



It's the Small Things

I WAS PUSHING MY CART TOWARD THE RIGHT side of the aisle, close to the end, with my eyes scanning the lower shelf, when he approached from my left. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see him walking toward me as my head was bent down, knowing what I was looking for would be found on the very bottom shelf. Traditionally, the highest quality items are on the top shelf, like a top shelf scotch or tequila, or, in a grocery store, the top shelf is where the most expensive brands are found. I was dipping down toward the lowest of the shelves, though, down where the generic brands live.

I like my food fresh and healthy: I like my broccoli organic, my half gallon of milk antibiotic and hormone free, and my chickens free-range. When it comes to one of life's comfort foods though—macaroni and cheese—I like mine boxed, rather than fresh and homemade with real cheese. This is wrong on so many nutritional levels, goes against everything taught by the Food Network and produces shudders of disdain from my foodie friends. It gets worse. Not only do I like boxed macaroni and cheese, but I also like the really, really inexpensive kind. This is not because of financial savings, but because of the taste. I never reach for the Kraft "it's the cheesiest" brand; rather, I go out of my way to bend my knees and dip to the lowest shelf possible to pull up the least expensive box of macaroni and cheese I can find.

At home, with the water boiling and the pasta cooking, when I open the white envelope of powdered cheese, sometimes, if it is ripped open fast enough, there is a slight cloud of fine powdered cheese dust that escapes into the air. Ah, powdered cheese! Nothing delights me more when

making this very unglamorous meal, as when a bit of the powder fails to mix completely, and I get a pocket of powder.

Boxed, generic macaroni and cheese has to be nearly the lowest level something can be and still qualify as a food. At 45¢ a box, it is a cheap thrill, but it is one that brings me a bit of joy. Did you ever notice, more often than not, it is the small things in life that bring us the most joy? The things that don't cost a lot, that are minor, but have a major impact. We can see this ring true in so many areas of our lives.

Back to the man who was approaching my cart, as I scoped the shelves for my cheap culinary thrill. "Excuse me," he said, stopping at the side of my cart. I looked up expecting to see someone I knew. I did not recognize him, other than having passed him earlier.

"Yes?" I responded, uncertain of what he was going to say. Had I cut him off with my cart? Was I blocking the item he needed? Was he going for the same boxed macaroni and cheese as me?!

"I just wanted to say thank you," he said. "You took the time to look me in the eye, smile and say 'hello' when you passed by my cart earlier in the store. I just want you to know how much that meant. We don't do that enough, and you made me feel important and you made my day. So thank you!"

He smiled, nodded his head and was on his way.

I stood there, box of inexpensive macaroni and cheese in one hand, staring ahead, thinking about what he said. It had been the smallest of gestures for me to say hello and to smile, but it had made a big difference in his day. Again, a small thing in life brought such joy. And he in turn had taken the time to acknowledge how much it had made his day – another small thing – that in turn made mine.

So much emphasis in life is put on the big things, the sweeping gestures and the profound actions, the expensive purchases and the out of reach "things," but it's the small things that really bring the most joy to our day-to-day existence. An encouraging word from someone, be it a friend or stranger. A smile and a direct look in the eye. A box of inexpensive macaroni and cheese.

If you're looking for simple and small joys, know they aren't just found on the shelves and aisles of grocery stores; rather, they are in every aspect of our lives. Hearing the voice of a loved one. Getting a surprise visit from a friend. A card that comes in the mail or a hug when you need it most.

Summer is an especially rich season of simple, small joys. On page 44, we share our annual Summer Fun article, highlighting all the small things that make summer so great in our neck of the woods. Simple small things like enjoying blue skies and a cool lake on a hot summer day, listening to live music in an outdoor venue, and heading out on a road trip with no known destination.

Whether you are on the receiving end, or the giving end, there are so many ways to experience small joys in life. And the good news is, they needn't be expensive. Sometimes, they're as inexpensive as a box of macaroni, but to the recipient, they are riches beyond comparison.

Happy reading!

Blythe