

On dumpster diving essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the essay “ On Dumpster Diving” author Lars Eighner narrates his experiences of scavenging. This well-known author, though being incredibly talented, had to work as a counselor at a drug crisis center in Austin, to earn a living. After losing his job, he unfortunately had to move out of his home and live the hard life on the streets. The essay talks about the author’s survival on the streets and expresses his ethical dilemma. The author was surprised by the large amount of perfectly edible food and usable goods he saw in the Dumpsters.

According to observation, Dumpsters in the areas where many students live, are usually rich, and supply almost everything one needs to survive (par. 21). Students usually just throw away many objects, since they spend their fathers’ money. Many people with abundance of resources tend to throw away many useful things and don’t even realize it. The author gives a long list of items that can be found in Dumpsters. He found all types of food: vegetables, fruits, meat, yogurts, sometimes even warm pizzas, juices, ice-cream and liquor.

He has also found a pair of brand new shoes, a pocket calculator, a walk-man, and clothes. Many things were damaged, but easily repairable.. At first he was shocked to see all these items discarded just because their owners were done using them. Lars Eighner says, “ Although I would naturally prefer to live the comfortable consumer life, perhaps — and only perhaps —as a slightly less wasteful consumer owing to what I have learned as a scavenger (par. 4). Mr. Eighner describes himself as an experienced scavenger. He knows many methods of evaluating food to check the quality of it.

He has mentioned three principles of eating safely from the Dumpsters: using the senses and common sense to evaluate the condition of the found materials, knowing the Dumpsters of a given area, and checking them regularly, and seeking always to answer the question, " Why was this discarded? " (par. 6). He developed different techniques to identify the quality of different foods. He found out that canned food, fruits and vegetables with intact skin, hard candy, sealed yogurts, and discarded warm food from restaurants are usually safe to eat.

However dented or puffed cans, vegetables contaminated with liquids, rotten food, carbonated beverages that do not fizz or fruits juices with mold in it can be extremely toxic. The also states some ethics, etiquette scavengers follow. He found it inappropriate to judge people who dump in the Dumpsters. Surprisingly he found bank statements, correspondences, and other documents in Dumpsters, which can give away very personal information. Pill bottles have have name of the patient written on it. AIDS drugs, anti-psychotic medicines and even birth-control pills labeled with detailed information, that could disclose private information.

It wouldn't be ethical for a scavenger to misuse the information. Talking about few precious courtesies among the scavengers, he says, " It is common among scavengers to set aside surplus items: pairs of shoes, clothing, canned goods, and such. A true scavenger hates to see good stuff go to waste and what he cannot use, he leaves in good condition in plain sight. " (par. 45). Author tries to express that though scavengers are poor and homeless, they still have their ethics, and live according to them. Mr.

Eighner claims that the life on the streets, diving in Dumpsters to survive is not as difficult as it one might think.

Yet the essay mentions some upsetting incidents. The author lived a lonely life with no friends or family. His dog Lizbeth, was his only companion. The penalties of making wrong decisions were pretty high. Once he was intoxicated in the middle of the street, in an early afternoon, because of the mistake he made by drinking a beverage mixed with liquor (par. 26). No matter how careful he was, he still would get dysentery every month (par. 30). Living near a Dumpster that was home for red ants was not a good experience either.

The author also mentions that he not only had to endure health issues but also emotional suffering. Dumpsters often disturbed him. Adorable things like bears and wedding books were found torn and shredded. The author came across many pets lying dead in the dumpsters. This always made him think about Lizbeth as he feared his only companion would share the same fate as the other pets, and end up in a dumpster. He also feared Lizbeth getting caught by the dog catchers(par. 53). Throughout the essay author presents his experiences devoid of any emotions, but these events and his fears mentioned make us sympathies his sorrow.

While reading the essay, one gets a sense of author's high intellectual ability. He not only narrates his experiences but also presents his ethical dilemma. From his experiences of scavenging, he found two rather deep lessons. First was ' take what you want and let the rest go by'. The second was the transience of material beings. Mr. Eighner learned not to invest

sentimental values in object. Now he says he possesses no objects, but only emotions. Losing everything made him a frugal man. He did not feel sorrow of losing things because he understood that no object was going to stay forever with him.

He greatly believes from his experiences, that in future, he will find whatever he requires. According to the author, he shares the same attitude with rich people—they both know there is plenty more where what they have come from (par. 65). Though his thoughts sound logical, I strongly disagree to it. Great philosophers always have guided us to live a simple life with no expectations. Often this advice is misunderstood. The great thinkers always talked about frugality, but they never said one should give up making efforts for their own prosperity.

Although still capable of finding some work, the author seems to have lost his impulse to struggle and live a better life. He seems to have given up on himself. The author might say that he shares the same attitude, but in reality, a person with no aspiration to strive will never share the same dignity. Dignity, I find, is the most important value in our life. As Ayn Rand once has said, “ The man who does not value himself, cannot value anything or anyone. ” The approach to the essay appears to be devoid of any positive hope or self-esteem, and that deeply disturbs the reader.