

One small act of kindness



I was homeless and miserable. It was the coldest Christmas in years. Negative 20 to be exact. Days prior, I was in detox but decided to go back out to spend Christmas with my boyfriend, the abuser. Before leaving detox, I got to select a packed purse - a gift some charitable organization had donated hundreds of these to detox as a gift for all those less fortunate. (I will come back to this later)

So yeah, I am homeless and cold that Christmas Day. My boyfriend and I had found a building that had a heating pipe that supplies our cardboard box with heat, so that we didn't freeze at night. Come Christmas Day, I realized my stupidity of leaving detox to be with a man that beat me and wished I was anywhere but there. While he went out to score what he could, I chose to stay behind - not wanting to share in any of the Christmas cheer- blocking out the entire world.

Like I said, it was a cold one that year, and I was quite pathetic. A 38-year-old woman trying desperately to block out the whole damn world, trying to stay warm inside my cardboard box beside a building's exhaust system. I think now - what the hell was I breathing?! Anyways, someone saw me - or several people did - because the police were called in.

I sat that afternoon arguing with them that I was fine and that I was in my cardboard box by choice. That I just didn't want to be around people that year, and people's concerns were unfounded. I was warm enough with the exhaust blowing in. They told me that too many people had called it in and seeing a young woman in a cardboard box on Christmas morning in the freezing cold was too much for them to see. A harsh reality was unsightly. Try living it people!

It's a moment I cherish. Ogitchitaa. In Cree, that means warrior. I survived the streets and lived to tell about it.

And so, I reluctantly agreed to accompany police officers to the shelter - where I begrudgingly went inside. I was surprised to find the place almost empty as it was extremely cold outside. The staff offered me a mat and a warm shower and a plate of turkey and all the fixings when I emerged. My clothes were filthy, and I had nothing to change into. There was a donation of clothing that had come in and there was this camouflage onesie with a hood. Brand new, never worn. I gracefully and eagerly took it. What an extraordinary gift to someone who just wanted to disappear. I can still see that girl, sitting on that mat, wearing her camouflage onesie with the hood up - happily eating that Christmas dinner because no one could see her.

That was one of two gifts that really hit home with me that year.

Present number two.

Regardless of being homeless - I am one of the few addicts that can consider themselves lucky. I had a family that still cared. Boxing Day came and I was grateful for that wretched holiday to be over. My mom was still able to drive and she came down to meet me. She still tried to encourage me to leave the life and would bring me smokes and sometimes money. I got into her car with my backpack - eager to see what she had brought me. Previously, she had told me that my sister was working on something for me for Christmas. Instead, I was met with a question - where was my purse?

How did she know about the purse we had gotten in detox?!? I fondly remember how so many of the girls were excited about the purses! They sat and dreamed about which one they were going to pick and what would be in them. The storage room was filled with them.

I had picked the small, soft violet one, I traded it for drugs.

Unbeknownst to me, it was my sister and all her friends

that had gotten together to put those purses together. Knowing that her little sister was a homeless drug addict living on the streets and wanted to send a little bit of Christmas love, the only way she knew how.

I don't think I have cried so hard over losing something so precious and meaningful to me and the only thing that allowed me to get over it was the fact that that purse went to someone very dear to me; that purse went to a fellow participant. From one sister to another.

*The Christmas
Grinch*