

## Exchanges

Note: This story is a work of imagination. The author is a white guy.

Always whitey places me in a circumstance of peril. This time it is teacher. Her. The clever one. Teaching me how to string together the ABCs. So I can record the old days for the youngsters. She sends me to the place of shopping. Groceries. Look for a story. Then write it down. Practice.

My old girl does not want me to go to that place. In the midst of danger. In the midst of the Covid. It will appear braver if I go. My old girl hollers OK then get flour. Sugar. Salt.

First I must leave the rez and get to town. Without a car. Me. I hitch with others. And now I am outside the store. I know this place. Right there. Where those shoppin' carts are. Before this earth was paved over with their stinkin' asphalt. Grandfather's tipi was pitched there. Him. He was a child and that friggin' whitey put him into a place of peril. Another pandemic. They called it the smallpox and that friggin' whitey cared less about the social distance then. Many of my ancestors did not survive that one. I know the proper way to spell friggin'. I spell it that way on paper but in my heart I spell it the bad way. I do not want the reader of this adventure to know that I have been corrupted.

I have been warned by the council. I must not enter whitey's big store without a mask. I know trouble will follow if I do not mind their rules.

In I go. Completely equipped with the N-95 mask. A federal issue. Them, they still see that I am a native. Behind this government bandana. I only require flour, sugar 'n salt from their big fancy store. And maybe a story.

Me, I should have brought more of that cash money to town. Whatever I have left over from my \$17 and change, I will squander. It won't be much, that money. Enough only for a candy. For my sweet tooth.

In the old days whitey used to call this place a trading post. It is the same principle now as then. Make sure the native people leave this selling place with a little more than they bargained for. Then it was the smallpox. Maybe now it is the Covid. And always it has been make sure they leave thinking that whitey is the superior. Who else could build a store such as this?

Like the others, I grab one of their easy rolling carts. Into the store I go. I know a stop sign and what it means. Me. I steer away and follow their arrows on the floor. I dare not violate their rules.

OK. Me, I shuffle around and discover I am surrounded by vegetables. By fruits. Every colour those. None frozen. How does whitey grow such plenty in winter? Even in summer we cannot grow vegetables such as these. The reservation upon which they placed us has only thin soil, plenty of sand and rocks.

Over there I spy shelves and shelves of bakery. Why would I buy that stuff? When I intend to buy my own flour, sugar 'n

salt. With that my wife can make our own food. The old way.  
And for her hold the sugar.

This social distance is nothin' new for me. Always the white guy and his kin have maintained their comfortable distance from me. Never get too close in case they catch something. Or maybe have a whiff of smoke from old campfires.

As I wander around I spy something of whitey's I crave. It is a package of wieners. Ah ..... I covet those wieners and think how tasty they would be. Roasted over an open fire. Me, I want that tasty package. What is this? Ten dollars and ninety five for 10 tasty wieners? A dollar ten each wiener. Was whitey not satisfied with a dollar per? He needs that extra 10 cents? I want to say friggin' whitey the bad way.

I hasten away from that source of temptation and continue my search. Flour. Sugar. Salt. Me. What's this? A can of beans. Reduced by 17 cents. But where would I spend the 17 cents? I carry on.

About this shopping place. Always my sweet tooth is tempted. Candy, chocolate, pop, more candy, candy bars. I know about numbers. My \$17 would easily let me own 17 candy bars. I better not. My wife has the white man's disease. Diabetes. She would call me that friggin' guy. She does not spell it the bad way. She has not been corrupted.

Finally I discover flour. Nine dollars and ninety nine. Almost 5 bucks for the sugar and 2 more for the salt. Outstandin' ..... 17 and a little less. I slowly roll my cart to the place where I will exchange my ample cash for these goods. The lady there is not pleased to see me or my \$17 and change. She claims the cash might have touched the pandemic. She wants a plastic card. Tap only ... do not touch. I tell her, the whitey banks will not give an old native such a card. Because I am not reliable. In their view. She says rules are rules.

I say well then call your boss because cash money is all I have. Me. \$17 and change. I begin my plea. Mister, look at my mask. It is not a bank robber's mask. There is a pandemic happening and I need flour. Sugar. Salt. For my old girl at home.

See that spot outside where the shoppin' carts are. My ancestor's used to pitch their tipis there. Your ancestors gave my ancestors the small pox. Now all I want is to give you white man's cash for your goods.

I tell that boss you do not have to pay for the story I will compose. For my writin' teacher and her newspaper. He whispers to that lady and she says place your money there. The exchange is made. That newspaper? Just a pale lie about something teacher likes to read.

Leavin' that store I place that sugar in the food bank place. Less than 5 bucks. Always my old girl says buy a little sugar. Give it to the poor. They can make a treat.

I do not embrace the kindness of my wife. They have given us the smallpox. The residential schools. The poverty. Now the covid. And for giving our children death with the fentanyl, I leave my bitter note."There, now we are even."

I have repaid them with sugar.

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