

A Matter of Lemons and Lemonade

Life was not going Josh Browder's way. The bullies at Bronston Middle School seemed to hate all twelve-year olds, including Josh. The only way to keep them off his back was to pay them. His sister's birthday was coming up and he knew of a book she loved that he really wanted to get her. He also needed a school project for his math class. It all came back to money he supposed. Now, he was not a money-obsessed kid, but he did need money. He no longer received an allowance from his parents since he blew his last allowance playing poker with his friends. And chores were out of the question because all that was available was raking leaves, his least favorite chore. He let his head rest against the tree and thought "I need God's help on this." Suddenly something hit him on the forehead. He opened his eyes and saw a bright yellow lemon on his lap. He picked it up and examined it. It was ripe and fragrant. He cocked his arm back and was about to throw it when a thought struck him, "When life gives you lemons..."

Two weeks later Josh stood in the shade of his stand and listened to the chaos of middle school recess. As he stood, two girls walked up to the stand and examined the sign above him. One of them, Erica, read aloud "Lemonade made from lemons straight from the McGeizer farm." She looked at Josh "Is that true?"

He nodded and said, "I'm friends with old man McGeizer hasn't moved away yet."

As recess wore on, more and more kids came to see the lemonade stand that had caused Rick Hons, the critic, to proclaim it the best lemonade he had ever tasted. The next day at lunch Josh was walking towards his regular table, when he saw the kids at the popular table waving him over. He glanced over at his friends messing with each other, then back over at the popular table. Sitting down at the popular table, everyone began praising him for his spectacular lemonade stand. As he journeyed through the week, he began to notice that people were becoming a lot more interested in him. Kids who he had always thought were bullies acted nice to him, though he heard rumors that they were still acting like bullies to all the other kids. He dismissed the rumors as lies because they were so nice to him and praised him so much.

One day as he was walking home, he saw his two best friends, Andrew and Cameron, walking a ways ahead of him. When he called out though, instead of greeting him warmly, they turned around with expressions of disgust on their faces.

Andrew said mockingly, "Oh, finally decided to notice us?"

Josh froze and said, "What do you mean?"

Cameron retorted, "Oh like you don't know." Without letting Josh respond he continued, "You've been completely ignoring us. You've been choosing the kids at the *popular* table." He said with a sneer, "And what's more, you've been hanging out with all the bullies at school. You're not defending the kids getting bullied anymore."

Both of them glared at him, then walked off, leaving Josh wondering why his friends' attitudes had suddenly changed against him.

His friends' attitudes weren't the only thing changing. Though his lemonade stand was still booming, regular customers such as Rick Hons stopped coming. They were saying that the quality of the lemonade had suddenly dropped. In fact, the reason for this was that Josh had stopped caring about how his lemonade tasted. In short, Josh had become obsessed with money and popularity. But Josh hadn't realized this yet. He

thought that his life was an endless supply of lemonade. Well, he was about to get a whole bunch of lemons, or rather a lack of them.

“What do you mean I can’t keep using your lemons?” Josh asked.

Old Man McGeizer sighed and responded, “What I mean is what I said. You can’t use my lemons anymore. The lemons aren’t going to a worthy cause. Your lemonade stand is dropping in quality of taste and love.”

Josh stormed out of the door fuming under his breath, “I can’t use your lemons? Fine I’ll get them from somewhere else.” He was still fuming when he got to school. He thought to himself, “Oh well, I still have plenty of lemons. At least enough to last a week.”

This thought cheered him up considerably so that when recess arrived, he was in a downright good mood. Well, that didn’t last long. He had sold about three cups of lemonade when Mr. Appleton, the science teacher, walked up to the stand. Josh greeted him warmly, because science was his favorite subject. When offered lemonade, Mr. Appleton, who always looked nervous, started fidgeting around even more.

Just when Josh was about to ask him what was wrong, Mr. Appleton burst into speech, “I’m sorry to... The board...” He sighed, “I’m dreadfully sorry to be the one to deliver the news, but you’ll have to close this stand.” As he spoke, he held up a paper that read: “As decreed in the Bronston Middle School handbook: No student may open any business or club that involves any form of money.”

Josh looked up, “Is this a joke?”

Mr. Appleton shook his head. “You need to move your stand out of school by the end of the day.” Josh moved through the rest of the day in a haze, and when looking for support at the popular table, he was immediately shunned. When his mom came to pick him up, he brought his entire lemonade stand with him. Though his mom asked him what happened he made no response. He just glowered. Later that afternoon he was sulking when his sister, Avery, came into his room.

Without asking she plopped herself on his bed and said in a nonchalant tone, “I heard that your lemonade stand got shut down.” He just grunted. She continued, “It lasted a long time. And it was pretty popular...for a while.”

He looked up and snapped, “What do you mean by that?”

She shrugged, “Nothing. Just that I’m not surprised that business stopped, though I wasn’t sure how it would fail.” He stared at her “I mean how long did it take you to make lemonade the first week. And how long did it take you to make it the last week?”

He retorted, “So? How does that change anything?” But even as he said this, he remembered Old Man McGeizer’s words, “Your lemonade stand is dropping in quality of taste and love.” He hadn’t understood what he meant, but now he saw that he meant Josh’s joy and love of making lemonade had waned.

Some of his thoughts must have shown on his face, because Avery kept talking, “And didn’t some wise little brother once say that bullies and those who ignore bullies never prosper?”

Josh sat there, dumbfounded. Suddenly memories flashed through his head. Cameron and Andrew confronting him. Rumors of his new “friends” being bullies. And

both Rick Hons and old Man McGeizer saying that the quality of the lemonade dropped. Avery winked at him, “Just some food for thought.”

Three minutes after she left, Josh was still standing in the exact same spot. He staggered to his chair and muttered, “Oh, man I’ve been a jerk.” He rested his head on his arms and sighed. “I’ve got to make up for my attitude. But how?” His mind was very confused and for some reason was running through random memories. Images of the local pregnancy outreach center, and the MLK march flashed through his mind.

All of a sudden, he jerked his head up, “Aha! I’ve got it!” He reached into one of his drawers and pulled out pen and paper and started writing hurriedly. Later that evening, Avery brought up his dinner.

She glanced at the numerous papers on his desk and said, “Wow, you’re really going to do that? Talk about a turnaround.”

As she left Josh leaned back on his chair and said, “Thanks, sis.”

She poked her head around the doorframe and asked, “What are you talking about? I just quoted a wise kid.” Then she left. Josh turned back to his work and added the final touches to his plan. He leaned backwards and studied his work. He grinned. This was going to be fun.

One week later, he ran out of old man McGeizer’s house shouting, “Thank you so much, Mr. McGeizer!”

Old man McGeizer called back, “You’re more than welcome, my boy. Come back anytime.” Josh hurried into his sister’s car.

Avery asked, “Where to?”

He replied, “The town square.”

As he spoke, he glanced behind him at the assortment of poles, signs, and coolers in the back seat and felt an excitement rising in his chest. An hour later, he once again stood under the shade of his lemonade stand. Two teenagers, a boy and a girl, wandered over to his stand. The boy looked at the sign on the counter “90% of proceeds go to our local pregnancy outreach center and the MLK foundation.” He looked at Josh, “Wow, that’s impressive.” Both of them got the largest cup of lemonade he had.

Though Josh didn’t think that his contribution to the pregnancy outreach center would be noticed, the head of the center, Mr. Lewis, found that an amount of around a hundred twenty dollars was coming in every week from one source. When he investigated further, he was even more shocked to find that the one source was a twelve-year-old boy’s math project. In the square, Josh saw Cameron and Andrew walking towards him. He called out to them and they warily came over.

Before either of them could say anything, Josh burst into speech, “I’m sorry for ignoring you. I was a real jerk.”

Cameron nodded, “It’s alright.”

Josh offered them cups of lemonade and said, “On the house.” They all grinned.

As he handed Avery her book, which was Anne of Green Gables, she asked “You had tried to start a lemonade stand at your school. What made you try it again?” He grinned and responded “Well, it was a matter of lemons and lemonade.”