

## Compassion in the Parking Lot

Jan Frazier

With Brattleboro voting overwhelmingly to become part of the international Charter for Compassion, the Reformer and The Commons have agreed to publish a "compassion story of the month." This is the ninth. Information on submissions from Brattleboro area residents is offered below.

Expressions of compassion often occur spontaneously, in the context of everyday Brattleboro life. They blossom in ordinary encounters between people, often strangers to one another.

Such moments can occur in the several downtown parking lots and the garage, where you need to feed a succession of coins into a box mounted on a pole and wait for a ticket to be printed. The small white paper rectangle, sticking out like a tongue, declares your ending time, reflecting the number of minutes or hours you've purchased. Now your vehicle has a resting place, enabling you to head off to a store or a concert or lunch with a friend.

All the while you're away on your mission, the slip of paper bearing the expiration time rests peaceably on the dash of your car, in clear view. The arrival of the meter maid occurs perhaps two minutes after the final paid-for moment, which is just prior to your return (since things always take longer than expected). So whatever it cost you to park in the first place is now somewhat amplified, since the piece of paper being left flapping on your windshield has its own price printed on it.

But back to where this all began. Once in a while, after having rolled your car into its parking space, you don't need to feed quarters and nickels and dimes into that box on the pole. Because as you were turning in from the road, a car on its way out had slowed down at the approach of your vehicle and then stopped. By then you knew to stop yourself. Down went the drivers' windows, the exiting driver extending a friendly hand toward you, a little slip of paper being proffered in your direction.

"There's still 45 minutes on this. Would you like it?"

"Oh yes!" you brightened, gladly accepting the gift, as you'd already been wondering if you had any coins on you.

So two cars get to park where only one was paid for, and you have been spared the trouble of finding coins. I can't tell you how many times this gift-giving has happened as I was entering a Brattleboro parking lot. (Please don't mention this to the meter maid.)

And so I too enjoy being able to offer one of my own little tickets to an incoming car, on one of those occasions when the destination store has turned out to be closed for the day. What fun to see the face of a stranger light up that way. Just when they'd been fishing around in their pocket or purse, feeling for coins that aren't there.

The truth is, the deepest pleasure of such an encounter, whether as receiver or as giver, has nothing to do with money. It has to do with how good kindness feels on either side.

*Submissions, from Brattleboro area residents, for future publication, not to exceed 650 words, should be emailed to: [compassionstory@gmail.com](mailto:compassionstory@gmail.com) or mailed to: Compassion Story of the Month, c/o Robert Oeser, PO Box 6001, Brattleboro, VT 05302. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address. Earlier submitted stories will automatically be considered in subsequent months.*