

Joe and the Beggar

Story

No one remembered when the first beggar showed up at the only stoplight between Copperhead City and Big Tree. But show up he did, with a cardboard sign that simply said, "Help me."

He waited on the grass by the stoplight. When the cars stopped at the red light, the beggar would walk along the line of cars holding his sign and peering into the windows. Most people did not give him anything. They told themselves that the man would spend the money on alcohol or drugs, and besides that, they reasoned, beggars are crazy and dangerous. After a few weeks, some people began to suspect that the beggar was making a little too much money with his cardboard sign, and they frowned at him from their cars.

Soon other beggars joined the first beggar on his patch of grass. Every day, all day, at least one beggar would walk along the stopped cars, listening for the sound of a window rolling down.

When Joe Johnson moved to Big Tree, his neighbors complained to him about the beggars. "What will we do with them? Why don't they leave?" they asked. No one gave anything to the beggars any more, but the beggars did not leave.

Joe Johnson had always seen things differently than other people. When he saw the beggars with their "Help Me" signs, he wanted to do something for them. He began to put extra sandwiches in his lunch to give to the beggars on his way to work. He would drive his car onto the patch of grass and hand each of the beggars a sandwich. He would say, "Here you go, Brother," or "Have a sandwich, Sister."

One day, as Joe was handing out sandwiches, a man rolled down his window and waved him over.

“Do you think you and your little sandwiches are doing any good?” he asked angrily. “These beggars are going to kill themselves with alcohol or drugs. Then you will know that all of your sandwiches have gone to waste! Go spend your money on something worthwhile.”

“Brother,” said Joe, as he leaned into the car window, “I can’t think of anything worth more than a man’s life.” And with that, he tossed a sandwich onto the man’s lap and walked away.