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Sowerby: David's gift during road trip was one to treasure

By Joe Sowerby , For The Macomb Daily

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He moved in sort of a slow motion, hunched over lope. His age was undetermined and probably younger than he looked. Bearded and a bit disheveled he moved from garbage canister to garbage canister at each gas pump searching for buried treasure,

We were heading for home after a four day trip to the west side of Michigan visiting Douglas and Saugatuck. A snack to eat on the road, gas and go was the plan. At the cash register inside I inquired about this man. He was not a pan handler, wasn't bothering anybody and there was a certain dignity to how he went about his search for revenue. He almost seemed like an employee. The young cashier said, "That's David; he comes here to search for empty bottles and cans."

I asked if he thought it would be OK to offer him some money. He said, "I don't know if he'll take it but you can offer it to him".

Outside David was loading his latest finds of returnable cans and bottles into an older model cluttered Saturn SUV. I walked up and said "hi," slid some cash into his hand and started to leave. He thanked me and then said, "hold on -- I have some brand new Johnny Walker glasses that are still in the box, I found a bunch of them." I thanked him but said it was OK, waved and walked back to my car. He immediately went to his back seat and grabbed a box with two new glasses in it and came over to me. It was a gift box. The kind of box you see at Christmas with a bottle of liquor on one side and a couple glasses included on the other side of the gift box. The liquor was gone, the new glasses remained.

David's eyes glowed with enthusiasm and his voice was filled with excitement as he told me the story. He found a bunch of these boxes in a dumpster, the booze was gone but the glass's remained. David had a vivid imagination. He said with gusto in his voice that he imagined that some rich guy with a bunch of girlfriends probably threw them out after gifting the bottles. I accepted his gift and watched him go back to his vehicle in the same slow motion scuffle of a walk.

I put the glasses on the backseat. My wife got in the car and we headed for the highway. Unfortunately the package he gifted me with smelled like the dumpster he found them in. We pulled over in a park and drive lot to move them to the trunk.

My wife, Kata, jumped out first and said she would do it, I popped the trunk but she was worried that the trunk and luggage in it would end up smelling like the box of glasses. She suggested leaving them in an easy to find spot in the park and drive lot and they would soon find a new home. I agreed and we left them behind.

I regretted that decision moments after we were on the freeway. It was not my wife's fault. She had not been part of the interaction between David and myself. Nor had she witnessed his excitement or the glow in his eyes as he insisted I share in his great find. This had been his way of thanking me, his quid pro quo and I abandoned his kind -- if smelly -- gesture moments later.

Here was a man who appeared not to have much and rather than simply accept my small financial gift felt compelled to gift me back. Was David different, would he be considered odd? In most circles, probably. Did he suffer from Psychosis? Some mental illness, perhaps; but in our heart of hearts so do a lot of us. We just have better disguises than David. Television star and world traveler Anthony Bourdain as well as fashion icon Kate Spade recently took their own lives. On the surface most of us would have been happy to trade places with them, but their internal heart wrenching struggle with despair and depression cost them the ultimate price. The reality is that we all have a secret top dresser drawer of emotional ghosts and goblins. Bourdain and Spades fame and fortune was enviable on the surface but the footings of their lives collapsed and they died alone. None of us would want that part of their existence.

Then there is David. How many would trade places with him?

In the few moments I spent with him at the Shell station he seemed comfortable in his own skin and not the least bit uncomfortable with who he is. A guy who doesn't seem to have much. A man whose looks, presence and behaviors would make many of us a little or a lot uncomfortable. If you are like me, look in the mirror and raise your hand

I don't know David's innermost thoughts, demons or angels. I still search for and struggle with my own. What is known is he gifted me with something that was a treasure to him. His generosity and kindness far exceeded my own. There is no clear definition of happiness or success. I will embrace David as one of those ah-ha moments and memories in my life and I hope and pray that someone finds and puts David's gifts treasured rock glasses to good use.

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