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Wizard: A Street Person

From the first moment I saw him moving towards me on the sidewalk, I just knew the old man had to be a homeless person. As he came up closer to me he had this big as life smile on his face and he nodded to me in a polite way as if I was the one out of place. I couldn't help but notice how well groomed he was and smelled of Irish Spring soap. He was wearing clean, nicely-fitting pressed clothes. I had to stop him to ask if he was homeless. "No," he replied, "I'm a street person."

Intrigued by what he had said and wanting to know the difference between a street person and a homeless person. I offered to buy him a meal if he would tell me his story, explain to me the difference between being homeless and being a street person. He was quick to accept my offer and we found this little Mom and Pop greasy spoon up the street a few blocks that looked right out of the fifties - rednable tables with red vinyl booths.

He told me his street handle is Wizard, a name laid on him in the early sixties by his brothers and friends because of his seemingly magical skills of making things disappear inside a store and reappear somewhere else. Wizard was somewhere in his late sixties or early seventies. He was a short roundman, maybe 5'7", weighing close to 250 pounds. He had thinning white hair that hung down over his shoulders; he wore no hat, with a long well-kempt silver beard.

We both decided on chick-en-fried steak and coffee. After we had finished our meals and freshed up our coffee Wizard looked me in the eyes and smiled an ear to ear smile and in a soft voice without accent began to tell me the difference between a homeless person and

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a street person. A homeless person had no place to call home and nowhere to go, they wander around aimlessly lost all the time carrying their few possessions along with them. A street person, on the other hand, has a home where he keeps his possessions and he usually knows where he's going, why he was going, and some ideal about how to get there. Wizard himself said, "I've been hanging out on these streets since I was a teenager, you ^{ever} find me somewhere hanging out almost any time. It's my life and I love it, all my friends love it."

In his soft voice Wizard told me that he had a place to hang his hat. He had been staying in an old travel trailer parked behind his sister's house across the river on the west side. The trailer has a refrigerator, a stove, a water hook-up and electricity. There was a bathroom with a shower he used inside his sister garage.

He told me that few homeless people have access to most of the things he has, whereas most all of the street people he knew had some place or someone. He received Social Security of about \$300.00 a month, received food stamps and had Medicare and on top of this his sister didn't charge him for anything, she would even give him money when he needed it. She just wanted to know that her brother was all right and didn't disappear like some homeless person. She even made him wear an I.D. tag around his neck with all his information and her hook-ups on it. He showed it to me and it was the same size and shape as a military dog tag.

Wizard was explaining to me that street people were out on the streets because that's where they wanted to be. It makes them feel

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to be able to come and go as they wished. Unlike the homeless who had gotten lost for one reason or another. Most homeless people would do anything to be able to get off the streets.

Street people are able to find a few odd jobs around town from people who know them to put a few bucks in their pockets, some get Security, SSI, some Social Security, some Veteran's benefits. Street people seem to always a place to go and hang out, to enjoy the company of their friends day or night. Yet in some ways street people are just like the citizens they're always laughing at. They don't want the homeless in their space.

As we said our goodbyes and I watched the old man as he walked to the corner and met up with a group of street people who were standing around. They shook hand and clapped one another on the back laughing all the while at some joke I didn't hear and wouldn't understand if I had. I watched as the street people moved off down the sidewalk. As I turned to go on my way I noticed an old man with blank eyes, dirty white hair an unkept white beard, wearing sagging, dirty clothes, and pushing a shopping cart full of possessions along the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street. THE END

I wrote this on Mel's birthday ¹⁰⁻⁶ 2009 a year before Wizard past.

