

Talking to someone who is convinced you're a mindless zombie

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Photo date and location unknown

It's an interesting experience, talking to someone who is convinced you're a mindless zombie with the strange power to hypnotize them. But it doesn't make for great conversation.

I was fundraising a small town in Tennessee, on a cool fall day. Our region didn't have huge cities that could be fundraised constantly, so we moved around the state a lot, doing basically every town that was big enough to have a name.

We'd do the shops and businesses first, then knock on doors. I had spent the morning going in and out of mom and pop stores, and the usual Woolworths and auto dealers. In the first hour of the day, I gave my usual line "Hi, we're fundraising for our Christian youth program, and askin folks if they'd like to help out by getting a box of this here peanut brittle". (It was my goal to sound like a local. Thanks to my theater training, I usually passed. Or at least nobody called me a Yankee, a dirty word in Tennessee).

In this town, several people's first response was "Have you bin warshed in the blood?" After a while, it seemed like every third person belonged to this same church and asked the same question. Ritual questions like these were not uncommon. People would often ask "Are you saved? How can you be sure?" or "What version of the Bible do you use?". Other favorites included "Do you call your minister reverend?", "Do you play any musical instruments in your church?" or "Do your women wear jewelry or cut their hair?"

Anyway, being "warshed in the blood" was a new one on me, and I didn't quite know how to respond. If I claimed I was, there was probably some ritual response that I didn't know, and they'd know I was faking it.

So I said something about the blood of the messiah, but it didn't work for them. I went into every store, and ended the morning with little in my pocket. I was looking forward to seeing this town in the van's rearview mirror. But as always, I slogged on.

The end of my run was a parking lot with a bank, a drugstore and a cafe in it. Not much, but it was the hub of commerce for this town. Little old ladies were backing up carefully, some driving the car they had when they were first married. Pedestrians were moving around in slow motion. It was in this parking lot that I was to be picked up by my captain.

I started walking around talking to people, not really getting anywhere, and feeling more and more like a 'furriner'. Outside the bank there was a craggy old man in a security guard's jacket, eyeing me as I walked around. The place wasn't big enough to hide in, so I just prayed and kept talking to people.

He waved me over. The place wasn't big enough for me to pretend I hadn't seen him, or keep fundraising in the back end of the lot. Plus, it felt like half the people there were staring at me anyway. So I walked up

to him. He was gazing at me the whole time. "Son, what are you doin?" he asked. (What the heck, talk to everybody).

"I'm fundraising for my Christian youth program," I said, (here comes the kickout.)

His eyes never left mine. "Have you been warshed in the blood?"

(Aaaagggghhh! Not again! And that's disgusting! Washed in blood? Yuck! If I had a big tub of blood here, would you jump in it? I don't think so! And if I sloshed it on you, you'd probably arrest me!)

"Well, no sir, our church doesn't do that, exactly."

"You need to be warshed in the blood of Jesus."

"Well, thank you sir. God bless you."

"And you cain't walk around this parking lot like that."

(Thank you! Thank you! This place is making me crazy.)

"God bless you, sir. Have a good day."

"The blood of Jesus."

I found a gas station to wait for my captain. It was the second busiest place in the downtown, about one customer every five minutes.

Before the internet, many small towns had phone trees, plans to spread word around if there was an emergency. Each person was to call three others, who each called three others. It also doubled as a gossip network. Anyway, in some towns, news of a real, live, brainwashed Moonie was clearly going out ahead of me.

Walking into a print shop or doctor's office, I'd walk up to a receptionist staring at me goggle-eyed, trembling, all their senses on high alert. It's an interesting experience, talking to someone who is convinced you're a mindless zombie with the strange power to hypnotize them and make them lose their minds. But it doesn't make for great conversation.

For that reason, I've added thoughts to make it more interesting.

"Hi, how are you?" (Are you ok?)

" _____ " (Omigod! Omigod!! It's a Moonie! And he's lookin right at me! I can't believe it!)

(Wow, she's terrified. I better talk calmly.) "We're fundraising for our Christian youth program, Would you like to help out and get a box of this here peanut brittle?" (Boy, if I did something crazy right now, they'd be talking about it for years.yeah, better not.)

(Don't say yes! Don't say yes! Don't look at him too much! That's what brainwashed eyes look like...wait'll I tell the girls!)

"Ah don't think ah'd be interested. Thank you ver much." (Omigod, I talked to a Moonie! I talked to one!)

"Would you like to give a little donation just to help out?" (What the heck. I know you won't, but I'm going to give you every chance so your ancestors don't accuse me of not giving you a shot.)

A(aaaah! He's still talking! That's what brainwashed people do. And he's looking at me, trying to hypnotize me! Watch out, watch out!)

"No, thank yew."

"Ok, well have a nice day. God bless!" (Next.)

(Did I lose my mind? I don't think so! But how do you know? I've gotta tell the girls about it. He's going into the place next door. So that's how brainwashed people walk!)