

# The Bad \$5 Note...

I was at a McDonald's restaurant for my daughter's 6th birthday party last Friday night. When you are a father you have to do these things. Yes, you want to do these things, but when you arrive at the party to find you are the only male present, and Macca's don't have bars in their restaurants as yet ... well let's just say you get the feeling it is going to be a long evening.

The time for the party was 6 o'clock and as is usual with much of our circle of family and friends, promptness was not a priority (especially for the men - who weren't turning up at all). After nearly becoming stuck in the play slide (which by the way was in full view of all other diners) attempting to get a little one out of the way of a sliding conga line of older kids, eventually food was ordered for all - except me. I had to do that myself.

As is the way with McDonald's on a Friday night - the place was packed. Line ups were 10 deep with everyone standing in pools of their own drool, continuously reading the menu's as they waited for short people with bald spots; large people with fast food butts; and young people excited with everything from their latest eye shadow colour to their new phone app (and that was just the boys); to push forward so that they too could ultimately be served. I was one of the waiting.

After much toing and froing in my mind - the inevitable food fight of choice between my eyes and my belly - eventually I found myself standing at the counter in front of a 16 year old boy (complete with required fast food acne and a look much too stern for his position in life).

I toyed with the idea of going the trendy, supposedly healthy menu - but rabbits would have trouble justifying nibbling on some of the choices on offer - especially when put into direct comparison with the meaty offerings of the old school menu. The Big Mac's and cheeseburgers (with fries inside the buns of course) got me in the end. I gave the lad my money...

... And that is when the evening began to turn sour.

You know when you don't really want to do something, but for the sake of peace and harmony, you do it? Well that was one of these moments.

I paid the pimply faced 16 year old kid behind the counter my money and waited for my change. He held out a \$5 note and some coins. This wasn't an issue of course, except for one thing... the \$5 note was missing a large chunk of one corner. In reality the \$5 note was worth about \$4.70!

I didn't really want to take the note. You know how it is - you take the note, the note becomes your responsibility and you have to strategically offload it to someone else down the track. Its money you have to think about. You also know that when you do eventually produce that dodgy note to that somebody else down the track, well they aren't going to want to take it either. But... McDonalds was flat out at that time, I had waited ages to be served and the lines behind and around me resembled last call at the loaves and fishes day.

So I took the chunk missing \$5 note.

Scoffing down my burgers, I watched the kids play. Being the only male present I was pretty much excluded from almost every adult conversation on content alone. I had never moisturised; never personally, physically, had a baby; and had no idea what had happened on most soaps during the week. Occasionally a charitable female would throw a question my way - but that was done out of pity more than sincerity.

Eventually we lit the candle cake, sang Happy Birthday out of key and I began to ponder freedom outside the Macca's party room once more. However, I was still a bit peckish. That's when the idea struck me.

I'd buy a Sundae. It would be perfect as a dessert, a treat ... *and* would also allow me to give back the broken \$5 note. thus excusing me from having to concern myself about strategically offloading it onto some poor other individual at a later date. Talk about killing two birds with one stone – I was killing about twenty. Pure genius!

The counter area was quiet by this stage. I ambled up to it like I owned the joint. The same 16 year old kid awaited me, teeth braces glinting in the artificial light, pimples threatening to blow like volcanoes. I ordered, he served. I was completely content in my little world, mesmerised with the soft chocolate swirling and sitting on the cup of soft serve ice cream.

'That'll be \$2' the kid said.

'No problemo' I answered, whipping out the \$5 note with a chunk missing.

'Umm... Ah, I don't think I can take that sir' He smiled smugly.

'What do you mean you can't take it - you were the one who gave it to me!'

'Ah, I don't think I did.'

'Oh yes you did. Are you calling me a liar?' I was irate. This guy had not 60 minutes earlier given me the bodgy fiver - and now he refused to take it back.

'You've got to be joking' I roared.

'Sorry sir. Policy says we can't accept notes that aren't in full condition.'

'Then why did you give it to me as change earlier? You must have taken it from someone who paid you with it. How on earth would you be able to give it to me unless you had?' My reasoning was sound, so I thought.

The kid appeared rattled for a second, but re-composed himself well. 'As I said sir- I didn't give you that money.'

By this stage a few other people were at the counter. As it was the girl's birthday and it was McDonalds after all (happy, happy land!), and not wanting to draw too much attention to the issue at hand, I dropped the volume down a level.

'Ok kid...' I whispered '..You know and I know that you gave me this crappy fiver. I didn't want to take it but I did to help you out and assist with the busy time you guys were having. I know you get paid about an ice cream an hour, so wanting to show a little support for you I accepted the note. Now - what say you take the note back, give me my change and I'll even give you a tip.'

He looked at me for a time, up and down, smiled his smarmy little smirk. I had him. I smiled back, comfortable that we had found some common ground. I'd get my Sundae, he'd get his dodge \$5 back, I'd get my change and he'd get a little something extra to spend at the corner shop in his down time. I found myself humming 'Everyone's a winner babe... yeah that's all right'.

I watched the kid leave his position behind the counter and walk over near the shakes dispenser. Strange - maybe he was going to throw in a free Apple Pie to sweeten the deal - I liked his style. For a second.

Grabbing a microphone and crooning like Barry Manilow in a seedy nightclub, the kid didn't so much talk as grease across the restaurant's airwaves... 'Manager to the counter please. Store manager to the counter.'

My world turned syrupy. 'What are you doing?' I yelled in slow motion across the bench top. 'I thought we had a deal?'

The store manager appeared from out the back. She was a large lady who looked like she had sampled every burger they had produced since store opening about a decade earlier. She must have been sampling even more (when so rudely interrupted by the upstart who was presently trying to screw me royally), as she had a paper napkin tucked sternly into her neck, bejewelled with accompanying ketchup dob.

I could hear her thighs whooshing in the company provided nylon pants she waddled towards me in. She wasn't tall - but I've seen Kenworth trucks with lesser girth legally have to display 'wide load' signs. Looking at her, she was the law in my world right about then.

'What is it Shaun?' she whined nasally to the kid.

'Ah Wendy...' The kid's voice squeaked like all do when stuck between childhood and manhood '...this gentlemen here tried to give me a \$5 note that was missing quite a large piece. After I refused - explaining store policy on full currency in the process - he consequently attempted to bribe me with cash to divorce myself from the store policy.'

This bloke was screeching out language like he had a Webster's dictionary stuck in his back pocket.

'Is that right?'

The store manager gave me the once over. I felt dirty. It wasn't a normal look. Like being sized up by a giant rat working out where best to plunge the fangs first. Thank goodness she had already been eating.

'Well we can't have that...' she continued '...As stated by the sign on the wall, in full view of all clientele, the only cash accepted here must be of Australian currency and in complete condition.'

I followed her porgy arm and stubby finger as she made reference to the sign like a disinterested air hostess discussing crash procedures. I couldn't see a sign... until a young counter girl, with black, Marge Simpson like hair, bent down to get something from under the bench. The sign emerged like a knife from a throng, hitting me square between eyes.

Too smugly, Whopper Wendy and Shake and Bake Shaun, grinned before calling in unison 'SECURITY.'

'You're joking! You can't throw me out of a McDonald's store! Can You? Well you shouldn't be throwing me out - not for this. You guys are crazy!'

Wendy turned nasty. 'I can damn well do whatever I want! This is my store. This is my son. (Aching light streamed into my brain, squealing, turning... no wonder the kid was so messed up. His rat eyes were exactly the same as hers come to think of it). If you try to break the law in here - then my friend - you will find your butt on the footpath. Horace!'

Horace looked like he was also paid in food. I could of out ran him simply by circling the room. Didn't matter though. Now wasn't the time or place. Embarrassingly I was collared, lifted and walked into the car park, very closely missed by a departing drive-thru customer.

My better half saw me being dispatched. Frantically she grabbed bags, presents, kids and whatever else happened to be lying around and made her way out to the car park. I watched her pass Whopper Wendy and Sneaky Shaun who were doing all kind of weird high fiving things - even a waist bump thrown in (which sent the pimple faced dobber flying across the room and crashing into the newspaper stand). I think a straw flew out and stabbed an elderly woman in the throat. That was their problem. Probably offered her a box of cookies for any inconvenience.

'What happened?' my wife asked.

'Long story. I'll tell you on the way home.'

'You okay?' She asked 'Wasn't anything to do with that fat woman and young kid dancing around? The ones carrying on about trying to get rid of a bad note or something for years?'

'Could be...' I said 'Could be.'