

The Lucky Bucket

An odyssey of unmanageability

I left work at 3:30 on Tuesday afternoon, determined to get to my doctor's office (50 miles away) before they closed at 5:00 pm. I had been without my diabetes medication for about five days because insurance wouldn't cover refills without another prior authorization, and I didn't have \$800 to pay for it myself. I couldn't get to the doctor's office the previous few days, so after five days of high blood sugars, my plan was to at least get some free samples until my insurance situation resolved. While this wasn't the ideal situation to have gotten myself into in the first place, I knew I had to do my best to do what I needed to take care of myself—something I'm continually working on in my recovery.

After leaving work, I realized, in my near-delirious state, that I didn't have my wallet. I backtracked to the places I had been. I had paid with my phone at the coffee shop, so it wasn't there. After several minutes of brutal, punishing internal dialogue, I had to accept that my wallet had slipped out of my pocket, or that I had left it somewhere. So, I headed home, surrendering any notion of getting my medication until the next day. I arrived home at about 6:45, my nerves completely shot from the commute, losing my wallet, not having my medication, and nearly running out of gas; not to mention a complication with a new job because I now didn't have my credit card and ID for travel to Boston the next week.

Tuesday night is street-cleaning night in downtown Long Beach, so parking is allowed on only one side of the street, making it nearly impossible to find a parking spot. I circled the neighborhood for 15 minutes, found nothing, and pulled into a paid parking lot—and then remembered I had no way of paying, so I parked my car at a nearby pharmacy. I couldn't leave my car there because they tow cars left in the lot when they close at 10:00 pm, so I would have to return later to move my car.

Finally, in my apartment, I canceled all my credit cards and reviewed everything online—no fraudulent charges appeared. Whoever found my wallet pocketed about \$260 in cash and a \$40 department store gift card. Upsetting, but not devastating. Around 7:30, I realized that I still needed to eat dinner. A new panic set in: How the hell am I going to eat? My kitchen was completely empty with the exception of a few butterscotch candies. But then I realized that with my cellphone app, I could pay for a sandwich at the nearby coffee shop. Knowing I had to move the car, I scraped up three quarters I was reserving for laundry, which would buy me 30 minutes on a parking meter.

I picked up my car and went into predator mode for about 20 minutes until, finally, a metered space opened up. I pulled into the spot a little after 8:00, put 30 minutes on the meter, and hoped I wouldn't get a parking ticket before 9:00 when it would no longer be necessary to pay the meter. I was parked for the night. Mission accomplished! Years of living in San Francisco conditioned my thinking on the strategic gamesmanship and warrior mentality needed to park in a downtown area. There was no way I was moving my car again that night.

Knowing that the coffee shop closed at 9:00, I sauntered a few blocks to the location. They were locked up tight with a note on the door saying that starting two days earlier, they would be closing at 8:00 on week-nights. Suddenly starving, and in a near panic about being diabetic, being off my medication, having nothing

to eat, and having no money, I picked up the pace and walked another half mile to another location of the same coffee shop. Same sign on the door.

At that point, my entire thought process was that I was just screwed all around. Exhausted, defeated, and hungry, I walked home. I passed a supermarket, wishing I had a way to pay for food. At that moment, a miracle occurred: I remembered that the market had a machine to convert coins to cash—and at home in my otherwise empty kitchen, I had a small black bucket of pennies, nickels, and dimes! I got home shortly after 9:00, sweating from the humidity and my power-walking. I dug out my 25-pound black bucket of coins set out, determined and on a mission from God. I carried my heavy black bucket all the way to the market, right past my car, still refusing to risk losing the coveted parking space. Sweating profusely at this point, I squeezed through the glass doors of the market right before closing. A few minutes later, I cashed in a receipt for my coins and I had about \$75. I was RICH! The new plan was the fast-food taco place, because they advertise being open late. However, all the fast-food restaurants in the area offer only drive-through service after 10:00 pm and they have a strict safety policy about not serving pedestrians. There was no way I was going to move the car from my precious parking spot to order at the drive-through.

Every restaurant downtown was closed, so dinner had to be from a convenience market another few blocks away. I hiked there with my lucky bucket, and found a few of their iconic big hot dogs ready on the grill. I purchased two, dressed them with condiments, and put their flimsy little boxes into my lucky bucket for the journey home. I was admiring my caveman-like abilities to forage and scavenge, thinking that I was as resourceful as a dope fiend to be able to scrape up change and hustle late at night. I've never lacked for arrogance, and this time was no exception: I had no capacity to feel ashamed of how pathetic and unmanageable my life was in that moment at 47 years old with 29 years clean.

I was able to get everything straightened out from that mess of a day. I know I shouldn't have been off my medication and in a dazed state that seemed to lead to losing my wallet, nor was it a responsible plan to have no food at home and no emergency cash in the car. My number-one take-away was to take better care of myself with my diabetes. Although it was a really painful, exhausting, frightening, frustrating, and humbling lesson, I'm grateful that today I can actually learn and grow from lessons like this that I experience living life on life's terms in my recovery.

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I had a nice little “hot dog bouquet” that I photographed as a searing permanent image of my insanity and unmanageable life.