

A Stroke of Luck

I stopped for my morning coffee at the local donut shop and was pleasantly pleased to find no other cars in the parking lot. My usual routine is to wait in a long line to get my morning dose of caffeine. Opening the door, I noticed only one fellow at the counter.

The gentleman was obviously struggling to explain his order to a seemingly impatient young woman, "S-m-a-l-l c-o-f-f-e-e, b-a-g-e-l w-i-t-h c-r-e-a-m c-h-e-e-s-e." He spoke so slowly, some words slurred together, and I noticed that he held his left arm limply against his chest. It was obvious to me that he had suffered a stroke - so had I just four years earlier. Unlike this fellow, my deficits are few and unnoticeable. The fact that I sometimes can't remember what I had for dinner the night before has never bothered me. I am lucky enough to remember that I did eat, that there was food on the table and I did not go to bed hungry like so many others in this world of ours. No, the fact that I can't recall the menu is a small matter in an otherwise very blessed life.

I quickly stepped to the counter in time to hear the young woman ask again, "What was that you wanted?" I glanced at the man, then the young woman, and then I interrupted, "I believe the gentleman wants a small coffee and a bagel with cream cheese." The young lady nodded at me, glanced at the gentleman, who also nodded and quickly turned to prepare the order. The man turned slowly towards me and smiled.

When the order was placed in front of the man, the young woman took his money and placed the change on the counter. He gingerly tried to pick up the coins with his trembling hand. "Can I help the next person in line?" I couldn't believe that she was oblivious to his struggle and only concerned with getting my order filled.

"The next person, the only OTHER person in this line is me. I will be with you in a minute as soon as I assist this gentleman." I picked up his change and placed it in his hand. Then, as he gingerly tried to lift up his bagel, I reached for his coffee and motioned towards a small table in the corner, "How's this?" I placed the coffee on the table and reached for a few napkins. He sat down slowly, positioning himself with his left arm resting on the table. "T-h-a-n-k y-o-u. G-o-d s-e-n-t m-e a-n a-n-g-e-l t-o-d-a-y."

He smiled as I answered, "No, God sent ME the angel. You see, I suffered a stroke, too. I survived a ruptured brain aneurysm four years ago. It was a stroke of luck that God put you in my path this morning to remind me how blessed I really am. Blessed to be here to help you. Blessed because I can use both of my arms. Blessed because I have been given a gift of compassion which has opened my eyes to others in a world that is blind to suffering."

I returned to the counter to place my coffee order. The young woman was unaware of the conversation that had just transpired between my newfound friend and myself. I wanted to share it with her. I thought perhaps it would open her eyes to his misfortune. "He had a stroke and that's why he is moving and speaking so slowly." She nodded and said, "\$1.29. Will that be all today?" I handed her the money, took my coffee and waved goodbye to my new friend who was smiling and enjoying his bagel.

Why is it that we cannot see the suffering around us? Have we become too wrapped up in our daily routine, our chores and our jobs that we do not recognize the need to stop or slow down and help the less fortunate? A simple smile. A kind word. A helping hand for those who may have only one hand. Let us not be so wrapped up in getting through the day that we see clear through the veil of suffering around us. Let us give thanks for the little things like being able to help someone in need.

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2)