

PK's Perspectives ... Pay It Forward

Babs Miller was bagging some early potatoes for me. I noticed a small boy delicate of bone and feature, ragged but clean, hungrily appraising a basket of freshly picked green peas. I paid for my potatoes but was also drawn to the display of fresh green peas. Pondering the peas, I couldn't help overhearing the conversation between Mr. Miller and the ragged boy next to me.

"Hello Barry, how are you today?" "H'lo, Mr. Miller. Fine, thank ya. Jus' admirin' them peas. Sure look good," said the ragged boy. "They are good, Barry. How's your Ma?" "Fine. Gittin' stronger all a'time." "Good! Anything I can help you with?" asked Mr. Miller. "No sir. Jus' admirin' them peas." "Would you like to take some home?" Mr. Miller inquired. "No sir. Got nuthin' to pay for 'em with."

"Well, what have you to trade me for some of those peas?" The ragged boy responded, "All I got's my prize marble here." "Is that right? Let me see it," said Mr. Miller. "Here 'tis. She's a dandy!" the boy proudly exclaimed. "I can see that. Hmmm, only thing is this one is blue and I sort of go for red. Do you have a red one like this at home?" "Not zackley...but almost," the boy responded. "Tell you what. Take this sack of peas home with you and next trip this way let me look at that red marble," suggested Mr. Miller. "Sure will. Thanks Mr. Miller."

Mrs. Miller, who had been standing nearby, came over to help me. With a smile she said, "There are two other boys like him in our community, all three are in very poor circumstances. Jim just loves to bargain with them for peas, apples, tomatoes, or whatever. When they come back with their red marbles, and they always do, he decides he doesn't like red after all and he sends them home with a bag of produce for a green marble or an orange one, perhaps." I left the produce stand smiling to myself, impressed with this man.

A short time later I moved to Colorado but I never forgot the story of this man, the boys, and their bartering. Just recently I had occasion to visit some old friends in that Idaho community and while I was there learned that Mr. Miller had died. They were having his viewing that evening and knowing my friends wanted to go, I agreed to accompany them.

Ahead of us in line were three young men. One was in an Army uniform and the other two wore nice haircuts, dark suits and white shirts...all very professional looking. They approached Mrs. Miller, standing composed and smiling by her husband's casket. Each of the young men hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, spoke briefly with her and moved on to the casket. Her misty blue eyes followed them as, one by one, each young man stopped briefly and placed his own warm hand over the cold pale hand in the casket. Each left the mortuary awkwardly, wiping his eyes.

Our turn came to meet Mrs. Miller. I told her who I was and mentioned the story she had told me about the marbles. With her eyes glistening, she took my hand and led me to the casket. "Those three young men who just left were the boys I told you about. They just told me how they appreciated the things Jim 'traded' them. Now, at last, when Jim could not change his mind about color or size...they came to pay their debt. We've never had a great deal of the wealth of this world but right now, Jim would consider himself the richest man in Idaho." With loving gentleness she lifted the lifeless fingers of her deceased husband. Resting underneath were three exquisitely shined red marbles. (by W.E. Peterson)

1 John 3:18 "Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions." Etienne de Grellet, an 18th century Quaker missionary, wrote, "I shall pass this way but once; any good that I can do or any kindness I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again." Grace & peace, love you. PK.