

Do You Need Help? Are You OK?

2010

Do you need help? Are you OK?

No, I'm fine. Thank you.

Are you sure?

Yes, thank you, I'm sure.

With that, she drove off.

It was toward the end of my usual route – a three mile walk that takes me through William Land Park and back through the neighborhood streets to home – when I ran out of gas. This has happened before, but not very often. I would find a place to sit, catch my breath, talk out loud with Clyde a bit, and then tool on home. If we were close enough to Larry's Gas Mart, I would get a small Pepsi and a small bag of Cheetos, which I would split with Clyde. But today I am alone, Clyde is gone for good and feeling drained by my emotional loss or my aging physical condition – no doubt, a bit of both – I begin to drag a bit.

There was no convenient place to sit, so I leaned against a fence. The Toyota Prius was idling in the driveway next door. Several minutes passed before the car slowly backed out and stopped next to me. The young woman – Hmong, I think, and with a small child in a car seat behind her – rolled down the passenger window and asked after me. How nice of her, I thought. Would I have done that? I hoped so.

But the reality was obvious: I was elderly, I probably looked confused and unsure of myself, and I was standing alone on a sidewalk going nowhere. What else could she have thought? I needed help.

Alas, the help I need is not available. Clyde will not return, nor will the energy of my youth. Leaning against this fence, catching my breath, resting a bit will have to suffice.