

Acts of Kindness

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Friday night my wife and I had finished loading the groceries in the trunk, were in the car and ready to back out, when another customer got our attention and said we had forgotten something in the cart. He was waving a package of frozen vegetables. Evidently it fell out of one the reusable bags we employ nowadays.

Clearly, there was nothing in this for the customer; in fact, he could have scored a free bag of frozen veggies if he hadn't said anything. It was just an act of kindness.

I often repeat another story involving kindness that I experienced about 50 years ago. I grew up in a small city and by the time I reached nine or so, my parents allowed me to walk downtown with friends on Saturdays. This was the commercial district's biggest shopping day, and the streets were mobbed with people, including lots of kids looking for fun. It was perfectly safe.

Generally none of us kids had more than a buck in his pocket for the afternoon's adventure, but in those days a buck went quite a ways. At the end of one such foray, a group of about five of us decided to stop at a small, grill-type restaurant—the kind of place that had the word "Eat" displayed prominently—and have Cokes and maybe an order of fries that we would share. By that point, that was all we could afford *after* pooling our money.

So we went into this place, plunked down at the counter, checked the menu board for prices, counted our dimes, nickels, and pennies—literally—conferred, and decided that indeed we only had enough money for a round of Cokes (at 10 or 15 cents each) and one order of fries (at a quarter or so).

The grill cook came up to us and was a classic for the time, probably around 1960; I still can picture him to this day. He had dark hair and was wearing one of those white, army-style paper hats (the photo is from thecostumer.com) that such workers used to wear, a white t-shirt, and white apron.



He took our order and pretty soon came back with the Cokes. We started sipping them and continued talking up a storm.

A little while later, I noticed the cook walking toward us with his arms full of plates! My memory is that every one of my buddies had the same shocked expression. Soon a hamburger and order of fries were in front of each of us.

We stammered together in surprise and horror (all of us thinking no doubt that seeing we didn't have the money to pay for this feast, we'd have to do the dishes!) that there must have been some sort of mistake because all we could afford was one order of fries and the Cokes. He smiled and said, "Don't worry, boys, it's on me!" I distinctly remember each of us breaking out in a grin as wide as the sky at our good fortune.

'Course at that age we all ate as if we hadn't seen food before and were as effusive in our thanks as kids can be. We also left a small pile of coins as a tip.

I wish there were some way I could locate that grill cook and tell him what a wonderful thing he did, how I still think about his kindness on a regular basis and have probably retold the story a hundred times.

I don't even know his name, but he brought a lasting ray of sunshine into my life that day and taught me an important lesson.

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