

Write Your Life

A micro memoir writing project

Write about a time when you didn't know whether to trust someone.

A Jump

A man approaches me in the Kroger parking lot. He could be fifty years old as easily as he could be seventy. He's wearing faded khaki pants and a tan short-sleeve shirt. His hair, the color of rust, is cut close to his head. When he tells me he doesn't speak English, I hear Eastern Europe in his accent. Maybe I see that in his face. He looks down, then raises his cell phone to my line of sight. On the screen I read, "Can you help me start my car?"

He points across the lot to a white van. The door on the driver's side is open. The hood is open. It's an unmarked van. He's been going about his business, a free agent in the US. Maybe he just needs to get home.

It could be a jump would do it. I've jumped a lot of cars. Though when asked to do it the last time, more than ten years ago, I couldn't find the battery on the car I was driving (a van, in the back, of all places.)

"Sorry," I say now, "no." And point to the Shell station at the edge of the parking lot.

Of course he would have thought of that. What would they charge a man who doesn't speak English to jump start a car fifty feet away, \$25? \$50?

Ten years ago a man approached me and Tizi in a parking lot in Rimini, an old Roman town near San Marino. He was tall, very well dressed. He said in Italian that he was French, that he was separated from his group, that he had been pickpocketed and needed some money for a cab to get to the French embassy. I held up my hands, like I was being arrested. Then he started to speak French. Given the opportunity Tizi will always speak French. I imagined he was telling her the same story he'd just told us in his Italian, only better, in his own language. Tizi was enjoying it. Finally I said we had to go. We really had to go. She nodded at me, a nod I recognized.

Couldn't I? I reached in my pocket and handed him some money.

"Thief," she said, as she closed herself in the car. "How much did you give him?"

"Ten euros."

"Ten euros. Are you crazy?"

It was all I had. I wanted to get rid of him.

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Today the man turns away from me—what can he say?—and walks back toward his car, gesturing at vehicles as they pull into the lot. I sit and watch. I can't leave. After two or three minutes a white panel truck wheels across the lot and comes to a stop in front of the van. Yes, I think.

The driver, wearing shorts and a shabby t-shirt, opens the hood of his vehicle. The man from the van has cables. They work silently. Jump is universal. First try fails. They lean over their respective engines, jostle the cables, try again.

For what happens next no phone is needed.

We can all go now.