

Dear Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones,

You probably don't remember me, but as you predicted, I have not forgotten you. That is indeed why I am writing this letter. I am writing to say what I could not that day you took me to your home, fed me dinner and forever changed the course of my life by teaching me a lesson, thank you m'am.

Mrs. Jones, you could have easily hauled me off to the police when I tried to steal your purse but instead, you recognized that I was not very practiced at stealing and you gave me the courtesy of trying to figure out why I had made such a poor decision. You did not just jump to conclusions about my behavior, instead you gave me the benefit of the doubt and guessed, correctly, that I must want something really badly in order to steal from you. You had every reason to be angry with me. Instead you brought me to your house, let me wash my face and treated me like a human being by asking me questions about why I had tried to steal your purse. You didn't even try to pry into my home life even though you recognized it wasn't great. Because you treated me with kindness and let me maintain my dignity, I was more able to hear your message that in the future, if I want something I should ask for it.

I have to be honest, when I was standing there washing my face, I had thoughts of leaving but when you were so honest, when you did not say "but" after telling me you were young once, I realized, I was not the only one to ever want things, and then I looked at you and saw you. I mean really saw you. I realized you worked hard for what you had, you were a hairdresser, it was late at night and you had had a long day. You worked hard for your money to get the things you wanted and you weren't angry and bitter. You were as kind to me as you might have been to a grandson and I didn't deserve it. You even gave me ten of your hard earned dollars. Because of all this, I learned that I can get what I want but I should try to do it through hard work, not by illegal means.

As I look back on that whole night I can't help but think also about how your kindness to me was really a way to show me that being kind and respectful to others is more rewarding than being angry. It's funny, while you had me by the collar I would have given anything to run, but when you let me loose in your house and proceeded to take care of me, I had no desire to run. When you handed me that \$10.00, I did not understand. But it turns out it was the most generous move anyone has ever made. Thank you for not turning me in. Thank you for being a caring adult who took time to show me that generosity of heart and patience is often much more valuable than monetary generosity. I wore those new blue suede shoes you bought me until my toes poked out the top but I have not outgrown your lessons. I have tried every day since then to treat others with kindness even when they make me angry. Thank you m'am for everything.

Sincerely,
Roger

