

Fighting bad guys with a smile

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A mugger almost got me one time
just outside Northridge mall --

Me – middle-aged, small, white, female,
arms laden with heavy bags --
Christmas gifts.

The mugger -- young, big, black, male,
someone I'm "supposed" to fear.

Before I saw him,
I *felt* him
behind me.
Somehow I knew he had walked
fast, diagonally across the parking lot,
to catch up with me.

I did
what came naturally,
what I'd do without thought
to anyone
who had hurried up
to meet me:

I turned.
My eyes met his eyes.
I smiled.
I said "Hi!"
as if he were a friend
I hadn't seen in a long time.

His face held no expression.
He zipped his eyes away,
zipped his body
diagonally across the parking lot
away from me
back the way he had come.

Last night my daughter Anna called
to tell me her friend and co-worker was dead --
21 years old, delivering
Jimmy Johns sandwiches

at night in Riverwest,
shot twice in the chest,
robbed.

The cops found
a young dead body,
no wallet, no I.D.,
a Jimmy Johns car nearby.

They called Jimmy Johns
and asked "Are you missing a driver?"

Anna said several other drivers
had been robbed lately --
They carry all their money to the end
of their shifts...

... Someone knew.

Did Anna's friend resist
when the bad guys hurried up to rob him?
Would a smile and a dumb "Hi!" have saved his life?
We'll never know.

Now there are two parents
like Mike and me
mourning their young son,
the same age as our Anna.

I ache for the hole in their hearts

And I wish
all the bad guys could be
disarmed with a smile.

All the good guys,
all the poor college kids trying to make a buck
delivering sandwiches
could protect themselves
with a smile on their faces.
instead of
a gun in their pockets.

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