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## When Push Comes to Shove

Wednesday, September 12, 2012 | Written by Laura Z. Sowers

In retrospect, I'd do some things differently.

I suspect that most people have some regrets if they're over the age of 12. There is a huge range of regrets -- some are irreparable and tragic, and others nag us with doubts and what-ifs. Maybe we wish we'd pressed on to get our college degree, or we regret a hasty commitment made before fully counting the cost. We may have declined a great opportunity out of fear and worry, or carelessly involved ourselves with a toxic person, situation, or substance -- eventually paying the price.

In my own life, there are a few unhealthy relationships I regret, and a couple of impulsive decisions that have had far-reaching consequences. There were times I should have stepped up, and didn't, and things I shouldn't have said, and did.

Humans make mistakes, but I don't believe our regrets have to define us. In fact, one of the most joyous moments in my life came when I realized that God saw me for the raw truth of who I am and loved me anyway. What freedom! And what responsibility. It's been well said that God loves us just as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way.

Hopefully, we learn from our big mistakes, but I suspect it's in the small, everyday incidents that our mask is stripped off and the true identity of our heart is revealed. We tend to rush by those times with excuses and denial. I'm still surprised when I blurt out some unfiltered comment rooted in pride, anger, or judgment. I should know better by now -- right?

Well, recently, I was put to a test. It was one of those spontaneous situations that erupted on a perfectly normal day in a perfectly normal place, and it gave me a little snapshot of my unguarded self.

So here's the way it played out in two acts:

## ACT ONE

**The Scene:** Target. The checkout line.

**The Players:** Me, a woman standing behind me in line, and the sales woman at the cash register.

**The Situation:** With my purchases bagged and set in the cart for transport to the car, I fished in my wallet for my debit card. As I stepped to the card machine, I saw that the nicely dressed woman behind me had blocked my access with her cart (accidentally, I assumed).

**The First Push:** I moved her cart back (gently...really) and said, "Excuse me." And proceeded to run my card and put in my PIN, when

**The Second Push:** She pushed the cart back against my hip in a no-nonsense shove.

**The Third Push:** Shocked, I moved the cart again, and said, "Could you back up a bit?"

**The Response:** The woman looked at me stoically, muttered something under her breath, and defiantly held her cart in position.

**The Reaction:** Irritated, I said, "Well, for heaven's sake!" I guess I could have said something worse, but I'm sure my attitude said it all.

**The Intervention:** At that point, the sales clerk (picture your beloved kindergarten teacher), who witnessed the standoff, reached across the counter and angled the cart away from my hip.

Her action broke the struggle, and I realized how ridiculous the whole interaction must have appeared. Embarrassed, I said to the clerk, "Sorry."

She shrugged and replied, "It happens."

## ACT TWO

I walked to the car, still fuming with anger and offense. As I loaded my bags in the trunk, my inner dialog went something like this: *Who does she think she is, anyway? What gives her the right to be rude and push people around? And I hate being treated like I'm invisible!*

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**The Final Scene:** I pulled my car onto the street right in front of the store. I stopped at the pedestrian crosswalk, and at that moment, the very same woman crossed in front of me pushing her cart (and, no, I didn't even *think* of running her over!). What I did think, however, was that despite her pretty clothes and high heels, she looked so very sad. Observing her from a safe distance allowed me to see her objectively -- and with more compassion. And while there was nothing mystical about it, God prompted me to pray for her and whatever was going on in her life. Although her circumstances were unknown to me, they were not unknown to God.

As I prayed for her, my own lacking and fault were undeniable.

I sometimes have trouble loving my fellow man (or woman). They can get in my way, tailgate my car, undermine my plans, fail to notice I exist, and generally harsh my mellow. I hate to admit that I'm sometimes like the *Peanuts* comic strip character Linus, who said, I love mankind, its people I can't stand.

In retrospect, I would not have engaged in that sophomoric exchange. I realize in the grand scheme of things, it was not a big deal. But as a believer in Jesus Christ, I want to live my life in a way that pleases God, remembering that I'm an ambassador for Him at all times, whether in my relationship with my husband, family, and friends, or with total strangers in the checkout line in Target.

Jesus expects that from me. In Luke 6:33-35, "He said, And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be the sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

Maybe next time I'll do better.