

The sweeper

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I looked out the window one Saturday morning and there he was – a total stranger with broom in hand, sweeping the street at the corner across from our house. I noticed him again a couple of weeks later and started paying attention as on alternate Saturday mornings he would sweep or weed, keeping the corner clear of both the detritus fallen from a row of Douglas fir and the crack grass and moss that seemed to reappear as soon as he'd cleared it. This was over a year ago and since then I've often wondered who he was and why he had assigned himself the chore of keeping that particular corner looking nice.

Why did he do it? And what was his back story?

I started out seeing him as 'stranger' and vaguely resented what felt like an intrusion. But of course his ministrations harmed no one and even improved the view out our front window, so what the hell? This was during a tough time for me with my recent back injury and the ongoing insult of an increasingly toxic social and political atmosphere. Gradually, watching this guy weed and sweep became a metaphor for clearing all the preconceptions and prejudices out of my life.

I wish I'd worked up the courage to approach and ask why he did what he did. And I imagine his answers might include:

- The work keeps him busy in his retirement.
- Cleaning and weeding beautifies the neighborhood.
- Occasionally, people stop and ask – not me, but people – and he gets to meet new friends.
- And the bottom line - why not?

I'll never know. Mary and I moved away before I ever got up the gumption to talk to him. I don't get up that way Saturday mornings but I find myself wondering if he's still there, sweeping and weeding.

I hope so.