

A Walk Across America

By Don Vermilyea



Intersections

It was February 13th in Cedar Rapids, IA and the Midwest was in the middle of an old-fashioned winter. Walking Nebraska from December through early January and Iowa the rest of wintertime was a constant challenge. Negative 30 wind-chill's made it tough getting out of my "warm" sleeping bag.

Some of the sidewalks in Cedar Rapids were treacherous due to recent partial snow melt and refreezing. Stretches were slicker than oil, others were dammed up slushy ponds, still others hadn't been shoveled at all. I'm grateful the majority were in pretty good shape and were safe to walk.

I was on my way to a couple's home who offered to take care of me overnight. They lived in the poorer part of the city, and as I slip-slided on the sidewalks, two teenage young men were walking the street in a way that looked like we'd cross paths. We were walking perpendicular to each other and I noticed they looked like gang-bangers, ganstas, or punks. You know the look—scary!

Because my knees were already really hurting from the torque of twisting and sliding on ice and snow with a heavy backpack, I was being very careful negotiating the hazardous conditions.

When I'd slow up, they'd slow up. When I'd speed up, they'd do likewise. My mind was imagining the "ha ha ha" as they "accidentally" bumped into me, the bum. It wouldn't have taken much for me to go down and be injured.

I started to get concerned, but decided not to retreat, and accepted that I'd deal with the inevitable when it happened. As we moved within five feet of each other, one of them held out two quarters and a nickel that looked like they'd

been very recently picked up off the dirty slushy streets. He said, "Here, this is for you. I just picked it up." "Thank you," was my reply as we went our separate ways. You'd think, the way I'm judged as scary by much of the public a good deal of the time, I'd know better. Not this time.

It's been interesting observing different ways people give me things.

Truckers have flung food out of their big rig windows after seeing me on the same highway day after day. I passed the beef jerky on to meat eaters, but ate everything else, and really appreciated their kindness from 65 miles per hour.

There was a man about 75 years old who knew how to do it. He gave me what appeared to be a twenty dollar bill and said, "Put this in your pocket." If it were crack cocaine or something else harmful I would have just said "no." Of course I complied with his request. After we parted company, I checked out the twenty and found it was five twenties! Wow! Praise God!!

Upon entering Boise, ID I spied a busy intersection that was loaded with coins that with time blend in with the dirt and gravel along the road. The general public had deposited the coins both by accident and deliberately. These days, we're not so careful with our money and people throw it out on purpose. Pennies aren't worth much to kids in the 21st Century.

All of a sudden, while gleaning the gravel, I heard a shrill whistle from three lanes of traffic away. Looking up I saw nothing and went back to the task at hand. About 10 seconds later the whistle happened again and I recognized the perpetrator. He was a mature looking man driving a regular looking vehicle. His arm was out



the window and he flung a "large" silver object my way into the congested stopped traffic.

From my expert point of view (I'm a professional coin-finder), I saw it was a shiny quarter that had landed on the pavement. The traffic light hadn't yet changed, the coin was in perfect sight, so I went in between the stopped vehicles and retrieved it. Then I saw the first shiny quarter he'd thrown me and started going for it. The man laughed hilariously at me in a way I perceived at my expense. Like, "see the degenerate stoop over and pick up coins in front of everyone and look like a loser."

What he didn't know was that I'd already "been there done that" for pennies. Quarters are like 25 pennies all rolled into one and the money I pick up or am given out on the highway goes to do the Lord's work. I stoop for the Lord and the money goes to those who truly need it.

If indeed he was using me to elevate his self-worth and stature in life it doesn't work when one gathers for Jesus Christ. He can laugh all he wants. I'll laugh all the way to the bank and the hungry will be fed. Don't get me wrong, it still hurts when someone laughs at me, but not like it would if I was picking up money for myself.

There's only been one gift I've had to throw out. Someone threw an almost full pack of Marlboro's to me and sped away before I could say no thanks. If it were meat or junk food I would have found someone who would have enjoyed

it, but cigarettes—I don't think so. My reluctance to give poison to someone outweighed my inclination of not wasting \$3 of tobacco.

A short while ago a woman gave me the Book of John from the Bible. In it she wrote, "Mr. Traveler, God loves you so much that he told me to stop and give you this booklet along with \$10. Jesus gave his life for you, that's how much you are loved." Is that good or what? There have been numerous persons who have stopped for me and said God spoke to them before helping me out.

I wish people wanting to give me money wouldn't say, "Do you need money?" I'd like to lie and say "yes," but I don't, as my 11 cents per hour salary is enough to make it. If I lied it would be more money that could go to those in need, but they are asking the homeless looking traveler personally, not the man walking across America for Jesus.

There was a fella in California who drove by a four-way stop I was mining for coins. He said, "Need some money?" and I said "no." As he drove off slowly, I continued to excavate the gold mine. About five minutes later he returned from the other direction, stops, and says, "Are you sure you don't need money?" Again I said, "no." Finally five minutes later he comes back for the third time and holds \$10 out his window and exclaims, "I don't care if you need money or not, take this." Yes, I did.

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