass by the tiny convenience store on the way home, where if I played my cards right, we'd stop and I'd get a popsicle or a candy bar. The timing was perfect: the store was halfway between school and home. I had enough time before we'd get there to work Dad over, and enough time after to finish my treat and destroy the evidence and Mom would never have to know.

Mom never caved when I used my childish charm on her. She'd look at me sideways with a half-smile that said she appreciated my effort, but she wouldn't be swayed. Dad was a different story. Two drawn out "pleeeaaaaaase"s and a winning smile, and I almost always got my way.

We stopped and I picked out a fruity, sweet popsicle that started to melt just a little bit when we got back in the truck. Fully distracted by my prize, I hardly noticed

when we had almost arrived at our road. I stashed my popsicle stick and wrapper safely under my seat among Dad's hardware receipts and tools and looked out the window to see a car pulled over with its lights flashing.

As we turned the corner, Dad looked past me and out my window and saw the car belonged to an elderly couple. She was in the passenger seat, looking very worried and helpless. He stood on the sidewalk, pausing between the trunk and the front right tire, a jack in his hands and a look on his face like this was a Herculean task. Intimidation consumed them both.

Before I knew it, Dad had pulled the truck over and was telling me to get out and follow him. I hopped out my door, my popsicle-covered hands sticking to the handle. I scurried around the corner, curious what my dad planned to do. Standing out of the way, I watched as my dad, in torn jeans and a paint-speckled T-shirt, changed the couple's flat tire with the speed and ease of a pit crew mechanic. I made eye contact for a moment with the man's wife, still seated in the car. Her expression was one of relief.

When my dad stood up, he wiped his hands on his shirt and put the defeated tire and jack back into the trunk. The old man pulled his wallet from his trouser pocket and opened it, revealing several bills, picked out a couple and outstretched his hand.

"No, no, no, it's no trouble," said my dad.

His offer of money squarely refused, the old man took my dad's hands in his and closed his eyes, "Lord, bless this man in a special way." They went on their way, and we went on ours. I smiled thinking about what my dad had just done.

In a stretch of five minutes, my dad had come to the rescue for a pair of complete strangers. It was a small favor, something Dad was totally comfortable doing, and it

spared the old man from having to do it himself. I don't have any idea who they were, or where they were going, but they needed a hand and we happened to be driving by. What I learned that day, at age seven, was decency: that you help when and where an opportunity presents itself, that being kind for the sake of being kind is its own reward and that sometimes the simplest task for you means the world to someone else.

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