



A Lesson in Time

Will Thomas

Despite having the opportunity to spout off my highly enlightened and informed opinions every two weeks here on the fourth page of The Crimson White, I occasionally have experiences that humble me and teach me a little bit about what life is really about.

Tuesday morning, after leaving my GBA 490 class with Dr. Dulek, I was a little stressed out to say the least. I had a paper to work on, a few upcoming tests to study for, jobs to apply for so that I don't go hungry after graduation and, worst of all, a damn article to turn in by 3 p.m.

That's when I happened to see one of my housemates, Emily, who told me that a man had come to our house and that he needed a ride to Moundville. (While this may seem like an abnormal happenstance, after living at a church for nine months nothing seems peculiar anymore.)

My immediate response was a quick, "Oh no, I don't have time." But eventually my conscience got to me and I headed home to give the man a ride fifteen minutes down the road.

His name was Jackson, and he was a Vietnam Veteran. He had gone to the VA hospital in Birmingham to undergo tests, and had been there for three days. Since one of his trucks was in the shop and his wife was at work, she wasn't able to pick him up at 1 a.m. when he arrived at the Greyhound station here in Tuscaloosa.

After calling several friends on a payphone who were all unable to assist him, he wandered around the city for a bit, trying to find someone who could give him a ride fifteen minutes down the road.

He got stopped by a few police officers, who rather than actually trying to find him a solution, chastised him for not having a credit card to simply get a taxi. He called the VA hospital in Tuscaloosa, whose chaplain was apparently just too busy to give him a ride, either. Most disgustingly, he stopped by a church downtown, which refused him, simply stating that they "didn't give out money" when all he was asking for was a ride fifteen minutes down the road.

Jackson, who served in Vietnam from 1969-1973, had simply gone to Birmingham to undergo tests, had to stay a bit longer than planned, and his accommodations ended up falling through by no fault of his own.

He was by no means poor, as he owns a sizeable plot of land in Hale County, and even insisted that he buy me gas for my time. Nor was he unemployed, as he breeds and sells AKC certified dogs for a living. He even rides motorcycles with many of the men he served with in Vietnam, raising money for those less fortunate than he is. He even gave me his phone number, and offered to let me come down and ride in his friends' helicopter that he occasionally flies.

This man was just someone who had come upon an abnormal set of circumstances and needed a bit of help, and for some reason almost everyone he encountered just didn't have fifteen minutes to spare in order to drive him to Moundville.

And sadly, I was perilously close to not being any better than any of these people, in part because I had this article to write. Even more sadly, it wouldn't have been the first time I've been caught being a hypocrite.

All this made me realize, maybe I'm not as busy as I think I am. Maybe I have a lot more time than I think I do to do some good.

I think that this is probably the case for most of us. Most of us are just too wrapped up in our day-to-day to realize the hardships of those around us, and how simple the things that will make progress and help another person out are. It doesn't take a large amount of time or skill, and it may just be as easy as smiling to someone you don't know.

No matter what you do, take time out of your day to help out your fellow human beings. It may not pay very much, but trust me, we can afford it.

Will Thomas is a senior majoring in economics and finance. This is the final column in his series.