

CAN I HAVE A LICK

Having finished dinner with friends at a little Italian restaurant about twenty-five miles from our home, my wife and I set off to return home. On the way, we stopped at a drive-up ice creamery for desert. We had driven by this place a million times before but had never stopped.

Business was good, as the parking lot was crammed full this Friday night. People were standing in line to order, while others milled around. It seemed to be a hangout for the youth of the town. I was lucky to find a parking spot, surprisingly right in the front. Somebody must have just left.

There was an SUV parked next to me, the back gate open to the cool night air. Sitting inside on a sleeping bag, were a mother and her two children, a boy, an older sister, and the family dog. All were munching or licking on what looked like some very good ice cream concoctions. Well, not so much Fido.

Exiting my car, I made my way to the back of the SUV. The boy appeared to be about seven and was licking furiously on a version of a really big ice cream bar. Quite naturally, mom was looking me over with some suspicion in her eyes, which softened when my wife appeared by my side.

Cutting right to the chase, I looked at junior. I said, "Hey my man, I am quite picky about my ice cream, and as I had never been to this particular establishment before, I was wondering if you might give me a lick of your ice cream bar. I only need one."

I am pretty sure my wife groaned at this point.

Junior's eyes got big as his ice cream bar. He had probably never had a stranger have the unmitigated gall to ask him for a lick of his ice cream bar. In fact, I would bet on it. He looked over at his mother, as if she might know who this screwball was that would dare ask for a lick of his ice cream. I can only imagine the thoughts going on his head at that point.

Slowly, he smiled as he shook his head in an emphatic no! He probably couldn't spell emphatic, but he certainly knew how to look that way. I could see it in his eyes that there was no way this crazy old coot was getting any of his ice cream bar. Not tonight anyway.

As the chances are you don't know me, it is at this point I should tell you something. I am overweight, particularly in the mid-section. Okay, more than a little! There, I said it. I also happen to sport a white beard and mustache. My hair, which I proudly have most of even while nearing seventy, is in the process of turning white a little more each day. I'm also kind of a joker around children.

I glanced over to mom. She was now smiling, in on the ruse, which gave me the opportunity to go on.

The conversation went something like this:

Me: "Are you sure I can't have just one lick?"

Junior: (Silence as he continues to grin, lick, and shake his head, again with an emphatic no, all at the same time. It was a quite remarkable contortion of his face.)

Mom: “You can give him a lick, can’t ya.” (Actually, she said his name, but as I previously mentioned about my advancing age, for the life of me I can’t think of what it was. We’ll just go with the name ‘Mike’ for the rest of the story.)

Me: “If you’re sure, Mike, that you won’t give me a lick, I guess I’ll have to go get my own, but I sure would like just one lick of yours to see if I like it first. You know, young fella, other kids never seem to mind.”

Mike: (Silence, still with the face contortions.)

I’m pretty sure at this point his licking intensified as if thought he could eat the whole thing right in front of me. That ice cream bar was so big, I was sure it would melt on his hand and the sleeping bag long before he was able to eat it. Hopefully, the Fido got a few licks too.

Mom is still smiling. My wife, not so much and has suggested a couple of times we might leave the young family alone. Big sister, a bespeckled young lass possibly of junior high school age, is now standing on my other side, also smiling. I have no idea where she came from or how she got there, but I sensed she’s interested to know where this exchange is going too. Will Mikey give him a lick.

Me: “Well, Mike if you’re not going to share, I guess I’m going to have to go get some for myself to see how good it is. Sure, would have been better to have gotten at least one lick though, just to see if I like it. I’d hate to buy some and not like it, know what I mean?”

Mike slowed down his licking to look at me, cocking his head sideways a little. It was as if he was wondering if I was serious and that he should be considering actually giving this strange old man a lick of his ice cream bar. Or maybe it was because his sister was egging him on. It also occurred to me he might be getting a brain freeze too for rapidly advancing on that ice cream bar to protect it from me. But it seemed he might be realizing something

Not wanting to overstay my welcome to the point where mom might feel the need to call the local constabulary, I repeated that I guessed I would just have to get my own. I said my goodbye, thanked mom, and turned to head up to the counter to order. I had taken about two steps when I heard Mikey speak excitedly to his mom:

“Did I just say no to Santa?”

Turning back, I smiled and said, “Ho, Ho, Ho.”

