

The Story of Mr. Emptypockets



It's almost six o'clock on a busy Friday evening and the local business establishments are closing for the day. Clerks are drawing blinds and changing their "open" signs to "closed." Others are sweeping floors or counting up the day's receipts. It's time to go home to their families, the ones who really reap the benefits of the day.

Unnoticed by the bald-headed man who has owned the bakery since his father turned over the shop to him thirty years before, is a tall, dark but otherwise non-descript man peering over a newspaper. While his body is still, his eyes are taking in much more than what they see printed on the borrowed paper. The routine is always the same. The floor is swept, the front door is locked, the lights are turned off, and exactly three minutes later, there would be the familiar sound of the back door opening noisily as it scraped across the concrete of the driveway. The next sound he would hear is the unmistakable echo of a package thrown into a dumpster.



As the bald-headed man started his car and drove slowly towards his home, the dark, nondescript man folded his paper and carefully placed it back into the broken newspaper vending machine. Wearing rubber soled shoes, his steps were quiet and cat-like as he approached the alley that lead to the dumpster. A quick look back and then ahead assured him that nobody was around. That was good, because people generally have a negative perception of individuals who take food out of trash bins, even if it's wrapped in plastic.

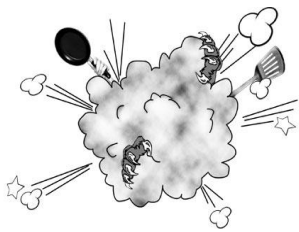


Mr. Emptypockets has been doing this for two years. Ever since he lost his job as "the Bug Man," he has relied on Grandpa's Bakery for his "slightly less than fresh" baked goods. He truly believed that nobody ever died from eating a day old bagel.

Back in the days when he drew a weekly paycheck from “Send Your Bugs to Bug Heaven,” everyone knew him. When he made his rounds in the bright yellow “bugmobile,” children would stop what they were doing and run to the curbside to wave at him. He always managed a smile as he carefully poked his head out of the small vehicle’s window. This way, he made sure that his view of the road wasn’t obstructed by the vehicle’s two mouse ears that were mounted on the roof. Housewives would get up early on the days Mr. Bugman was scheduled to spray their houses and make him sandwiches and lemonade. Mr. Bugman was their friend. He kept their homes safe from those annoying little six legged critters that could pop out from just about anywhere. One squirt from his “bug neutralizer” was all he needed to send those little critters to their promised land.



He was a true showman. At times when he received a 911 call (meaning a REAL bug emergency), he would plug a flashing blue light into his cigarette lighter socket, place it on his dashboard, and zig-zag in and out of traffic until he arrived at his destination. (No siren was needed . . . the flapping ears and the bobbing tail served as a warning to traffic that this bug man was serious!) Armed with his goggles, mask, and ever-present squirt can, he would jump out of the Bugmobile and assume his Rambo-like position. On his belt were three nozzles, each for a different distance and spray intensity. Mr. Bugman instinctively knew which one to choose for the job. If the situation looked particularly ominous, he would begin long-range sprays until he sensed things quieting down.



Crowds would gather and begin chanting, “Kill those bugs! Kill those bugs!” When Mr. Bugman emerged from the now bug-free house, it was always to cheers. He quickly became a folk hero. Teenagers began wearing his pointed toe shoes (in case any of those critters tried hiding out in corners), and there was a run on Mickey Mouse ears at the Disney Store. They just couldn’t keep enough of them in stock!

It was nice while it lasted. But like all good things, it came to an end.

Nobody saw it coming. Corporate downsizing doesn’t usually affect bug companies, but this time, it did. The letter arrived on a Friday, and when Mr. Bugman answered the knock on the door, he had to pay the “postage due” to the mailman before opening the letter from his employer. Imagine that. As he read the two-sentence termination letter, he sank into his favorite chair and let the letter drop to the floor.



“Mr. Bugman, your job has been eliminated due to downsizing. Please turn in your ears and tail immediately.”

It took years to build a legend, and only thirty seconds to tear it down.

What was he to do? Bugs were his life! During his years as Mr. Bugman, he learned the names of each type of insect. He could even pronounce all of those long

Latin terms entomologists use to describe ants and flies. He knew which type of wood termites liked to eat and how spiders learned to make those symmetrical webs. He was a wealth of bug information. Now he was unemployed.



The evolution from Mr. Bugman to Mr. Emptypockets was gradual. Unlike the corporate downsizing and termination episode, this transition took time. As he looked around his apartment, he commented to himself that he managed to do fairly well on a bug man's salary. His home entertainment system was state-of-the-art, and once he removed the mouse ears and tail from his car, it appeared to be a fairly normal vehicle. He could really get on with his life, but he would soon realize that life wasn't fair.

Children no longer cheered when he drove down the street. Housewives stopped making sandwiches lemonade for him. Restaurants took away their "Mr. Bugman" discounts and he was forced to pay full price for his meals. People have short memories. Something had to be done, but what?



In this cold, cruel world, there are rules. If you borrow money from someone, they will eventually ask for it back. People don't do things for nothing. But there had to be a way to at least get things for less, especially if he didn't have the money to pay for them.

You get a different perspective when you walk down a street it as opposed to driving. Sights are processed differently because you have that much more time to observe. So, Mr. Emptypockets began walking. He walked everywhere, partially because his car contained barely two gallons of precious gasoline and he didn't want to waste it on prospecting. Each day he walked through a different part of town making mental notes on what he could get for less, and more importantly, what he could get and do for free.

In the mall, he could go past the food court and there would always be people offering him food on toothpicks. He quickly learned to take two or three shirts and a baseball cap with him in a backpack so he could change them and get three portions of each restaurant's special. That would take care of lunch.

For entertainment, there were always first run movies at the drive in. All he would have to do is to park just outside the gate in a spot where he could see the big screen. He could then roll down his window and hear one of the paying patron's sound boxes.



There were plenty of free concerts in the park, and of course, there is window-shopping! The latter turned out to be his best idea, because here he could go to places like Sachs Fifth Avenue, Macy's, Nordstrom, and even Mayor's Jewelers. All types of expensive items were just a pane of glass away. He also discovered that walking through shopping malls could be a really cool date too. Women just love to window shop.

When it came to retail sales purchases, he also refined the technique of buying and returning. If he had sporting event to attend and needed a pair of expensive binoculars, he would purchase them on a credit card, use them for the sporting event, and return them a day or two later. That way, he got to use them for free and he never had to actually use his shrinking supply of money. Brilliant! He also learned that it doesn't work for underwear and bathing suits.

The rolls from Grandpa's bakery were softer than usual this evening. That's good, because Mr. Emptypockets has a date, and he promised to go to his lady friend's apartment and help her with dinner. Almost fresh dinner rolls and a bottle of wine he "borrowed" from a wedding reception he crashed earlier in the week should do the trick.

Even Mr. Emptypockets gets lucky once in a while.

But be careful ladies. That is how some women can become Mrs. Emptypockets.

