

Mayhem in Maryland - God Bless America Washington DC

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Early in the last "selling" (selling tickets for Washington Monument bus tickets) week, I was in a cluster of smaller "project" buildings in a "two-level" motel style, and the woman who answered my knock was definitely not a candidate. She must have been over 80, and she even had wrinkles on her facial wrinkles. Ordinarily, I would have apologized for disturbing her, but my determination was to tell everyone, so I did. She was very excited about the event, and she sent me to talk to her daughter about it. The daughter lived in another section of the complex, and she must have been over 60 herself. Referring to her mother as among the "old people" who do not consider the logistics of such things, she said they had other plans. However, she directed me to a nearby retirement center, giving me the name of the person who organized trips for the residents to have planned outings to museums and other attractions. That woman's name was something like Helen Flowers.

So I went there, a modern building about 12 stories tall, and asked for Helen Flowers. Unfortunately, she was on vacation and not due until the next week. However, since this was the last week, the ladies at the front desk told me the residents had just finished lunch, but I could explain the opportunity to any still lingering in the dining area. One guided me there and introduced me to the 20 or so people sitting at tables and chatting. When I explained about the event, they were as excited as the original wrinkled lady, and they lined up to get tickets. While I was writing down everyone's information, taking the money, and giving them their tickets, one person said that Mr. Barnes wanted me to go to him. I was a bit peeved to be interrupted, but I went over to him and learned he wanted tickets as well. He had asked to go to him - not only because he was 90 years old but because he was blind. I ended up with over 30 tickets "sold," and I revisited the location a few times during that week when others who had not been in the dining room called to ask about tickets. Overall, enough people signed up that this met the level to have one of

the buses stop at the front door of the facility.

Knowing that only about 80% of the people who purchase tickets would actually show for the events, during the final week leading up to September 18th, our focus was on revisiting all the folks who had tickets to remind them about the upcoming event and let them know where the bus stops would be set up. I went back to the retirement center and met Helen Flowers in person. However, it was not a pleasant meeting, for she was more like "Hell on Fire," and totally outraged at what I had done in circumventing her responsibilities in this "unapproved" outing. Apparently, she always kept a tight rein on the sanctioned group outings, and this outing had basically violated all the controls for these elderly folks who might have complex medical issues, meal requirements, and so forth. She was like a drill sergeant, angrily going up and down the list of all the irresponsible elements of the situation I had created. Even though these were mature adults who had made individual choices, her view was that it was just as irresponsible of them as I was, but I should know better! Eventually, she proclaimed that what had been done had been done, so like Pontius Pilate 2000 years ago, she washed her hands of the whole situation, implying that any complaints, lawsuits, and so forth would be placed specifically at my feet.

But that was not enough trouble. One of people who had been contracted to provide a dozen or so buses for the event had gone to the licensing office at the end of the week to extend his license to add another six buses for the charter. The folks at the licensing office noted that his license was for charter trips only within the state of Maryland; he was not allowed to transport people across state lines, which included going into Washington DC. Thus, not only did we not have the extra half-dozen buses, but we had lost the previously confirmed dozen buses. At this time, the Maryland State Fair was also opening that same weekend, and groups around the area had contracted every bus for group transportation to the fair. Not a single bus was available. The designated bus stops had to be consolidated, and no bus would be scheduled to stop at the retirement center. I had to go back again at lunch time to provide maps for my people to know where the closest bus would be available. Fortunately, "Hell on Fire" was not having any give and take with me, so I was able to go in, meet my people, and go out without any further confrontations.

When the day came, I was put in charge of the bus stop closest to the retirement center, but it was still several blocks away. It had a pay phone nearby, and I needed to report in once my buses arrived, and then I should hop on one of the buses. If any people were not able to get a seat, I should report that and ask for one of the backup buses to stop for them. I should stay and monitor that.

When the "yellow" buses came, I ended up with about 18 people left over, so I called and asked for one of the "backup" buses to swing by my location. What I didn't know was that we had no "backup" buses.

Meanwhile, some distance away, our group leader, Matthew Morrison, was in a similar situation with 26 family members who had not been able to board at that stop. The difference was that Matthew knew very clearly no more buses were available. The only thing he could think to do was to start praying for some miracle. He walked a short distance away so that he could pray without being seen and overheard in his desperation. However, because it looked like he might be trying to abandon them, most of the family followed him and started demanding to know what was going on. Some guy driving by saw this crowd of Black people surrounding a White dude, so he stopped to find out what was going on. Matthew explained frankly what the situation was. The guy said he owned three tour buses which had been chartered to go to the Fair, but had just been cancelled. The guy said he had three buses with drivers at his lot in the city: would Matthew like to charter them?

These three buses - air-conditioned with bathrooms - soon stopped at my area and picked up my 18 people and me.

As Satchel Paige has reportedly said: "If you don't pray in the sun, then don't expect answers in the rain."