



A Personal View

(At the Post Office)

It was 11:00 am. We were all quietly waiting. I was fifth in line, one gentleman working the window. A cell phone rang about three people behind me, a lovely angelic sounding melody. We all looked up to the ceiling in response and then laughed at each other. The ceiling, by the way was the original stove pipe white tin tile with that pattern of some kind of raised flower. You've seen it around somewhere in a small town hardware store, old buildings, dating from the 1920s, 30s.

As we moved up one step closer to the window, the woman said into her phone, "Yes. The obituary is in and I'm handling the rest now." Should we, who have now become part of her world, turn and express condolences? I chose not to, thinking it best to face forward and tend to business.

A short little woman in front of me was preoccupied with something in her purse and unaware that she was dropping the slippery envelopes she'd tucked under her arm. I stooped and handed a couple to her, which seemed to startle her a bit so that she dropped the rest just as it became her turn to approach the postmaster. She was apologetically embarrassed, thanking me and trying to hustle to the window.

The one man working was under some pressure to move things along, of course. He dismissed the previous customer with, "Well, if we did it that way it would take all day! NEXT!"

This pressure did not help our little woman but she greeted him pleasantly, her elbows on the counter, trying to become taller, preparing to hopefully minimize the time she needed of him. After all, there were now nine people waiting. She tried quickly to swipe her charge card through the machine. It didn't register. "Try again, Ma 'm, he said loudly." It didn't work. "Let me," he said. (I could feel her tension.) It worked when he did it. She smiled, gathered herself together, and then it was my turn. I flashed a little nervous smile to the people behind me for now we seemed to have become friends.

My turn. "Yes, may I have some commemoratives please?"

"What kind?"

"What kind do you have?"

"I have this, this and this," he said, pointing to the chart under my nose on the counter.

"I was thinking of a flower or something," I said.

"My drawer is empty of those. I'll need to go get some." He

left and I checked with a glance to my waiting friends and felt a bit of disapproval.

"I can take it," I said to myself. I knew what they were thinking, but it's my turn.

As I finally paid my bill and moved to a side table to post my letters, a second worker arrived. The line moved up quickly now to the woman with the phone. She tried to speak softly of her needs. New Mr. Postman, big fella with a big voice, repeated for clarification and apparently for everyone present, to clarify, "You have power of attorney? Did you bring the death certificate? Did you bring any proof of power of attorney? Did you bring the obituary?"

All of us friends wished we could group around her, stand close, vouch for her. We understood that she had just lost a loved one and all she wanted was to pick up the mail of the deceased. But it was "business as usual" for each of us.

At 11:00 am, in a line, in a group of strangers, there was so much life, so much diversity, so much compassion, so much unspoken, at the post office that day. My personal view.

