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*Copied.*

## **The Folded Napkins – A Truckers' Story**

I try not to be biased, but I had my doubts about hiring Stevie. His placement counselor assured me that he would be a good, reliable busboy. However, I had never had a mentally handicapped employee and wasn't sure I wanted one. I wasn't sure how my customers would react to Stevie. He was short, a little dumpy with the smooth facial features and thick-tongued speech of Downs Syndrome. I wasn't worried about most of my trucker customers because truckers don't generally care who buses tables as long as the meatloaf platter is good and the pies are homemade.

The four-wheeler drivers were the ones who concerned me – the mouthy college kids traveling to school – the yuppie snobs who secretly polish their silverware with their napkins for fear of catching some dreaded truck stop germ – the pairs of white-shirted businessmen on expense accounts who think every truck stop waitress wants to be flirted with. I knew those people would be uncomfortable around Stevie so I closely watched him for the first few weeks.

I shouldn't have worried. After the first week, Stevie had my staff wrapped around his stubby little finger, and within a month my truck regulars had adopted him as their official truck stop mascot. After that, I really didn't care what the rest of the customers thought of him.

He was like a 21-year-old in blue jeans and Nikes, eager to please, but fierce in his attention to his duties. Every salt and peppershaker was exactly in its place, not a breadcrumb or coffee spill was visible when Stevie got done with the table. Our only problem was persuading him to wait to clean a table until after the customers were finished. He would hover in the background, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, scanning the dining room until a table was empty. Then he would scurry to the empty table and carefully bus dishes and glasses onto his cart and meticulously wipe the table up with a practiced flourish of his rag. If he thought a customer was watching, his brow would pucker with added concentration. He took pride in doing his job exactly right, and you had to love how hard he tried to please each and every person he met.

Over time, we learned that he lived with his mother, a widow who was disabled after repeated surgeries for cancer. They lived on their Social Security benefits in public housing two miles from the truck stop. Their social worker, who stopped to check on him every so often, admitted they had fallen between the cracks. Money was tight, and what I paid him was probably the difference between them being able to live together and Stevie being sent to a group home.

That's why the restaurant was a gloomy place that morning last September, the first morning in three years that Stevie missed work. He was at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester getting a new valve or something put in his heart. His social worker said that people with Downs Syndrome often have heart problems at an early age so this wasn't unexpected, and there was a good chance he would come through the surgery in good shape and be back at work in a few months.

A ripple of excitement ran through the staff later that morning when word came that he was out of surgery, in recovery, and doing fine. Frannie, the head waitress, let out a war hoop and did a little dance in the aisle when she heard the good news. Belle Ringer, one of our regular trucker customers, stared at the sight of this 50-year-old grandmother of four doing a victory shimmy beside his table. Frannie blushed, smoothed her apron and shot Belle Ringer a withering look. He grinned. "OK, Frannie, what was that all about?" he asked.

"We just got word that Stevie is out of surgery and going to be okay." Frannie answered. "I was wondering where he was. I had a new joke to tell him. What was the surgery about?" Belle continued.

Frannie quickly told Belle Ringer and the other two drivers sitting at his booth about Stevie's surgery, then sighed: "Yeah, I'm glad he is going to be OK. But I don't know how he and his Mom are going to handle all the bills. From what I hear, they're barely getting by as it is." Belle nodded thoughtfully, and Frannie hurried off to wait on the rest of her tables.

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Since I hadn't had time to round up a busboy to replace Stevie and really didn't want to replace him, the girls were busing their own tables that day until we decided what to do. After the morning rush, Frannie walked into my office. She had a couple of paper napkins in her hand and a funny look on her face. "What's up?" I questioned. "I didn't get that table where Belle Ringer and his friends were sitting cleared off after they left, and Pony Pete and Tony Tipper were sitting there when I got back to clean it off," she replied. "This was folded and tucked under a coffee cup."

She handed the napkin to me and three \$20 bills fell onto my desk when I opened it. On the outside, in big, bold letters, was printed "Something for Stevie"

"Pony Pete asked me what that was all about," she continued. I told him about Stevie and his Mom and everything. Pete looked at Tony and Tony looked at Pete, and they ended up giving me this. She handed me another paper napkin that had "Something for Stevie" scrawled on its outside. Two \$50 bills were tucked within its folds. Frannie looked at me with wet, shiny eyes, shook her head and said simply, "Truckers."

That was three months ago. Today is Christmas Eve, the first day Stevie is supposed to be back at work. His replacement worker said he's been counting the days until the doctor said he could work. It didn't matter at all that this was a holiday. He called ten times in the past week, making sure we knew he was coming, fearful that we had forgotten him or that his job was in jeopardy.

I arranged to have his mother bring him to work. I met them in the parking lot and invited them both to celebrate his day back. Stevie was thinner and paler, but couldn't stop grinning as he pushed through the doors and headed for the back room where his apron and busing cart were waiting.

"Hold up there, Stevie, not so fast," I said. I took him and his mother by their arms. "Work can wait for a minute. To celebrate you coming back, breakfast for you and your mother is on me!"

I led them toward a large corner booth at the rear of the building. I could feel and hear the rest of the staff following behind as we marched through the dining room. Glancing over my shoulder, I saw booth after booth of grinning truckers join the procession. We stopped in front of the big table. Its surface was covered with coffee cups, saucers, and dinner plates, all sitting slightly crooked on dozens of folded paper napkins.

"First thing you have to do, Stevie, is clean up this mess," I ordered. I tried to sound stern.

Stevie looked at me, and then at his mother, then pulled out one of the napkins. It had "Something for Stevie" printed on the outside. As he picked it up, two \$10 bills fell onto the table. Stevie stared at the money, then at all the napkins peeking from beneath the tableware, each with his name printed or scrawled on it.

I turned to his mother. "There's more than \$10,000 in cash and checks on that table, all from truckers and trucking companies that heard about your problems. Merry Christmas." Well, it got real noisy about that time, with everybody hollering and shouting, and there were a few tears as well. But you know what's funny? While everybody else was busy shaking hands and hugging each other, Stevie, with a big, big smile on his face, was busy clearing all the cups and dishes from the table. Best worker I ever hired.

## Department Operations

**Office Hours:** 7:00 am ó 3:30 pm

**Office Phone:** 812-238-7628

**Evenings/Weekends:** Dial 00

Ask the operator to page the Chaplain's Office.

## Upcoming Events

**December 17** – Annual Spirituality and Health Workshop ó 9:30am ó Landsbaum Center

December 24 ó Christmas Eve Service ó Noon ó Combs Memorial Chapel  
Christmas Eve Mass ó 5pm ó Combs Memorial Chapel

## Quote of the Month

öKind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.ö  
Mother Teresa

## Editor's Note

Contact Neva McFarland at the Chaplain's Office for any comments or additions. 238-7628.

## Primary Sacred Times for World Religions

**December 6** – **Saint Nicholas Day** – Christian celebration of the birth of Saint Nicolas, patron saint of children and role model for gift giving.

**8** – **Bodhi Day** – Buddhist celebration of the time when Prince Gautama took his place under the Bodhi tree, vowing to remain there until he attained supreme enlightenment.

**Immaculate Conception** – Catholic Christian day of celebrating the belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was preserved from original sin all of her life.

**12-19** – **Hanukkah** – Jewish Festival of Lights. Commemorates the Maccabean recapture and rededication of the Jerusalem Temple in 165-164 B.C.

**16-25** – **Posadas Navidenas** – Hispanic Christian feast of The Lodgings commemorating the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem in preparation for the birth of Jesus.

**18** – **Hijra** – **New Year** – Islam celebration of the new year.

**21** – **Yule** – Wiccan celebration of the rebirth of the sun.

**25** – **Christmas** – Christian celebration of the birth of God's Son, Jesus

**26** – **Zarathosht Diso** – Zoroastrian anniversary of the death of Prophet Zarathushtra

**27** – **Ashura** – Islamic optional one day fast recognizing the Creation, Noah's departure from the ark, and the saving of Moses from Pharaoh.

**28** – **Holy Innocents** – Christian day of solemn memory of male children killed by King Herod in attempt to destroy Jesus.

**31** – **Watch Night** – Christian occasion to thank God for bringing people safely through another year..