

# Harley and Dog

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**Story Summary:** Harley led a simple life, an ideal life to some, living alone in his little Airstream trailer on the hill. Dog who was not really a dog, and not exactly a pet either, was his only companion.

Few people knew whether Harley was his first name or his last. And after 30 years of reading electric meters for the town, walking six to eight miles every day, at 75 years old, he was forced into retirement.

Harley wasn't ready to settle into the recliner chair, and found picking up litter along the streets of town to be his own beautification project. But not everything is perfect in town.

When two little girls disappear from the park, the town police found their man. But Harley is not so sure. Thus our hero begins his own investigations, following the clues hidden in the litter left near the scene of the crime.

It's Harley and Dog to the rescue in this precious story that reaches across the generations. Harley makes the journey from lonely old coot to hero, all whilst still keeping the town picked up.

# Chapter One

## *Harley*

Few people knew whether Harley was his first name or his last. He was a loner, living alone in his little Airstream trailer on the hill overlooking town. He was cantankerous, crabby, cranky and not what you would call a conversationalist. Those who had to deal with him, such as his boss, Mr. Brown, described him as set in his ways and stubborn. Only Judy at the dinner ever had a decent conversation with him. After 30 years of living and working in the town, Judy may have been the only person who ever asked him how he was doing. She chatted with him because she found something to like about the man.

Mr. Brown, Harley's supervisor at Utility Customer Service talked with him because he had to, but he kept it to a minimum. Brown especially needed to communicate with him in depth recently, unpleasant as it might have been for him because there were pressing issues having to do with Harley's upcoming retirement.

Brown would have to get new meter readers on board, get them trained, and get Harley out of there.

“I’m sorry Harley, I really am,” said Brown. “Fact remains, you’ll reach mandatory retirement age on your birthday next month. It’s written in the Town Charter. Here it is. Pretty clear. I’ll read it to you.”

*“Any employee who reaches the age of 75 is subject to mandatory retirement.”*

“I can out-walk any meter reader you got and you know it. Maybe I seem ancient to you, but I can walk all day. ”

“I do know that. It’s not what I’m saying here.” Brown rolled his eyes, took a deep breath and a sip of old coffee. He collected his thoughts.

“It’s the law, Harley. I know you’ve talked to the mayor and the town council, and the powers that be, and haven’t been able to get them to write an amendment, or otherwise change the law. You haven’t got a choice here but to retire. And neither do I have a choice but to let you.”

Harley grunted. Nothing much to say.

“You’re the best I got. You’ve never given me any grief. Never had a complaint on you since I’ve been here.” Except that one lady who filed on him for not talking to her, he thought, smiling. She’d walk out on her porch naked while he was reading her meter, trying to get a rise out of the man.

“I’ll be sorry to see you go, man. It’s going to take two meter readers to replace you. And on top of that, we got the switch to scanners...”

The phone rang. Brown reached for it. That was Harley’s cue to get up, and get out of there. No doubt, the conversation was getting nowhere, and he’d rather be outside in the fresh air, instead of Brown’s stuffy office.

“Hang on Harley.” Brown held up a finger.

Harley eased back down in his chair, looked out the window, thinking he had many things he would rather be doing on a Friday afternoon.

“Yes sir, mayor. Harley’s here in my office.” Brown’s hand covered the mouthpiece. “Harley, it’s the mayor. Personnel’s sending two new hires over on Monday. We’re not operational on

the scanners, yet. So forget about having to mess with them. But would you mind showing the new guys your routes?"

Harley shrugged.

"Thanks Harley. The mayor and I have some things to go over, so you have a nice weekend. See you bright and early Monday."

Bright and early did not mean the same thing to Harley as it did to Brown. Supervisors tended not to show up before nine on Monday, while he and the other readers would be there at six. They'd be half way through their routes before management had its first cup of coffee.

On the other hand, Brown couldn't leave on Friday until he got Monday's routes together for all the readers, and filed away in their cubbyholes.

Harley stopped at Payroll to pick up his weekly check, and walked two blocks to the bank. Having only a handful of bills to pay, he felt he didn't need the aggravation of a checking account, so each week he withdrew enough cash for groceries, and to pay by money order, the few bills he had for that week. What was left over, he dropped into savings. Harley didn't own a car. He walked

everywhere in town. And if he had to go to the big city, he took public transportation.

He walked a lot. Six to eight miles every day on his meter reading route, plus two more miles back and forth from work to his trailer in the hills overlooking town. Three or four evenings per week, after cleaning up, he came back down the hill for supper at Judy's Diner. On weekends, particularly during the warmer times of year, he walked the trail from his ancient Airstream trailer, to go fishing at the lake.

Also on Harley's Friday route, was a visit to the library. From a small backpack, he pulled a dozen library books, which he read during the week, and then returned. He checked out a dozen more. He enjoyed westerns, mysteries and thriller-suspense novels. Sometimes he'd read a non-fiction book on a topic he was interested in, mostly having to do with the natural world. He loved animals. More than most people.

Once, curious about why people threw their unwanted trash, their cans, their bottles, their soiled napkins their half eaten sandwiches, and the bags they came in, out the window of their

vehicles, he researched the topic on the internet by way of the library computer.

Facts were, litterers were for the most part males, and under the age of 25. They went to bars, fast food restaurants, and smoked cigarettes. Cancer sticks, as Harley called them, were the most littered item of all, but beverage containers were more than half the volume. According to the facts, when a locale was littered, it continued to attract more litter. Places that were allowed to be dirty would stay dirty, and get dirtier still. Until someone picked it up. Litter beget litter.

Harley wondered if a clean roadside would dissuade littering. Clean begetting clean? It seemed logical.

For the 30 years he worked for the town, he picked up litter on the road up the hill to his home. If he were in a particularly generous mood, he'd pick up a few side streets. He noticed that the streets and roads he picked up, stayed cleaner. But almost every day there was some litter to pick up. Someone inevitably did not get the message.

Harley lived simply. He didn't own a phone, a TV, radio, or computer, and had no air conditioning. His only expenses were

electricity, of which he used less than anyone else on his meter reading route; propane, delivered once a month; and groceries which he wheeled up the hill in an abandoned grocery cart. The cart, he modified by adding bicycle wheels, making it much easier to push. Heat came from a wood stove. Fuel was collected deadfall from the forest. He only used one light bulb at a time, in the room he happened to be occupying at the time. And he used one of those economical fluorescents. And on very hot days, he might plug in a small rotating fan, but mostly, his way to get cool, was take a cold shower and sit on the rocker out on his deck.

After the bank, library and grocers, Harley climbed the winding road to home, pushing his modified grocery cart ahead of him. He cleaned up the roadside on the way back up the hill.

Harley picked up litter by stabbing it with a sharpened stick that he left leaning against a tree at the bottom of his hill. Soon he would widen his litter route, knowing that after his retirement, he would have lots more time on his hands. He had begun picking up on weekends, he found that once he went after trash in earnest, he really began to realize the benefits of an unspoiled landscape.

Reality was however, it wouldn't stay pristine for long.

Sometimes, the next day, there would be new litter. For sure, after a month of not picking it up, it would begin to revert back to its former level of trashiness. There seemed to be no end to places, roads and streets and parks available to pick up. He filed a complaint at least twice a month with the police about the non-enforcement of littering laws.

"Litter begets litter," said Harley. "First you got to get it cleaned up, and then you got to enforce the litter laws."

The authorities replied with basically the same argument. "I'm sorry sir, we just don't have the manpower for that sort of activity. Our first concern will always be the safety of our citizens, of course. I'm afraid that writing tickets for littering is a pretty low priority for us. And we don't have the capacity to clean it up in the first place."

Harley thought the town should organize a pick up day. The police thought he ought to do it himself. But Harley didn't want to organize anything. In a perfect world, thought Harley, people would no longer toss trash out the windows of their vehicles.

He never understood why they did so. Was it somehow comforting seeing a brand name lying there in the street or on the

sidewalk or in the grass, staring back at the litter-monger? Could they not see how much better the scenery looked without hamburger wrappers, beer and soda cans and bottles, cigarette butts and cigarette wrappers, tin foil, used lottery tickets, old refrigerators and kitchen sinks, destroying the view? He had come across all the above, and even found money lying there beside the road. But he figured that it was tossed by accident.