

# Being Bernie

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I sigh and sit on the bus bench, which hardly provides any shade from this scorching sun. The heat is unbearable, but I choose to blame global warming for that. I do not feel like waiting for the bus, but I really do not have a choice. Both of my parents are at work, and my house is a good walk from my school. Out of pure boredom, I look around. I see a man in dirty clothes sitting nearby under the shade of a large willow tree. He has a backpack that seems like he has had it for years, with frayed zippers barely holding it together. He is smiling and talking joyfully to a woman with worn-down clothes and a messy ponytail. I wonder how someone without a home could still seem so positive. They barely have anything, like a roof over their head or a lot of food. According to my point of view, it's miserable, so why do they still look happy and content? As the man gives her the bag, some clothes peek out of the top. The woman is thanking the guy profusely, and she promises him something, but I cannot hear it clearly. I cannot help but notice how grateful she looks. As she is leaving, a bunch of young men come over and start talking to him, too. As they talk, the man hands them some food and listens to them with his full attention while they discuss the unforgiving heat. I overhear

them talking about a new shelter opening up downtown. He smiles and thanks them for “this wonderful information”. One of the men who looks the youngest amongst the lot, explains how much it means to have someone who genuinely cares. He says that he is glad to come to the bus stop, since he enjoys having the company. He also thanks the smiling guy for all the food that he has been giving, since he has been struggling with money lately. Then he says, “I am so grateful to have you, Bernie. You know, you matter a lot, to me. You have been giving me food nonstop, even though you have hardly any yourself. I could never be more thankful for you, Bernie! I can actually talk to you about my problems and you do not complain about my long rants. You offer me helpful advice. If you think about it, it is like you are my shelter, because isn’t shelter a feeling about being with the ones who make you feel safe and feel as if you matter?” Bernie beams and says, “It is an honor to be bestowed with such an honorary title! But shelter, to me, is when you have your loved ones with you, or when you feel safe and cared for and you have the means and opportunity to reach your full potential. A shelter is any place which you call home. Do I have any of these things? Hardly. I am glad that I can share what little I have so that other people can eat, dress moderately, feel heard and loved around me. Seeing other people smile and laugh heals something inside of me. I have not felt these emotions in a long time. But I am glad that other people can feel like they do not have to hide or feel unsafe around me.”

I look at myself and realize that I have been taking things for granted. While I just complain about small things, this guy is making a huge impact. Larger than what is ever needed! The bus comes and I look back at him, finally understanding that shelter is more than just a place to seek solace from natural elements and a place to live; it is the feeling of being safe, cared for, and connected to others. Shelter is a feeling, shelter is being kind and supportive, shelter is being 'Bernie'.