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Happiness is a flat tire

By Francie Healy



You know how it is when you're fed up, had the biscuit? When you want to go into the woods and hide?

There's nothing like careening into a ditch to change your mood. No kidding.

Last Saturday morning I was meandering along in the countryside in my old rattletrap Honda with two kids and a dog.

I was feeling particularly crabby. I wanted a cup of coffee. There was a guy in a truck behind me and I sensed he was impatient.

I knew what he was thinking. Dumb female driver. Doesn't know the road. Goes too slow. I was getting an inferiority complex on top of a headache.

People told me later I probably got the flat tire when I went into the ditch. I prefer to think the tire went flat first, and my inattention wasn't the reason.

However it happened, there I was, trying to steer through long grass in a deep ditch.

But I was in a bad enough mood to ram that sucker back up onto the road again, the guy in the truck still behind me, as if nothing had happened.

By now I was pretty addled, and I thought all the shaking was not my car, but me: my knees, hands, heart. So I eased over to a spot beside the road to catch my breath.

The truck driver pulled up beside me. Go ahead, I thought. Think what you want. I'm fine, just fine, and if you say one thing to me I'll scream.

But the truck driver disarmed me. He smiled.

"You got a flat," he said gently. "Follow me, next house. Fix 'er for you in no time."

I could feel my mood changing immediately.

“I’m not sure about the spare,” I said when I pulled into his driveway. I had a feeling this wasn’t going to be as easy as he thought.

It wasn’t. The spare was fine but it was on the wrong rim. And the rim on the flat tire was bent to smithereens.

Just then a woman appeared at the door. Her eyes spoke sympathy and warmth. She ushered me into her dining room for a cup of coffee. Her young son offered my children soft drinks and bikes to ride in their yard.

The truck driver went into action on the phone, calling all the wreckers he knew for a tire and rim that would fit.

He didn’t have any luck, so he and his family packed us up in their van and drove us home. He said he’d continue the search for the tire and rim. Meanwhile, my ugly brown car became an unwanted lawn ornament in front of their pretty farmhouse.

Do you know what these people did then? They smiled and continued to offer any help they could.

It took two days before they were rid of their lawn ornament.

To them, it was simple rural hospitality. To me, it was renewed faith in humanity. There’s nothing like a flat tire to change your perspective.