

Pass It On®...

For the Cost of a Box of Cereal.

How just noticing makes all the difference in the world.

Julian was having a difficult day at work. Projects were due, and his boss had just made major changes to a spreadsheet that would mean a long night. Julian isn't the type to get angry, but he does get withdrawn. Taking a deep breath, he gathered himself and went out to grab a late lunch that would also serve as dinner. He needed the break, but he didn't feel like fast food. So he stopped in a grocery store and grabbed a couple of pieces of fruit and a plastic-wrapped sandwich. He kept to himself as he waited in line to make his purchase.

The last couple of years had been difficult for Julian. He works in the tech industry, where pressure is high, but companies are volatile, expanding and contracting. Julian had just made his second career move and was pushing hard to catch up with the demands on his time. The request to work late did not come at a good time. His young family also needed attention; his wife was looking forward to some time off, but with the new job, it would be months before they could get away.

He put his few items on the conveyor belt at the checkout, barely noticing the woman in front of him. She was frantically counting change in her pocketbook, digging in every corner. When she laid it all out, there wasn't enough. She set a small bag of oranges aside, then a box of cereal. She had just enough for milk, eggs and a loaf of bread. Embarrassed, she apologized to the clerk.

That's when Julian noticed the tears in her eyes.

Julian handed the box of cereal and the bag of oranges back to the clerk. "I'll pay for these."

There was an awkward pause. It was clear that the woman had never needed this kind of help before. Julian didn't ask questions. "My kids love this cereal, too," he smiled. "And they need the oranges."

The woman thanked Julian and walked out. He would never see her again. Maybe she was traveling, or changing apartments, or had a pile of

medical bills. It didn't matter to Julian. People sometimes need help.

Before he left the store, Julian went back and grabbed a box of cereal for his kids. The next morning, instead of getting to the office early, he had breakfast with his family. They were delighted to have their dad — and their favorite cereal — waiting for them.

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