

Don't Touch

by Kevin Myrick

It was a crowded in the galleries of the High Museum in Atlanta. An afternoon full of school children who ran about with their teachers on field trips, the kind of hot, stinky afternoons Frank hated the most at the museum. Kids were all over with sticky bodies going everywhere just waiting to get their peanut butter-covered hands on priceless pieces of artwork.

Frank must have said "don't touch" about a million times over the course of the day; he sweated in the required blue blazer of his uniform waiting for another run-in with another kid. He looked over his station in the Folk Art gallery and saw a short kid with shaggy hair reach his hand out toward a Howard Finster piece that was part of the permanent collection. He shook his head and walked over to where the child stood, rubbing the statue with his greasy fingers.

"Don't touch kid!" Frank yelled, but it was too late. His hand was already on the rough base of a statue called "weaned child" and left a smear on a piece of glass tile embedded in concrete.

The boy was caught red-handed; after the initial shock of surprise he looked down toward the floor in shame. Frank asked him where his group was.

"I don't know, over there somewhere," the boy pointed toward a new exhibit featuring scenes from the Great Depression.

"What's your name kid?"

"Daniel."

"Daniel, do you know what "don't touch" means?"

"Yes, it means I'm supposed to keep my hands in my pocket and to look, like my mom tells me all the time at the antique store."

Frank stood silent for a moment, coming up with a good response.
"You see all of the things in here?"

"Yes."

"Well, you can't touch the things in here either."

"Yes sir," Daniel said. He kept his head down in shame. Frank remembered back to his own childhood of when he was in trouble, of how his father had beaten him. He looked this kid over and saw none of that in his stance. He wasn't hardened to the hard facts of life yet.

"OK Daniel, run along and find your class. And remember, don't touch anything."

"Yes sir," Daniel said, his head up and he jogged off to find his classmates in another exhibit. Frank looked back over his shoulder and saw another youngster with his paws on another Finster piece, a painted oil drum.

"Don't touch that!" he yelled, and ran over to the next child who had broken this golden rule of museums.

