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Lost and Found: WM Driver ‘Just Being a Good Neighbor’

From Curbside to Heartfelt Gratitude

Being a good neighbor often shows up in small, everyday moments. For WM driver Luis Bardales, a simple choice on his morning route in Oakland, Calif., recently turned into an unexpected act of kindness.

Luis has spent almost 28 years in the environmental services industry and has been driving his current route for WM for almost seven years. “I really like my job and never want to leave this route,” Luis says.

That dedication showed during a recent shift when something unusual caught his eye.

“It’s dark, and no one’s around,” Luis recalls. “I saw this backpack next to some garbage bins - it looked pretty clean.” He could have tossed it into the hopper without a second thought. Instead, something told him to pause. “I didn’t want to leave anything behind, but it felt like there was something inside. So, I put it on the side of the truck, thinking I’d check later when my gloves were off.”

That small decision mattered.

The night before, husband and wife Henry and Isabelle Ashista parked their car in Oakland for a quick stop. When they returned, the windows were shattered. Both of their backpacks were gone – inside were their laptops and irreplaceable valuables. They tried tracking their devices through a location app, but the trail went cold. After Isabelle finished her overnight hospital shift, the couple set out again the next morning, hoping for a miracle.

They eventually found Henry’s backpack, discarded near a library. His laptop was gone, but his wedding ring was inside. Isabelle’s backpack was still missing. Losing the computers was tough, but what really hurt was the loss of

personal treasures: Isabelle's backpack held her father's San Francisco firefighter badge and the stethoscope she received when she started nursing school, items that carried enormous sentimental value.

Their search led them to a neighborhood several miles away from the theft site. That's when Isabelle spotted a WM truck. "It was raining, and I had my hood up," she says. "I looked up and just hit Henry's arm— 'That's my backpack.' I ran over, but I didn't want to scare the driver. I just said, 'Hi, that's mine.'"

A very happy Isabelle Ashista, her recovered backpack, and WM driver Luis Bardales

Luis handed it over immediately. Inside, everything that mattered was still there. "Our computers were gone, but all the personal things – the badge and the stethoscope – were safe," Isabelle says. "We were so grateful. He didn't have to do that."

Henry agreed: "He could have tossed it, and no one would have known. But he didn't. He was really kind."

The couple later emailed WM with photos to make sure Luis was recognized, calling him "a salt-of-the-earth kind of guy."

For Luis, it was simple: "It's just part of my job, helping however I can," he says. "It's just part of being a good neighbor."

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