

Lost and Found

BY ALBERT ALTIMARI

I was ten years old and out collecting empty soda bottles. This was back in the good old days when they were made of glass, and you could get a refund for them. The little ones were worth two cents and the big ones, a nickel. It's not that I was ambitious. The fact of the matter was that I broke a neighbor's window while playing ball, and my Dad was trying to teach me responsibility. It takes a lot of empty bottles to pay for a new window. After I finished teasing the dog next door, I went on the elusive search.

All of a sudden coming up the street was my worst nightmare, my arch-enemy, Michelle. Every time we raced, I lost. She could always get someplace ahead of me, but it wasn't fair because she had those long, skinny legs. I got even with her though; I told her that she was adopted. It wasn't true, but it sure kept her guessing. At any rate I decided to cross the street. I was in no mood to deal with her today. While keeping a wary eye on her, I stepped on some-thing. I looked down, and there was a brown wallet. My anxious little fingers fumbled it a few times until I was able to peek inside. There it was, \$56.00, all mine!

Leaving the four bottles I had collected sitting on the curb, I raced home in record time. Even Michelle would have been left in my dust that day. I showed the gold mine to my Dad and told him I not only had enough for the broken window but for a new baseball glove too. Then my Dad got logical on me. Parents do that. They practice it when you're not around.

Inside the wallet was a driver's license, some pictures and a few coupons for the supermarket. As my Dad looked at these items, the silence was just too loud for me. I blurted out that we could buy some perfume for Mom. I figured that might win him over. All Moms like perfume, right? The next thing I knew we were in the car headed someplace, and it didn't look like the way to the store that sold baseball gloves either. We ended up in a part of town I had never been to, but I had heard about it. There was a whole little neighborhood of just trailers. My Dad called them mobile homes. He knew about stuff like that.

I couldn't tell the name of the place because most of the letters on the old black and white sign were missing. We drove around until my Dad found what he was searching for. The address on the rusty, green trailer was the same as the one in the wallet. There was a broken swing set in the yard and a fence with no gate on it. One of the windows in the trailer had a piece of cardboard in it to keep the cold out. In front was a beat-up station wagon that didn't look like it would run. Three kids, younger than me, were in the empty sandbox playing. They were playing with an old tire and a football that needed air in it. The wallet belonged to someone in this family. My Dad put the wallet on the car seat and told me the decision was mine. For the first time in my life I was at a loss for words. On the long ride home my Dad told me that he was proud of me. I needed to hear that. He said he knew what decision I would make because I was his son. Dad took care of that window I broke and he never made me pay for it. He said that he was a kid once too. I still used my old glove for a few more years; I guess I really didn't need a new one after all.

I never realized how much we had until I saw firsthand how rough other people had it. Dad was always leading by his example. Even today I still give him a big hug when I remember times like that. Some things stay with you forever. Thanks, Dad, for being there.

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