

Think Before You Say You're Starving...

by [Susan Jacobs](#)



Written by [Susan Jacobs](#)

I found myself scraping together change around the house just to buy a metro card. A dollar felt like a million bucks on some days. A quarter, like a gold. Credit cards were keeping me afloat, along with growing debt.

Susan Jacobs shares an experience where ten years ago, a homeless beggar on the subway opened her eyes to a new perspective.

What does it say about us humans when we become immune to seeing witnessing despair and suffering? When we pass judgment and make assumptions based on how a stranger looks or behaviors? In New York City, we see it all and perhaps it becomes 'self-care' to go numb because if we tapped into compassion, it would be too painful.

The parade of homeless beggars in the New York subway was endless. At one time, signs were prominently posted throughout the train cars urging straphangers to resist giving to them. Although begging was supposedly illegal, there was no sign of law enforcement on this day. And really, who is to know what story is true, and who am I to judge if they are being truthful or not?

Ten years ago, I made a radical career change when I walked away from a large salary, expense account, premium health insurance, and all the glitz and glamor of the music business, to go to Ghana, West Africa for a two-month Kundalini yoga teacher-training certification program. I was fried from two decades in entertainment public relations and marketing and needed to get as far away as possible to gain perspective, get some rest, and to find out what really mattered the most to me when stripped down to the bare necessities.

Several months after returning home, my bank account was sparse. I found myself scraping together change around the house just to buy a metro card. A dollar felt like a million bucks on some days. A quarter, like a gold. Credit cards were keeping me afloat, along with growing debt.

As I rode the subway one day back then, I watched and listened to a woman beggar. There was something about her that caught my attention enough to remove one earplug from my I-Pod. I had no money and only an empty metro card. But I knew I must help this stranger. She begged, said she was hungry and had not eaten since the previous day. I couldn't and still can't imagine the humiliation of having to beg, nor can I imagine how it truly feels to be hungry. On my most challenging days, I always had places to turn. Credit card companies were my drug dealer, continually increasing my credit line despite my situation. Why is it that the less money you have, the more cards and credit line you receive?

How often do we say, 'I'm starving.' A figure of speech yes, but to many, a reality. After spending extensive time in Africa and Haiti over the years and witnessing first-hand what real starvation is, I became embarrassed that I often forget and used those words, 'I'm starving.' But the truth is that word doesn't belong in my vocabulary for personal use, and most likely not in anyone else's who is reading this. That day, I had a few groceries with me as I headed home — only uncooked items — rice, beans, and a bag of pretzels that I was munching on to appease my gurgling stomach.

I apologized to the lady for only being able to offer her an opened bag of pretzels. She took them with such joy. Our eyes met, sister-to-sister, woman-to-woman, human-being-to-human-being. Everyone on the train was watching. She smiled and announced as she began eating, "Now I just need enough to buy a cup of coffee to go with my pretzels." People looked at her, listened, and then returned to their own business. Not one offer for any change was made.

In that moment, I was again reminded of how fragile it all is. Today we have, tomorrow, perhaps not. I vowed to treat all beggars with respect until knowing what their story really is. Perhaps their lives once reflected ours, perhaps they fell from an even higher place than we know today.

While I try hard to stay in that mindset, it's challenging because you never know what's for real, and it just takes one to throw a wrench into the pot. The other day a beggar came into the subway car where I was minding my business, trying to chill. He started with his story and as he was done talking, walking the car to see who would give money, I was right on the fence, not sure he was a legit beggar. Even just writing that statement seems wrong, but unfortunately, it's true. Low and behold, that gut instinct never lies. He sat down across from me and pulled out not one, but two brand new iPhones, from which he started blasting his music. Everyone in the car watched and basically say there shaking their heads in disbelief.

Holding onto compassion and human kindness is critical and needs to be cherished. But sometimes we've just gotta turn our back. I don't know about you, but even with the con artists it's still hard for me to do.

About the Author

Susan Jacobs

Writing has been part of my DNA, career, and creative outlet for as long as I can remember. My joy is bringing to life stories of the world, its people, and its cultures.

I'm filled with an insatiable curiosity for life off-the-beaten-path and love to share stories of the unheard voices I find along the way.

Giving voice to things that matter, raising awareness, and expanding perspectives is what lights my fire and is the heart and soul of who I am and what I do.

I have contributed a chapter to two books: "Step Forward and Shine," published by RHG Media Productions, and "Pain, Purpose, Passion," published by The Round House Press. I'm a contributing blogger to Huffington Post, Identity Magazine, Thrive Global, Yogic Living, and Medium.com. My personal essays and writing have appeared in Pink Pangea, FourTwoNine Magazine, Extreme Sailing Series 2018 Official Magazine, Aquarian Times, Spirituality & Health, PR Week, and IndieWire. I'm working on my first memoir.

Please visit at www.susanjacobswriter.com