

ThankYou! God Bless You!

January 2017

At the age of 82-years, I do not expect to have any more once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Think about it.

In my 82 years I have had some once-in-a-life times experiences – a handful, dozens, hundreds? - I can't say for sure, but now at such an advanced age why should I even expect one more?

Well, I guess dying could be one more. True enough, that would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience but since I expect it, I do not count it as one.

When I write once-in-a-lifetime experience, I mean there is no reason to expect it to happen. Why would you? You are walking along, minding your own business, not getting in anyone's way, doing only what you have done many thousands of times before – I mean you are just passing the time, living out your life of old age.

Sure, as an elderly person you could plan ahead to create a once-in-a-lifetime experience – something like a bungee jump, or parachuting out of a plane, or even taking a trip to outer space. But I am not talking about that kind of a once-in-a-lifetime experience either. I am talking about something that happens to you out of the blue, there is no reason for it to happen, you did not plan or expect it. You were just living your old age and boom! It happened! Just like that! You carry on but you know for a fact this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience! It will never happen again! In fact, you come to cherish it because it is so unique and so unexpected. It will never happen again!

On Christmas Day 2016, I had a once-in-a-lifetime experience!

The family had gathered together in Oceanside CA for a Christmas week family reunion in celebration our 50th Wedding Anniversary – 1966 to 2016. 5 daughters, 5 sons-in-law, 10 grandchildren and the old folks - and no family drama present.

The weather on Christmas Day was cold with wind gusts of up to 20 miles an hour but I was determined to get out of the resort and take my daily walk – 5 miles today! I said. I put on my fleece coat from Costco, wrapped my 5 foot scarf tight around my neck, jammed my Australian outback hat down on my head to eye level, grabbed hold of my bamboo walking stick and took off walking south along the ocean front with the wind whipping up my backside. At 2 miles by my estimation I turned left, crossed the rail tracks up to the main street, Oceanside Ave, and turned left again to make my return to the harbor area. Now the wind was right in my face tearing me up and trying to whip my hat off my head and send it sailing god knows where. I put my head down and trudged forward.

Orange juice, I thought. I need to find a place to buy a bottle of not-from-concentrate orange juice so I can have a glass when I get back to the condo. Two blocks down I spotted a Circle K convenience store– you rarely see them anymore - on the opposite side of the street. What are the chances, I wondered? . Lucky day! They had one 12 oz bottle of Simply Orange left, the kind I buy at home. I paid the clerk, she handed me the bottle. I'm walking I said, do you have a plastic bag I could carry it in? She hesitated, I don't know, I'll see if I can find one. She looked under the counter area for a bit and found a grocery store-size plain plastic bag and gave it to me.

Off I went, straight into the wind on our way to the harbor. As I crossed the bridge over the San Luis River, the wind almost took my hat but I grabbed it just in time, took it off and held it tight. I bought that \$50 dollar hat years ago in Santa Fe and have received many compliments about its look, especially from grocery store clerks. A Smart and Final clerk once offered to buy it right then and there as she checked me out but when I declined, she asked me to promise to sell it to her when I was finished with it. I promised.

Finally, I arrived at the harbor parking lot, just a quarter mile from our condo. I was dragging now - tired, cold, wind-swept and my pace had slowed but soon I would be home. Suddenly a car stopped, perhaps 10 yards or so away in the next aisle. The rear window rolled down and I saw a young Latino boy, probably 9 or 10 years old , stick

his body half way out the window and begin waving at me. He was smiling and enthusiastically waving at me. I looked at him smiling and waving, smiling and waving - he was motioning for me to come over. I took a few steps and saw he was waving money and motioning me to come over! What on earth? I walked up to the car window, he handed me a \$5 dollar bill. Merry Christmas! he said. His father in the driver's seat leaned back and with a big smile on his face shouted: have a Merry Christmas! and a Happy New Year!

I smiled, took the money, and shouted above the wind: Thank You! God Bless You! They smiled, waved, and sped off as fast as they had come.

Stunned! I realized what had just happened. This father was driving his young son around on Christmas Day to find homeless people to whom he could give money and no doubt teach him how important it was to be kind to those who were down on their luck and had no place to live. Hey Dad, I see that old homeless guy walking over there all bundled up, he has a stick and is carrying a plastic bag, let's give him some money!

Walking across the harbor bridge to my condo in the resort on the other side, I thought about it. Did I do the right thing? Under the circumstances what else should I have done? Short change the father's Christmas lesson plan? They were both so pleased with what they had accomplished, who am I to contradict - no! no!, you don't understand! You made a mistake! I am not homeless!

I looked at the beat-up \$5 bill. Now what? You don't belong to me, you belong to a homeless person . . . and then I thought about Charlie! This Christmas donation for a homeless person belongs to Charlie!

The day after we returned to Sacramento I drove over to the side of the Dollar Tree Store where Charlie spends his days in great animation talking for hours with people who are not visibly present and when he needs a break looks off into space for hours on end, setting as still as a stone statue.

Charlie was not as his usual post but I knew where to look for him – yes, there he was sitting on the asphalt curb of the parking lot behind the Lutheran Church.

Charlie, I said, a friend of mine ask me to give this to you and I said I would. I handed him the \$5 bill. It seemed like he was expecting it, he smiled showing only a couple of teeth left in his mouth and said: thank you.

A once in a lifetime experience, even at the age of 82-years! Now what?