

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss

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Booklets - Part 2

In preparation to get my booklets printed, I needed to do two things - Find a printer and make sure the booklets were ready.

While searching for a printer, I decided to look over the booklets. I prepared a few more and brought my total up to 21. I had my son read the four new ones, and he found a bunch of mistakes. This didn't surprise me too much since those stories had never been edited by anyone (I had run the grammar checker on them and then had the computer read them to me), but I didn't expect as many as he found.

That got me thinking. I was sure there were some errors still lurking in the 17 stories.

It was a Friday, and I said to myself, "Self, if you go to the park, I bet you can find some people to read your stories."

I replied, "How do I get people to stop and read them?"

"I have a sign I printed up several years ago that reads 'Come talk to author Douglas G. Clarke.' I can hang that up on a table with three chairs."

I thought about for a few minutes and shot it down. "People are busy, they're not going to want to stop and talk. You need a hook."

"I need my books edited, right? The cheapest I could get that done is to go on Fiverr.

Then it would cost at least \$5 each and probably \$10."

"Right," I said questioningly.

"What if I get a bunch of dollar bills and write a sign that said, 'find an error and earn cash'."

"So you're going to pay people to read your books and tell you what's wrong with them? That sounds really emotionally painful."

I nodded my head. "That's what I did when I paid an editor five cents a word to edit my book."

Well, the conversation went on like that for a little while longer and I finally convinced myself that I should do it - better to find the errors now than get 200 books printed and then find the errors.

Early the next morning I packed up my car with a table, three folding chairs, 17 booklets, my two signs, a red pen, and all the quarters and dollar bills I could scrounge from my change jar.

I was torn between Balboa Park or somewhere along the waterfront. I settled on the park. I was lucky and found a parking place near the museums. I somehow carried all my stuff up the hill in one trip.

There were a couple of other people set up around the

big fountain. I found an empty space next to a couple making balloon animals. Down the way was a guy challenging people to hang from a bar for two minutes. Across from him was a guy in a taupe robe, giving away free meditation books.

I set everything up, spread out my seventeen booklets, and quickly realized that the wind was blowing and booklets don't weigh very much. Luckily I had a bunch of quarters and placed one on top of each booklet.

Signs up, books out, money on the table - I waited. I watched several people walk by - all busy with where they were going or trying to keep track of their kids. None of them even glanced at me - kind of like people walking by beggars.

I remembered my Boy Scout training and told myself to stop being self-conscious. I started saying hello to people as they walked by and wishing them a good day. Talking help calm my nerves.

When the two young women walked up to the table, I was ready. They were in the 18 to 22 years old range. I told them if they found an error I would give them a dollar. They sat down and started reading.

One of them found an error on the first page. She was so excited. I marked the mistake

with my red pin, slid a stack of four quarters in front of her and handed her back the booklet. She found three more errors in the booklet, and I pushed three more piles of quarters in front of her.

Her friend kept reading and found one. She was a little more hesitant, not wanting to hurt my feelings. I told her I'd much rather have her find them than get them printed with the errors still in them.

The two women spent the next twenty minutes reading booklets – getting through about half of them. As they left, I swapped out some of their stacks of quarters for five and ten dollar bills.

While they were there, another woman walked up, read a story, found an error, got a dollar, took a business card, and left.

Over the next hour, I had one older guy stop by and find an error. He didn't take a business card because he 'doesn't use any electronics.'

A couple of middle-aged women read a few and earned their dollars.

I had one person ask me what the catch was, looking back at the guy with the hanging bar. I said, "No catch. Find an error and earn a dollar." She didn't believe me, so I showed her one of the booklets with red marks on it. I said, "People have already found these errors this morning. I can't guarantee that there are still errors left to be found, but there probably are. She read a couple of stories and found a mistake. She took her dollar and let satisfied.

There was one twelve-year-old boy, who had been watching all this go on from a nearby bench. When everyone had gone, he came over and looked at the table. I asked him if we wanted to read one. He seemed surprised, like he was too young to find errors in some old man's book. I gave him one that only had one error marked in it, and he started to read it. It took him a while, but he found one. He was so excited when I slid the stack of quarters in front of him.

He read a couple more books and found a couple more errors. His dad came over to tell him it was time to leave, but he said, "Let me finish this one. I'm finding mistakes. I think this dad was impressed that his son was reading and actually find errors. He left with a five-dollar bill, quite proud of himself.

There was a young girl, maybe thirteen, who sat down with her mother. The girl found an error first, but wouldn't show me. She showed it to her mother, and they talked about it. Her mother said it probably was wrong and to show me. She was right and got her dollar. She kept reading, each time asking her mother if she had found an error. Finally, her mother said, "Don't ask me." She showed me, and I agreed it was an error. I think she ended up finding four error and three things that were not wrong.

About an hour after they left, the original two young women came back. They asked if they could look for more mistakes, I said, "That's why I'm here." They spent another twenty minutes reading. They started finding things that were stylistic or

could be done several ways (like commas).

If I agreed with the stylistic comment, I gave them a dollar. For some of the picker grammar items, I put the sentence back into the grammar checker.

I had one European person drop by and read a story, he found the word 'color' and thought he had found one. I had to explain that here in the US, that's how we spell color.

Near the end of my stay, two o'clock, two twenty-something couples stopped. One of the boys started reading stories. He was determined to find an error. He must have read through ten of the booklets before he found one. I could see he was determined to show his friends that he could – and he did. Dollar in hand, he left a happy man.

When all was said and done, each booklet had between one and seven marks on its cover, showing how many errors had been found. Only one booklet had one mark. None had zero. On average there were four marks or sixty-eight in total.

Way more than I thought there would be. Less than the \$85 or \$170 it would have cost on Fiverr. In all a good investment – both for the quality of my booklets and helping with my interactions with strangers.

I packed my stuff up and headed home, humbled, with work ahead to fix the errors, and with this sense of peace and joy that I don't feel very often – maybe even excitement.

I was looking forward to the next phase, but that's another story.

Doug