

For Only A Dollar

=====

Today I went to Wendy's, the restaurant, which was one of those rare occasions I get to treat myself. I had it all planned out. I had been thinking about it all day.

I was going to have my Wendy's usual, a chicken sandwich, small fry and small drink, which were all off the dollar menu. However, while placing my order, I had a change of heart. You see I live in Phoenix Arizona, and its 110 degrees today. So I decided to have the dollar frosty instead of the small drink. I decided to wait to order it until I finished my meal so that I could have it on the walk back to the bus stop. By the way, I was telling all this to the young guy who was taking my order. It makes me laugh at myself now. But he politely smiled, nodded and offered me a cup of ice water.

I took my tray and sat down to enjoy my meal. As I was sitting there eating and listening to 3 unruly, crying kids and noticing 2 parents who think they are acting normal, an older gentleman came into the restaurant. He appeared to be in his seventies, very tall, very skinny, and a few days unshaven and very white hair. His clothes were clean but didn't fit right.

He was carrying 2 backpacks, several newspapers folded neatly under his arm, and a large Igloo(r) water cooler. He placed his things in the booth next to mine and proceeded to the counter to order. At that time, I noticed how quiet the restaurant had become. No one was staring at the gentleman because they didn't want to make eye contact with him. Even the unconcerned parents were forcing their children to be quite and not look at him.

I continued to watch everyone's reactions towards him, and I knew exactly what it felt like to be in his position. You see for the most part of the past 2 years, I have been homeless and it's hard to hide that fact. People don't know how to respond to you. They want to help, they know they should help, but for whatever their reasons are at the time they don't. So what do they do...?

They get quiet and for God's sake don't make eye contact. As long as they don't make eye contact with you, they think you don't know that they know. However, we know and feel it more than you will ever know.

I watched him order; he asked the young guy for ice for his cooler, then he ordered a large drink without ice. He paid with pennies. I noticed the look on the young guy's face. I recognized that look, he was nervous that the gentleman would not have enough money to pay. He then would have to make a decision on what to do; call a manager, put in some change of his own or tell the man to buzz off.

The man had just enough to pay. He too had been planning his treat at Wendy's all day, he had counted that change over and over again to be sure he had enough before ever entering the restaurant.

He didn't want anyone to know and it was embarrassing enough to have to pay with a handful of 'found' pennies; but to do so and find you don't have enough is an even a bigger fear. So he paid and at that moment, he was rich. He was able to go into a cool place, order something, pay for it, read his paper and for a brief moment, feel normal.

I continued to watch him and the others, not knowing exactly what to do myself. Sometimes we just want to pretend that no one knows. I watched him organize his things and he sat down

next to me. He faced the window and his back was towards me. He didn't make eye contact. I watched him wipe the table and seat down before he sat down to read his paper. He took the drink without ice and poured it into the cooler; he stretched his dollar. I continued to enjoy my meal and tried not to feel sad for him, myself or those watching.

Then I remembered my decision not to order the drink and to get a frosty instead. It all became clear. If I had ordered the drink, I would not have had the dollar in my pocket waiting on that frosty. I smiled at myself and said, "I get it God". I knew why you made me act a fool at the counter when ordering; I was suppose to have the dollar in my pocket at that moment. So I got up and walked up to the counter. The young guy said, "Ready for your frosty", and I said, "no, I think I need another chicken sandwich". He said, "Still hungry?" I replied "something like that".

I took the chicken sandwich, sat back down at my booth, waited a couple of minutes and spoke to the gentleman. I told him I had an extra chicken sandwich and asked would he like it.

He nodded his head yes, took the sandwich and began to eat it

before he could unwrap it completely. I then noticed a strange reaction in the restaurant. It was no longer quiet. There was a buzz, but I wasn't sure why. Feeling good about what I had done and how much better that felt than the brain freeze I would have gotten from the frosty, I finished my meal.

As I was gathering my trash, there was a rush to the counter. 3 people from 3 different tables, including one of the parents from the unruly kid's table all headed to the counter.

I sat back down to watch. One by one, they all brought him something over; first a fry, then a small salad and then a bowl of chili. All 3 saying the same thing I had said, I have an extra item, would you like it. He never said a word; he just reached out to take it and nodded yes to each. I watched for a minute longer as he arranged his banquet; he bowed his head for a moment and then continued on with his feast.

I watched the others begin to leave the restaurant. They were walking very tall, big smiles and feeling pretty good. They got that feeling "For only a Dollar".

I think sometimes we just don't know what to do, and we're

just waiting for someone to show us. Today, God showed me what

I needed to do. When I listened, look what happened. When we do something small it makes a world of difference. As I was leaving, the guy at the counter called his manager up and they both smiled at me as I left. I smiled with my big "Dollar" smile back and I felt seven feet tall.

As I walked by the window, the gentleman waved at me and mouthed the words, "God bless you". I think I saw him wipe a tear from his eye. At that moment I felt pretty blessed and I definitely had to wipe a tear from my eye. And I got all this "For only a Dollar".

~A MountainWings Original experienced and written by Thom Malone~