

One Shining Moment

by Cammie Corlas Quinn

One snowy winter afternoon when my children were young, we drove past a homeless man who was hiking along the highway. A large dog limped alongside him. Both were matted with snow. Two hours later on our way back home, we passed them again. He'd reached my town.



Earlier that day I'd been writing a Civil War story about starving contrabands fleeing from the war-ravaged South. How could I continue writing the story and *not* help this man? But what if he was dangerous? After all, I had my kids with me.

My conscience wouldn't stop pricking me. I thought about the "good Samaritan" story in the Bible. The Samaritan's kindnesses seem habitual, as if he was accustomed to rescuing battered victims of crime along the roadside. But is it possible he, too, was hesitant? Skeptical? Frightened?

I circled the block, tailing the homeless man. I circled the block again. I watched him tie his dog behind a gas station. I parked, locked my kids in the van, and followed him inside.

He was standing beside a glass refrigerator door, studying the overpriced luncheon meats. Snow melted in a puddle around his oversized boots.

"Mister," I said, my heart racing. "I saw you walking. You've been walking all day."

He turned. He looked young, yet old at the same time. The menace I half-expected to see on his face did not exist.

"Uh-huh," he said.

"Your dog's hurt?"

"Aw, he just stepped on a rock."

"Where are you headed?" I glanced outside the window at my kids.

"Chicago."

Chicago was one hundred miles away. I glanced outside again. The streetlight had winked on in the dusk.

“Made fifteen miles today,” he said.

“You have money for food?”

He shrugged. “A little.”

I plunged my hand into my pocket and pulled out a twenty. “Here. For you and your dog.”

He nodded. Snow slid off his outstretched coat sleeve.

I wanted to ask where he would sleep, but I’d already breached my “comfort zone.” I rushed out to the van, hopped in, and drove away.

Later that night, joy flooded over me. Why? After all, I hadn’t given him much. Finally, it hit me. For one shining moment in my life, I had allowed my compassion to overcome my fear.

Did this mean that I would always help every needy stranger? Probably not. But maybe, just maybe, the next time God tugs at my heart, I will brush aside the fear that hinders me from doing His bidding.

It is no great sacrifice to be a “good Samaritan.” Good Samaritans quickly learn that the rewards are greater than the sacrifices. They also realize that they are sometimes the needier of the two beggars. Yet God, in His great love, reaches down and blesses both in uncommon encounters that change the souls of men.

This story is an adapted version of Cammie’s “One Shining Moment” that appeared in Conquest, Regular Baptist Press, November 7, 1999.