

# The first "Hello"

By Oliver Pumera

It was Christmas. Large queues were building up at the cash registers. Most people wanting to get out of there and enjoy the Christmas spirit. One of these people was the cashier at register number three, named Lauren. Only she was on the wrong side of the register. She couldn't get out of there for the next five hours. People just ignored her; she was plainly a part of the shop for them. All she needed to do was take the shopping from the belt, scan it, and put it into a plastic bag. "Forty-five dollars please, by cash or card?" would be her usual question every few minutes. But instead of an answer, she would get the beep from the scanning of a card. No one would even look at her or just bother to say something like simply "Hello" or "How are you" or anything that would brighten her day up. This was already normal for her and started to be part of her daily life.

Now and then, there would be the announcement: "We would like to inform our customers, that there is a Christmas contest with the grand prize a three day trip to the Caribbean islands with two other family members, including living in an all-inclusive, five-star hotel. The deadline is the 25th of December. To enter the contest, simply write your full name, date of birth and phone number on your receipt, and throw it into the box near the exit. Three winners will be chosen. The winning receipts will be drawn out of the box on the 26th of December. Thank you and have a wonderful day". That was what she heard again and again and again throughout her day. She did want to join the contest, but because of all the ignorance that caused her to feel empty, she just couldn't.

It was half an hour before closing time, the queues finally getting shorter, when a boy, around the age of ten, appeared at the counter, carrying just a loaf of bread. "Hi, how are you?" he asked her, smiling. She looked up with disbelief. She couldn't remember the last time someone spoke to her, or even looked or smiled at her. Lauren suddenly felt a wave of happiness and joy, she didn't even know why.

"Have you entered the competition yet?" he asked her, "It's so exciting! I wonder who's going to win!". Lauren scanned the barcode on the bread packaging. "Yes, it's exciting, but I haven't entered it yet," she said to the boy

"Why not? You should! Anyway, I have to go. My mum is waiting for me in our car with my little brother.". Lauren watched him go to the contest box near the exit, scribble something on his receipt and throw it in. He turned around and waved, smiled again, and left through the sliding doors.

For a few minutes, she kept staring at the place where the boy had been last until her senses brought her back. She then thought if she should really do it for herself. She got up from behind the register, walked to the back side of the shop, and came back with just a kinder egg for her child. She scanned the barcode with her own scanner, printed out her receipt and scribbled on her information the competition requested.

She walked slowly towards the box. She looked at her receipt, held her breath, and closed her eyes. Slowly, she dropped it into the box.