

# Street scene

It was the first day of "warmth" after a week of sub-zero cold in Anchorage but the wind managed to bite those walking outside more sharply than had the cold of the still days before.

The sidewalks along Anchorage's Fourth Avenue saw more people walking than during the previous week but all those people hurried stiffly to avoid the miserable cold.

Walking through a tunnel created by a building were two men, one old, the other young. The older — white — had on a warm properous-looking grey wool coat, a warm neck scarf and wool hat.

The younger man — Inuit — was not so fortunate. His clothes were thin. A cloth jacket opened to mid-chest revealed a shirt. He wore a red hat with a ski pattern on it. He wore no gloves and clutched a cup of coffee in a styrofoam cup for warmth.

Just before they passed, the older man dropped a small wad of money. He didn't notice and no one else was really close enough to see other than the younger man.

The younger man bore on his face evidence of a brawl of some sort; he looked as if he could use the money.

The younger man stopped the older and handed it back to him. He was thanked and both parted.

It was impossible to see if the older man had a smile on his face for his good fortune.

But the younger man had a smile. And the day grew a bit warmer.

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Down the block, sitting on a bench in front of the restaurant, was a woman dressed in a leather-like plastic material coat. She clutched her hands together and shivered violently.

And people, used to seeing others sitting on that bench shivering violently, paid no attention.

One did, however, and while buying lunch purchased a cup of coffee to warm the shivering woman's hands. Not wanting to intrude, a short "speech" was rehearsed to use the right words and not make the colder woman feel uncomfortable.

"I don't want to intrude but I saw you were cold and thought this might warm you . . .

"Excuse me but I was wondering if you could use this to warm you . . ."

And the worry came. Will she think I am looking down my nose at her? Will she take this in the spirit intended?

The coffee was taken outside and the woman was still there, wringing her hands. She looked up unhappily when spoken to and it was then that her tears became apparent.

'No, she didn't want the coffee. Yes, she would be all right.'

But it was obviously not true. She was very unhappy and alone. Yet, she chose to remain alone in her silent unhappiness. "Yes, I'll be all right."

A feeling of helplessness filled the person who extended the helping hand. There was regret at not knowing how to make this woman feel comfortable enough to accept the small token of help.

And then there was anger, too. At the fact that she seemed to have no place to go, no one to comfort her.

And the day grew colder.