Angel on the Side of the Road

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He was an older man, maybe in his sixties. A faded, timeworn expression sat upon his gray stubbled face. He probably wore a once-green army jacket that hung loosely on his boney shoulders, and a red stocking hat sat crooked on his greasy gray hair. I was glad that he was warmly dressed, as it was that time of year when the temperatures dropped rapidly after dusk.

I was on my way home from a weekend spent with my two sisters, now my two best friends. We had spent time together sharing and laughing about our childhood shenanigans and creating fresh memories to be shared and laughed over in the years to come. That’s kind of how life works with sisters. Somehow, no matter what your childhood looked like, as adults, you become best friends.

As I was making the three-hour journey back home, I contemplated some things in my life and came to grips with a decision weighing heavy on my heart. I had told my sisters my intentions regarding this decision and knew that they would hold me accountable for following through in their caring way.

I had been battling the addiction of smoking for years now, and as Richard and I were planning on starting a family soon, it was time to put this habit to rest for a final time. At the beginning of the journey home, I had decided I would stop at the last exit and get rid of my cigarettes for the last time.

As I was tossing my last cigarette out the window on exit 48, I noticed him. He stood motionless and avoided eye contact. His sign read, “Need money for new glasses.” For whatever reason, I felt compelled to help this man out. I rolled down my window and reached into my purse, past the pack of cigarettes, and grabbed my wallet. Humm… all I have is a twenty-dollar bill. Still feeling compelled to help, I stick my hand out the window, holding onto my last bit of money, and hand him the bill.

His glasses were thick and crooked on his face, and the glass was broken in one lens. His eyes were cloudy and looked worn out. I smiled at him and felt like I should say something encouraging to him. I did not know what to say, so I said the first thing that came to mind….” God be with you.”

It was in this moment of exchange between a man with broken glasses and tired eyes and me, a desperate woman fighting her demons, that a chill ran from the very top of my head, through my face, down my arms, and all the way to the end of my toes. This man, while taking the bill, looked me straight in the eyes, eyes that were now as clear and as blue as a mountain lake, and responded, “God is closer than you think.”

I knew I had met an angel on the side of the road, on my way to throw away my reliance on a deadly god that had, until that moment, had a death grip upon my heart. I felt God’s presence in every cell of my body and can still remember the feeling today.

God stayed close to me in my desire to quit smoking, and my eyes were opened to the grace of God thru the most beautifully broken man on the side of the road that I have ever met. I have lived the past 20 years as a non-smoker and am now mom to two young adult boys.

The Bible tells us in Hebrews 13:2, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

God and His angel armies never fail to appear when we need them, whether cloaked as a homeless man or a kind stranger that helps at just the right moment.