

# Take It Easy

Dedicated to Carlos and all those who grind on a different rhythm, yet still manage to raise a smile.

**Monday, March 20, 2017 4:52 am.**

I roll down the dock door, fasten the master lock and turn to the Monday morning truck driver waiting nearby with his usual contagious smile. If it weren't for the heavy layer of sweat coming through his faded T-shirt, you'd never suspect he was burning up with a high fever.

"Alright man. Seriously, get well soon, alright. See you next Monday," I say with sleep deprived eyes and a concerned smile.

"Thanks. I will. See you next Monday. Enjoy your day," he replies in broken, yet heartfelt English after clearing a bit of phlegm from his chest.

We shake hands and part ways, understanding the high probability that we will, hopefully meet again.

Though isn't it something how we say our short goodbyes with the understanding that these few parting words will suffice until the next meeting. Oh how we take so much for granted. It's only when tragedy strikes that life slaps us across the face with its stinging hand of perspective.

My morning routine goes like this: once the truck is complete, I staple the broken seals to the paperwork and leave them on my supervisor's desk to be entered into the computer. I then set the alarm, grab my jacket and walk past the forbidding wall of pallets on my way to the floor.

On any given day, during this 30-second early morning plod across the dock, I'd run into Carlos; a short, stalky Hispanic man, devoted to his cowboy hat, navy blue tee and stone washed blue jeans, moving with purpose to the supply room despite the early morning hour. But today I do not see my friend. Nor do I realize the oddity of his absence. But I should have. See Carlos never misses a day. Ever. At least he hasn't since I've been with the company. We've always crossed paths in the morning and entered into a friendly exchange consisting of a salute, topped off with a fist bump. Carlos would then say, "Good morning boss,"

and tell me to, “take it easy.”

Watching the way Carlos approached the day like a dutiful soldier was infectious. I hope to see more of my friend.

I walk out to the floor patting the dust off my pants. It’s coming up on 5’oclock now. The store is beginning to wake. Most areas are lit. Sounds rise from various corners of the building and employees still drunken with sleep slowly begin trickling out of the elevator.

On my way to the front, I pass by the Salon. One of Carlos’s team members; a short-haired Hispanic woman is listening to music as she goes over the floor with a mop.

I have no idea what her name is but we always seem to acknowledge one another in passing. It’s amazing how far a smile and a simple wave of the hand can go.

I look for my team, the support team. In the past few months, we’ve dwindled down to just a handful. Sometimes while walking through the store, I think about where the others are and how they are faring in their lives.

I find Juana over by young men’s pulling merchandise off the racks and neatly setting them in place. Juana is young in face and even younger in heart. She is the kind of person driven by love. We all gravitate toward her.

I come up on Juana and immediately get to joking.

“There she is,” I say sarcastically.

“Looks like someone arrived late this morning,” I go on to say, hoping to get a reaction out of her.

But all I get in return is a tired smile followed by, “Whatever Michael.”

Juana and I get to the talking about our weekends and if it’s break time yet. I tell her my weekend was so so. And she tells me she was up all night making tamales for friends and family.

During the course of recovering and replenishing we fall silent for a moment that feels much longer than what it is: a moment.

Then, without breaking stride, Juana looks up and asks me a question.

“Did you hear what happened to Carlos?” she asks while neatly folding a shirt.

“Carlos? Which Carlos?” I asked on account that Carlos is a pretty common

name here.

“You know, Carlos. Always happy. Always working hard.”

I pause, shake my head and answer, “no.” I then take in the look on Juana’s face; a face hinting to what must be unsettling news on the horizon.

“He was hit by a car,” she says fighting back her emotion.

And right there, in that moment, my heart dropped dead in the dirt. I pause, stunned with silence. My mind tries to tell me that Juana is just pulling my leg, trying to get a reaction out of me like I just did with her, but then my heart reminds me that Juana would never joke around with a matter such as this.

“Seriously?” I ask just for the sake of asking.

Juana nods silently and then goes on to explain exactly what happened to Carlos.

Carlos came into work Friday afternoon and left later that evening. I can imagine how tired he was, having to work around all those frantic people trying to get their shopping in before engaging in their St. Patty’s day activities. I’m sure Carlos had one, very different thought on his mind: getting home to his family and resting.

At 8:15 Carlos left the store. Little did he know that five minutes later, his entire life would take a drastic turn for the worst.

I don’t know what direction Carlos was heading in, nor do I believe it matters. But somewhere between 8:15 and 8:20 pm, Carlos blew a tire, on the drivers side I presume, yet managed to safely veer off to the shoulder of the road. There, I can only imagine that Carlos, being the kind of do-it-yourself man that he is, took matters into his own hands, wrenching out his jack, squatting down alongside the car, gearing up to swap that blown tire for a spare when his world went black.

My father once said, if you ain’t got something going on, you ain’t living.

Earlier today, I messaged my supervisor in hopes of learning the whereabouts of Carlos, what hospital he’s at in hopes of paying him a visit. My supervisor messaged me back saying that Carlos has yet to regain consciousness and that he is still trapped in that black storm raging inside his head. The last sentence in her message said that he might not have use of his legs.

Misery is company and I can only imagine what Carlos is going through right now. Fighting alone in the dark. Trying to find his way through the black abyss toward the light.

Lord knows I want Carlos to wake up and come back to work not only so that we can fist bump, but also to hear him tell me to, 'take it easy'.

But truth be told, a large part of me is terrified to what type of life Carlos could wake up to.