

Gretel's Frisbee and a Stranger's Juice

by
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Three afternoons ago, my miniature schnauzer Gretel and I were walking up a heavily-trashed and graffitied path that snakes about the West Side Highway at 176th Street in Washington Heights – heading home after a frisbee fest by the Hudson River. Gretel victoriously carried the frisbee in her mouth. We were passing two people sitting on the littered stoop of a street light and smoking, as Gretel decided that a particular spot warranted a pee. She dropped the frisbee and unintentionally peed on the frisbee.

I squirmed aloud, "Oh, Gretel, not on the frisbee!", which I still had to carry half a mile home.

One of the people sitting on the stoop said, "Let me wash it." He waved a sealed Snapple bottle.

Now, these people appeared to be homeless, given their clothing and the unsightly location where they had chosen to sit. And a Snapple juice runs two to three dollars in Washington Heights. So I imagined that it had been a nontrivial purchase for him.

I said, "Oh, no, don't waste it!"

He insisted. Something in his tone made me let him. Soon I implored him to stop, as he had poured at least half of his juice onto the frisbee. I thanked him profusely and wished them a good day.

Only hours later did I realize why I had needed to let him do it: he had needed to *do something*. To feel valued by another human being.

What this pandemic has done to the psyches of so many people.