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Introduction:

My wife and I operated a Christian Bookstore here in Gallup, NM from 2005 through June 2011. While we operated that store, I came in contact with many, many people from all walks of life and many of them were “street people or homeless” people. Here is a story of one of those life changing encounters.

This a story about a man named Don he was a former Vietnam Veteran, he was a recovered alcoholic, he was a convicted felon and he was a man of God. There are 7 parts to this story. Parts 1 – 6 were written in 2011.

The last part 7 wasn’t written until May 31, 2016 – Memorial Day - because I had a hard time finishing the story. I don’t know whether he dead or not. But, I believe he deserves to be remembered. Also, Don is not his real name. It has been changed to protect his identity.

PART ONE:

There is this guy name Don. I first met Don when he came into the Bread of Life one day. He wasn’t dressed very nice and his clothes were a little “soiled”, he had shoulder length hair and he looked a little scary. Like a lot of street people, he had a backpack on and when he came in he wouldn’t make eye contact and walked quickly into the store and went to the Bible reference area in the back of the store.

At that time [which was more than actually 3 years ago] we had adopted a strategy to deal with "people like him". [Now, that I am finally writing about Don, I can see how "prejudice" we can all be at times based on someone's outward appearance]. Unless the person was obviously under the influence we would let them look for a short time and then approach them and ask if they needed help – this would normally result in them leaving shortly thereafter. Another thing is if they had a backpack we would ask them in a nice way to allow us to hold the backpack up front for them. Most would immediately leave at that point.

Anyway, when I went up to Don and asked him if he needed any help and if I could hold his backpack up front for him – I fully expected a negative response just [here again being "prejudice"] based on his appearance. But, Don looked up from a book he was reviewing and said "sure here take it [the backpack] and he then said I do have some questions about the Bible references and commentaries. As we made eye contact, I saw some very tired eyes – eyes searching to see if I would seriously take some time to talk to him and answer his questions. "Eyes" that were searching for acceptance.

So, as we talked and I answered his questions, I came to know that Don was "yes" staying at NCI [a rehab center] but that even though he was "staying" there he said he doesn't drink or do drugs. He said he had been clean for quite some time. He said he had just arrived in town from Farmington and had no place to stay and he said all the guys on the street said go to NCI. He said as a matter of fact I am a Christian – I know you probably look at me and "say – yea right!" But, he continued and said my Pastor who is moving to Phoenix dropped me off, and I asked if I could catch a ride to Gallup as he passed through, so he dropped me off last week.

He told me that "yes" he did use to drink and do drugs and that for the last 7 years he had been working with this Pastor in Farmington at a rescue mission there. He had gone there to volunteer to help if he could after he got out of Prison. Again, he gave me that "searching" look to see what I would do. Then he looked at his watch and said, "oh, Man, I am late for my appointment at the VA – I got to go – where did you put my back pack I got to go!" I gave him his backpack and he dashed out the door.

As I reflected on what he said that day, I thought well, we'll see if he comes back. See, I am at times so judgmental of the street folks and the NCI clients, mainly because most of the time they only come in the store to ask for money; or to ask you to buy them something to eat; or to steal; or cause trouble. They will swear they don't drink or I haven't had any today, yet they smell like alcohol or sometimes are barely able to maintain their balance. Many times, if you

don't give in to their demands they create a big scene and other customers will all make a hasty exit from the store. Some of them even have good knowledge of the bible and can really put you on the spot with scripture.

To be honest after the first contact with Don I didn't really expect to see him again or if he did come in again I fully expected he might be drinking or wanting money.

Part 1 of 7 in a series. If you wish to comment, the author can be reached at: rmkontz@q.com

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