

The Turkey Sandwich

By Ben from Oklahoma

Several years ago I found myself working one miserable, rainy Thanksgiving. I was 22 years old and alone on a major holiday for the first time in my life. All I wanted to do was stay inside with the curtains drawn and nap all day and feel sorry for myself. Holidays, weekends, inclement weather don't stop anything in the oil and gas industry , and I was called in to work about 10 that morning. Being the only single, childless guy on the payroll of a small trucking company, I guess I was obligated to work, and in hindsight I should have probably offered to do it without being asked. I got dressed and drove to the shop and climbed aboard the tanker truck I was assigned to and headed west towards Texas with a list of 5 or 6 loads needing hauled that day. I thought to myself : Great, not only am I getting a late start, now I'm looking at easily at least a 10 or 12 hour day IF (and only if) everything went smoothly.

As I settled into the drive, it seemed like the weather that day perfectly reflected my mood. Dreary, gray, overcast, and it being the Texas Panhandle , the wind never stopped howling. (10!years later it still hasn't) Every few minutes a few fat, heavy raindrops would smack the windshield. Not enough to be called a rain shower, just enough to force me to flip the windshield wipers on and smear dust and flyspecks across my vision. This is going to be a bulls[***] day. Endless Sand and tumbleweeds blew across the road. My coffee didnt taste good, and my favorite cds didn't seem to be doing anything to lift me up. Nowhere open with truck parking to grab a bite except the tiny truckstop on the main highway out of town. Heat-lamp deli burritos and string cheese for my thanksgiving, hooray for me. Oh well, I thought, "I will just get these loads hauled as fast as I can and go back home and drink beer until I fall asleep." I did everything I could for the first few hours to cut corners and shave

minutes off the rest of my day. Things were actually looking like I'd be in my recliner at a decent hour, until I pulled into pick up load number 4. Another driver had pulled in right before me and was going through the motions of getting ready to begin loading his tanker. I was completely blocked from doing my job. Those tankers can transport 200 barrels of crude. That's 8400 gallons. An hour or more of me just sitting there being miserable and waiting. F[***].

Normally it would not have bothered me. I got paid by the hour. Today it really got under my skin. I didn't care that I was getting paid time and a half. I wasn't thinking with my wallet. My outlook and perspective was all wrong. The only thought I probably had was how unfair the whole thing was and "why me" and "I just want this day to end". I hoped the next month would fly by quick because I guarantee I WILL be HOME for Christmas. The other driver waved a gloved hand and flashed a friendly smile at me, but I didn't return the friendly gesture. That's totally out of my character. I slumped deep in the drivers seat of my Peterbilt and dug into my gas station cooler feast. This was a few years before I owned a smartphone, so I didn't have any means of killing time aside from newspapers. They say that waiting is the hardest part, and when you have a sour negative outlook that is especially true. Any other day I would have walked over and introduced myself, maybe shot the bull and visited for a minute. I just couldn't do it that day. At some point I started to feel a little guilty for not even waving to the guy, he's just doing his job, same as I am.

I didn't have to wait long before I really realized how my terrible mood had blinded me and shifted my normally upbeat outlook. I heard a knock on my drivers door, and looked down to see the guy holding a brown paper lunch sack and something wrapped in tinfoil. There was no getting out of it now. I had to force a smile, climb down out of the cab, and met someone whose actions really made me stop and think about how stupid my negativity was. I can't

remember his name, I just remember a red white and blue Lone Star flag patch on his shirt. With a small grin he asked, "D'ja eat yet?" He handed me the lunch sack and it held a giant tinfoil wrapped turkey sandwich on homeade freakin bread. To this day it's probably the greatest sandwich I've ever eaten (not including the now discontinued but delicious chicken salad croissants from Dunkin Donuts: may they Rest In Peace)It was far more enjoyable than any fried truckstop display case burrito Ive ever eaten, and in this line of work I've had plenty of those. He let me eat while we made small talk. His wife had sent him off to work with more food than he'd ever need, and said he could tell by looking at me that I could use a little thanksgiving. I don't remember anything about our conversation after that that stands out. We probably talked about the wind and the weather. Road construction. Dot cops. Crude oil prices. Typical small talk. He handed me the other tinfoil packet and it was a slice of pecan pie his wife had made. He was done for the day after that load and said he would have plenty of leftovers when he got home and figured I could put it to good use. That's when I felt a big scratchy lump in my throat and stupid water in my eyes. What a freakin roller coaster of emotions that thanksgiving turned out to be. From what I can remember I did a pretty good job of hiding the fact I was choked up. We parted ways and he finished loading his tanker and I climbed back into mine. I watched him ease the truck into gear and move away towards the road, and he gave another wave. That time I waved back.

No doubt it was a great unexpected meal and very much appreciated, but the food itself isnt the reason for this being the nicest thing a stranger ever did for me. Im sure he could tell by looking at me I wasnt starving, so it wasn't a handout. I'm also sure he knew I earned a good wage something close to what he did, so he didn't do it out of charity or pity. I think he could just tell exactly what was going on that day, even with not knowing me at all. Probably just a decent human being with the right perspective and wanted to show a lonely

guy a little kindness. That was ten years ago and I still think about it from time to time. I forget and find myself occasionally feeling sorry for myself or judging others but I guess that's just human nature. I can genuinely say that ever sense the embarrassment of my self-pity that day I always try and keep an open mind and give people the benefit of the doubt. Sometimes to a fault. When I originally posted this online, someone replied that the greatest quote pertaining to this was, "be kind, because everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." And that is the most accurate and simple quote I can think of to sum up the lesson I learned. By no means am I a granola eating sandal wearing lover of all people and all of gods creations. Far from it. I am cynical and sarcastic and I don't take many things in life very seriously. Some people make it very hard to find anything nice to say about them but with the right perspective you should at least try.

Since that act of kindness I've worked several more thanksgivings and even spent a couple Christmases alone and after that day they're not nearly as sad and unbearable as you might think. There are worse places to be than the cab of truck on thanksgiving or an Oklahoma Waffle House on Christmas morning. Especially if you look at life with the right perspective and a little sense of humor.