

No hand out

By Tom Vandel

I first noticed him as I was heading into a convenience store. He was sitting on the sidewalk in a gray hoodie with one leg splayed out. He had a small ragged sign that simply said, "Please help." I knew he would most likely hit me up for money when I passed by and he did. Only it wasn't so much an ask, it was a look – lifeless eyes slowly lifting up to mine.

I took a dollar from my pocket and reached down to give it to him. He raised both arms and I caught my breath when I saw he had no hands or wrists. Each arm ended at the elbow. He used them to grab the buck, like a gray crab with pincers. I lowered my eyes and walked away.

When I got to my office I could see him from my window. He had his head down with his arms hidden inside his sweatshirt. At lunch, I walked to the post office and saw he was still there. I passed by him and caught my breath again. His one leg reached out like before; his other leg was missing. He had a prosthetic that extended just below the knee. It looked in bad shape, as if worn down over time.

I felt I had to know what happened. Was it a bomb in Iraq or Afghanistan? Did he step on a mine in Vietnam? Was he in a terrible car accident? What cosmic catastrophe caused him to be so physically impaired and also homeless? His answer was quiet and succinct: "I was born this way." God didn't even give him a decent story to tell.

I went back to my office and made him a new sign. It said: NO HANDS, NO WRISTS, ONE GOOD LEG. BUT I HAVE HOPE. PLEASE HELP. When I gave it to him he read it slowly, then said thanks, he would use it. He was probably humoring me. Now I realize he could have used two \$10 bills more than one cardboard sign. I haven't seen him since.

The Rage

By Mr. Man

There is a monster up inside me
From all the horrors I've been through
My daddy used to beat my ass
Till I was black and blue
I had to fight every day
on the street and in school
I tell life ain't easy for a boy named Sue
I left home at 16
I was tired of the game
If I die it will be the hand of a stranger
Not a man that shared my name
Being on your own as a kid?
It's easier than you think.
It beats getting black eyes
or getting knocked out by the sink.
The Midwest was a playground
where my soul was free to dwell
Then came the car crash
That started my own hell
I was only 19
On that fateful night
Broken glass in my face
and a dead man in my sights.

Mike was a just a kid,
19 just like me.
We switched seats for some reason,
every day that eats at me.
Why did I make it,
why is Mike gone.
He was a good guy,
that's one thing god got wrong.
I dream about it every night
and I think about it every day.
Every suicide attempt
is to take the pain away
You think you've had a hard life
You think your life is bad
daddy didn't buy you a car
You didn't have what your friends had.
All my friends didn't get what I got
and I think god for that
because the poor few that did,
prison is where they sat.
So go ahead and judge me,
you can't walk a mile in my shoes.
And if you think you can,
great, you'd look good in black and blue.

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Gary Cobb
Community Outreach Coordinator,
Central City Concern

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