

## Paying it Forward

Nellie was exhausted. That seemed her perpetual state. The unexpected refund check for \$500, coming on December 23rd, was a blessing. She planned on giving her daughter Amber a hundred dollars. In her cart were her granddaughters Santa treats and a themed Barbie. Grace would not appreciate the gifts. She had too much stuff, to enjoy anything.

In the cart ahead of her a blond-haired angel cradled a doll in a box. Another girl stroked a blue dress while a third eyed a big box of chocolates. Their mother, in paint splattered clothes, laid the items on the counter. The girls eyed each item, smiling in anticipation.

“\$112.75 please.” The cashier told the mother. She pulled out worn bills that were tattered. She came up short and began digging in her cheap plastic purse. “Do you want me to put something back?” The cashier asked.

The girl's eyes were round with fear, who would lose what? They obviously had very little. The dresses, socks and shoes were necessities. The dolls and chocolates are niceties.

Taking a hundred-dollar bill from the bank envelope Nellie offered it to the woman.

“I’ll pay you in advance for the work you’ll do for me tonight.”

Bitter, disillusionment marked the once pretty face. She looked into fearful faces. How could she disappoint them? Who would she take a gift from? The war played out on the young mother’s face.

“Thank you.” Taking the money, she paid for the merchandise. She was waiting for Nellie, with her girls outside of the store.

“What do you want me to do?” The young woman asked.

“Can the girls decorate my tree? . I need you to clean up my kitchen and vacuum.”

“I don’t like charity. My Frank died over there. I have been fighting for what’s rightfully ours ever since.”

“The government is harsh. When John died, they denied me all his benefits. God’s provided for me.”

“God? He doesn’t care.”

“If he didn’t care he would not have sent me this extra money to share with you.”

The woman smiled.” I will follow you home.”

As Nellie climbed into her car she too was smiling. The week before she stopped at a café to eat. She had spent the morning being poked, prodded and tested at the doctors. She ordered off the 55+ menu. Revived, she asked for the ticket.

The waiter smiled, pointed to a young man carrying a baby, just leaving. “He paid your bill.”

Nellie knew it was called “paying it forward”. Someday this mother would help someone in turn. Paying it forward left a warm feeling inside. Knowing the act was appreciated meant even more.