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## Life Stories



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### Quiet Angels on Cape Cod

by Saralee Perel

There's something I don't understand. When we help others, even if it's in a tiny way, we usually feel great. So why don't we all do it?

There are people on the Cape I refer to as quiet angels. One is named Vanessa. For seven years, she's been in charge of a non-profit organization called, "Vinnie's Hope." It's about helping others by donating time, money, goods, holiday meals, toys or simply offering a caring ear.

I asked about including her name in this story. She agreed but added, "I have not wanted anyone to know who I am." This is because she gives in the purest sense.



Vanessa makes waves ... quietly.

Like many of us, Vanessa is far from being able to easily make ends meet. But when she goes food shopping, she buys two of everything and gives half of it to others. She says, "I can't change the world, but I can change my world. If I have a dollar, that means I have 50 cents and you have 50 cents."

Vanessa never thought I'd write a story about her. She was just hoping I might tell a few friends about her quest.

She said it was okay for me to include her e-mail, [vinaphil@yahoo.com](mailto:vinaphil@yahoo.com), on the chance that people might want to contact her.

I once met a woman who spent five dollars buying a Salvation Army bell-ringer a pair of gloves. When she saw him on her way into Stop & Shop, he was shivering and blowing on his bare hands to keep them warm. Why was this woman, this quiet angel, the only

one who did something to help him? He was freezing! Why did I walk by him? How shameful of me.

I stood inside that supermarket for twenty minutes while I watched a severely developmentally challenged woman collecting donations for the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. In all that time, not one person gave a penny. When she shyly asked customers if they'd like to donate, shoppers walked by her as if she wasn't even there.

Then I noticed a very old woman slowly amble up and down the kosher foods aisle. A gal asked her, "What are you looking for?"

"I can't find the Manischewitz brand tomato sauce."

Together they reached behind other brands of tomato sauce until they found the right one. Now, why didn't everybody who passed by offer to help her? She was clearly having difficulty.

When I asked a friend why he wouldn't have done anything, he said, "Because she could have asked a store worker to find that brand." True. But she didn't. Besides, what kind of excuse is that?

Today I went food shopping. I need to use an electric cart because I have a spinal cord injury. A clerk named Jared saw that I was having a hard time with my groceries in the check-out line. Without me asking, he transferred my items to the conveyor belt.

Then he brought the bags to my truck and put everything in the back seat for me. He said, "Thank you," to me. He was thanking me for the opportunity to help. It made him feel good. I am blessed to have many quiet angels in my life.

Remember the term "random acts of kindness"? When we see a nickel on the pavement, most of us pick it up. Do we really need that nickel? Would we ever add a nickel instead? Trust me: You'll feel like a weirdo if you do that. But I guarantee that you'll feel like a really good weirdo.

I know that Vanessa would be just as happy receiving one dollar or a small slice of our time or a single toy as she would be with extravagant items. That is because she knows that by helping others, we in turn help ourselves. Then we all become quiet angels. And that is Vinnie's exquisite hope.

As my friend Marcia sums it up: "Of what value is life, if it does not consist of good deeds?"

**Photograph courtesy of Saralee Perel**



Saralee Perel is an award-winning nationally syndicated columnist. Her new book, *Cracked Nuts & Sentimental Journeys: Stories From a Life Out of Balance*, is available in local bookstores.

It can also be ordered through Amazon, or directly from the publisher, as well as from Saralee for a

personalized signed copy.

Her novel, [Raw Nerves](#), is also available as a paperback and an e-book on Amazon.

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