

Commencement Remarks

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My concluding remarks to you are a story told by a now successful business person who twenty years ago drove a cab. He wrote:

When I arrived at the caller's address, it was 2:30 a.m.; the building was dark except for a single light in a ground floor window. Under these circumstances, most drivers would honk once or twice and then drive away. But, I had seen too many impoverished people who depended on taxis as their only means of transportation. So I walked to the door and knocked. "Just a minute", answered a frail, elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor.

After a long pause, the door opened. A small elderly woman stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940's movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. No pictures on the walls, no knickknacks anywhere; all the furniture was covered with sheets. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

"Would you carry my bag out to the car?" she asked shyly. I took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to take the woman's arm and walk her slowly to the curb. She kept thanking me for my kindness. "It's nothing," I told her. "I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother treated".

When we got in the cab, she gave me an address, then asked, "Could you drive through downtown on the way?" "That's not the shortest way and it's late," I answered sharply. "Oh, I don't mind," she said. "I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice." I looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening. "I don't have any family left," she continued, "and the doctor says I don't have very long." I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. "Where do you want to go?" I asked.

For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator, the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived as newlyweds, a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she danced as a girl. Sometimes she would ask me to stop in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing. As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, "I'm tired. Let's go now."

We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico. Two

orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They must have been expecting her. I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair. "How much do I owe you?" she asked, reaching into her purse. "Nothing," I said. "You have to make a living," she answered. "*There are other passengers,*" I responded.

Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly. "You gave an old woman a little moment of joy," she said. "Thank you." I squeezed her hand and then walked into the dim morning light. Behind me, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

I drove around for hours, aimlessly lost in thought. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away? On a quick review even now, I don't think that I have ever done anything more important in my entire life.

The author concludes his story with this reflection: We are all conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments and accomplishments. But our greatest accomplishments often come beautifully wrapped in what may be considered an insignificant happenstance. We can all make the world a little kinder and more compassionate.

My advice to you? When someone really needs your help, shut off the meter. My prayer for you? That your USF Jesuit education has opened your mind and your heart so that somehow each of your lives will, in its own way, tell your version of this story.