

Afterword

“There’s A Better Way”

Where I was teaching temporarily at a college in Wyoming it got down to 50 below, cold enough to sneak my golden retrievers, Jake and Luna, from my car into the dormitory apartment. I waited until dark so no one would see the dogs coming inside with me, but in the dimly lit parking lot I saw a man standing behind my car with something in his hand. As I walked toward the car and he moved on down the lot out of sight, I recalled someone in the dorm saying that gas was being stolen from cars. Immediately I knew I should do what John Wayne would do. I’d get my rifle out of the trunk, apprehend the thief and march him into the dorm at gun point, call the sheriff and be a hero.

The moment I reached for the rifle a voice in my head said, “There’s a better way.” I set the rifle down, closed the trunk and headed after the man who now was coming back towards me. I could see a gas can in one hand, a hose in the other, but when he saw me approaching he tossed the can to his right, the hose to his left. The can clanged loudly on the pavement, and he kept on walking straight ahead as though he heard nothing. We met under a light.

“Are you looking for gas?”

“What do you mean? Looking for gas?”

Suddenly another man walked briskly down the hill overlooking the lot and asked the other guy,

“Hey, man, is this guy giving you a hard time?”

I sensed that they were about to attack me and make a run for it so I raised both hands, palms up.

“Now just take it easy. I saw this guy with a gas can and asked him if he was looking for gas.”

They paused, looked at one another for a moment then back at me, and one of them asked,

“Hey, man, you got any beer?”

The other quickly followed with,

“Yeah, man you got any dope?”

“No, I don’t have any beer and I don’t have any dope, but if you want some gas you can come down to my car and get some.”

They hesitated, then one of them went back up the hill, probably to a vehicle he had been using as a lookout. The other picked up the gas can and hose and followed me to my car where he proceeded to siphon gas, but he swallowed a mouthful and coughed and gagged repeatedly.

When he had filled the can with maybe a gallon of gas he capped it off, stood erect with a grin and reached out his hand to me,

“Hey, man, thanks a lot.”

“You’re welcome.”

As he walked away I let Jake and Luna out so they could run through the sagebrush before coming inside for the night. I stood there wondering if three men might have died tonight over a gallon of gas? The next morning the topic of my lecture was, “Do real men listen to the heart?”

There were no more reports of gas theft.