



The Kindness of Strangers

RD readers share first-hand accounts of compassion - 20 stories that touched their lives and our hearts. You may want a box of tissues handy...

THE MAN AT THE SUPERMARKET

When the supermarket cashier had added up my groceries, I was \$12 over what I had on me. I began to remove items from the bags, when another shopper handed me a \$20 note.

"Please don't put yourself out," I told him.

"Let me tell you a story," he said. "My mother is in the hospital with cancer. I visit her every day and bring her flowers. I went this morning, and she got cross with me for spending my money on more flowers. She demanded that I do something else with that money. So, here, please accept this. It's my mother's flowers."

LESLIE WAGNER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY YASU+JUNKO

JIM AND THE JOB

My neighbour, Jim, had trouble deciding if he wanted to retire from the construction field, until he ran into a younger man he'd worked with previously. The young man had a wife and three children and was finding it difficult to make ends meet, since he hadn't worked in some time. The next morning, Jim went to the union office and submitted his retirement paperwork. As for his replacement, he gave them the name of the young man. That was six years ago, and that young husband and father has been employed ever since. **MIRANDA MacLEAN**

A FAMILY'S FOOD ANGEL

While going through a divorce, my mother fretted over her new worries: no income, the same bills, and no way to afford groceries. It was around this time that she started finding boxes of food outside our door every morning. This went on for months, until she was able to land a job. We never found out who left the groceries, but they truly saved our lives.

JAMIE BOLEYN**THE LITTLE LIFT**

One evening, I left a restaurant just ahead of a woman assisting her elderly mother. I approached a step up and paused to see if my arthritic knees could climb it. To my right appeared an arm to assist. It was that of the elderly mother. My heart was so touched.

DONNA MOERIE**COLOUR ME AMAZED**

I forgot about the rules on liquids in carry-on luggage, so when I hit security at the airport, I had to give up all my painting supplies. When I returned a week later, an attendant was at the baggage area with my paints. Not only had he kept them for me, but he'd looked up my return date and time in order to meet me.

MARILYN KINSELLA**BOUNTY FOR A WIFE**

I was balancing caring for a toddler and holding down a full-time job, while my navy husband was on extended duty overseas. One evening, the doorbell rang. It was my neighbour, who was retired from the navy, holding a breadboard loaded with a freshly cooked chicken and vegetable stew.

"I've noticed you're getting a little skinny," he said.

It was the best meal I'd had in months.

PATRICIA FORDNEY**SHE GAVE ME DIRECTION**

As I left a party, I got on the wrong freeway and was immediately lost. I pulled over to the shoulder and called my roadside-assistance provider. She tried to connect me to a freeway police patrol, but that call never went through. Hearing the panic in my voice, she came up with a plan B: "You're near this office," she said. "I'm about to go off shift. Stay put, and I'll find you." >>

WHITE SHOULDERS

A woman at our garage sale wore a perfume that smelled heavenly and familiar.

"What are you wearing?" I asked.

"White Shoulders," she said.

Suddenly, I was bowled over by a flood of memories. White Shoulders was the one gift I could count on at Christmas from my late mother. We chatted awhile, and she bought some things and left. A few hours later, she returned holding a new bottle of White Shoulders. I don't recall which one of us started crying first.

MEDIA STOOKSBURY



LACED WITH LOVE

Children were playing at the recreation area of an IKEA store when my five-year-old granddaughter motioned for a small boy to stop. She knelt down before him and re-tied his flopping shoelaces - she had only just learned to tie her own. No words were spoken, but after she finished, both smiled shyly, then turned to race off in different directions.

SHEELA MAYES



Ten minutes later, she rolled up. She guided me not only to the right freeway but all the way to the correct freeway exit. And then, with a wave goodbye, she drove back into the night.

MICHELLE ARNOLD

BREAKING BREAD

Last December, before work, I stopped at a café and ordered an everything bagel with cream cheese. It was toasty warm, and I couldn't wait to dig in. But as I left the café, I noticed an older homeless gentleman sitting at the bus stop. Knowing it would probably be his only warm meal of the day, I gave him the bagel.

But all was not lost for me. Another customer from the café offered me half of her bagel. I was so delighted because I realised that in one way or another, we're all looked after.

LILIANA FIGUEROA

"I CAN STILL HELP"

As I walked through the parking lot, all I could think about was the dire diagnosis I had handed my patient Jimmy: pancreatic cancer. Just then, I noticed an elderly gentleman handing tools to someone working under his stalled car. That someone was Jimmy.

"Jimmy, what are you doing?" I yelled out.

Jimmy dusted off his pants. "My cancer didn't tell me not to help others, Doc," he said, before waving at the old man to start the car. The engine roared to life. The old man thanked

Jimmy and drove off. Then Jimmy got into his car and took off as well.

Take-home message: kindness has no limits and no restrictions.

DR MOHAMMED BASHA

HE KEPT AN EYE ON ME

Driving home in a bad storm, I noticed a vehicle trailing close behind me. Suddenly, my tyre blew! I pulled off the road, and so did the other car. A man jumped out from behind the wheel and without hesitation changed the flat.

"I was going to turn off three kilometres back," he said. "But I didn't think that tyre looked good."

MARILYN ATTEBERY

MY COMMANDER'S CALL

It was one of my first missions on a gunship during the Vietnam War. I was scanning for enemy fire when I spotted a bright object that looked as if it were coming straight at us. "Missile! Missile!" I shouted into my interphone. The pilot jerked the plane as hard as he could, dumping guys from one side of the craft to the next. Well, turns out the "missile" was a flare we had just dropped. Suffice it to say, the guys weren't pleased.

Back at the base, my commander put an arm around my shoulder. "Sergeant Hunter," he said, "you keep calling them like you see them. Better safe than sorry."

That kind act gave me the confidence to be one of the top gunners in my squadron.

DOUGLAS HUNTER

21 APPLES FROM MAX

When my grandson Max told his mother, Andrea, to donate any cheque she would give him for his 21st birthday to charity, Andrea got an idea.

She handed Max's brother Charlie a video camera. Then she withdrew 21 \$10 notes from the bank and bought 21 apples at the supermarket. When they spotted a homeless man, Andrea told him, "Today is my son Max's 21st birthday, and he asked me to give a gift to someone to help him celebrate." She handed the man a \$10 note and an apple. The man smiled into the camera and announced, "Happy birthday, Max!"

Soon, they passed out their booty to men and women waiting in line at a soup kitchen. In a unified chorus, they wished Max, "Happy birthday!"

At a pizza parlour, Andrea left \$50 and told the owners to feed the hungry. "Happy birthday, Max!" they shouted.

With one last \$10 note and apple, they stopped at Andrea's sister's office. Unable to contain her laughter or her tears, she bellowed into the camera, "Happy birthday, Max!"

DR DONALD STOLTZ

HOW DID SHE KNOW?

I was driving across the country to start a new job. What began as a fun adventure turned into a nightmare when I realised I had run through most of my money and still had a long way to go. I pulled over and let the tears flow. That's when I noticed the unopened

farewell card my neighbour had shoved in my hand as I left. I pulled the card out of the envelope, and \$100 dropped out – just enough to get me through the remainder of my trip. Later, I asked my neighbour why she had enclosed the money. She said, "I had a feeling it would help."

NADINE CHANDLER

BLANKET STATEMENT

When I was seven, my family drove to the Grand Canyon in Arizona. At one point, my favourite blanket flew out the window and was gone. I was devastated. Soon after, we stopped at a service station. I found a bench and was about to eat my sandwich when a biker gang pulled into the station.

"Is that your blue Ford?" a huge, frightening man with a grey and black beard asked. My mother nodded reticently. The man pulled my blanket from his jacket pocket and handed it to her. He then returned to his motorcycle. I repaid him the only way I knew how: I ran up to him and gave him my sandwich.

ZENA HAMILTON

TWICE AS NICE

Two firefighters were waiting in line at a fast-food restaurant when the siren sounded on their fire engine parked outside. As they turned to leave, a couple who'd just received their order, handed their food to the firefighters. The couple then got back in line to reorder. Doubling down on their selfless act, the manager refused to take their money.

JOANN SANDERSON



A KEY TO KINDNESS

Leaving a shop, I returned to my car only to find that I'd locked my keys and mobile phone inside. A teenager riding his bike saw me kick a tyre and say a few choice words. "What's wrong?" he asked.

I explained my situation. "But even if I could call my wife," I said, "she can't bring me her car key, since this is our only car."

He handed me his mobile phone. "Phone your wife and tell her I'm coming to get her key."

"That's a round trip of 11 kilometres."

"Don't worry about it."

An hour later, he returned with the key. I offered him some money, but he refused.

"Let's just say I needed the exercise," he said. Then, like a cowboy in the movies, he rode off into the sunset.

CLARENCE STEPHENS

JUST DRIVING THROUGH

When my friend and I were injured in a car accident, a family from out of state stopped to help. Seeing we were hurt, they drove us to the hospital and stayed there until we were released. They then took us home, got us food, and made sure we were settled in. Amazingly, they interrupted their holiday to help us.

CINDY EARLS

BY THE BOOK

I'd pulled over onto the side of a road and was suffering a panic attack when

a minivan full of kids pulled over. A woman got out and asked if I was OK. "No," I said. Then I laid out what had happened: I was delivering books for a publishing company. My next stop was way, way up this long and winding and, to me, very treacherous road. I couldn't do it.

"I'll deliver the books for you," she said. She was a local, and the roads were nothing for her.

I took her up on the offer and never forgot the simple kindness of this stranger.

DOREEN FRICK 