

## Sometimes you pay indemnity before blessing, and sometimes you pay later

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February 6, 2022



*Custom Vans*

Sometimes you pay indemnity before blessing, and sometimes you pay later. Tennessee wasn't a big cash flashing place to fundraise in 1980. Doing a four way stop light outside of Nashville, a guy in a custom van (remember those?) waved me over just as the light was turning green. "What kinda flowers are these?" he blurted as he fingered my bundle. "These are boom-booms," I said, real fast, as cars behind honked impatiently, "they're little bugs-" He grabbed the whole bunch, thrust a folded-up bill in my hand and roared off.

I stood there watching his van burble towards Nashville thinking "He's going to be mad when he realizes those aren't flowers" and "I wonder how much he gave me? It's probably a 20." I unfolded it. It was a \$100 bill. That was the only \$100 donation I'd had in 3 years of MFT. I half expected him to come back demanding a refund, but he didn't.

Needless to say, we fundraised that four-way again the next week. I had a feeling of foreboding, like a thunderstorm about to break, as I ran up and down the median. After a while, four guys in a beat up blue four door pulled up. "

Hi, how're you? I'm fundraising for our Christian youth program would ya like ta help out by getting a box a this here peanut brittle?" They just sat there giggling like little kids.

I was wondering why they were pulling pantyhose over their heads when one guy jumped out the car and punched me in the face twice, the driver pulled onto the median and drove straight at Peter Giossi, my partner, who jumped into the ditch. They circled back and tried to run over our case of peanut brittle. While the guy was jumping back in, I ran behind the car to get their license number. They'd bent the plate in half so you couldn't read it, and I had my fingers on it trying to pry it open when they took off, showering me with dirt and gravel and grass.

Peter and I looked at each other like "What the heck was that?" I went into the store at the corner to ask if I could use their phone. Stood there dripping blood and dirt and called the sheriff's dispatch.

"County sheriff's office."

"Hi, we're fundraising for our church at the corner of - - and - - and four guys just attacked us. They hit me and tried to run over my partner and-"

"What the hell d'yall expect?! Our phone's been ringing' off the hook all weekend with people complain' about y'all blockin' traffic and such. People're plenty mad at ya, I'm surprised it didn't happen sooner!"

"They tried to run us over."

I hung up, and told Peter what the dispatcher had said. A guy who'd seen it happen had come inside to listen said "They're going to do nothing about it just cause their church isn't status quo! That ain't right! I saw these guys attack them."

I think we drove over to the sheriff's office to talk to them after. Sharon Pace, our team mother, and PR sister, came in. "What'd they look like?" "Ah, there were four of them. They had panty hose over their faces." "What kinda car was it?" "Um, it was blue. Four door." I didn't know enough about cars to say make or model. License number?" "I couldn't read the license plate, they bent it back." "Hmm. Blue four door. That's not much to go by. You know how many blue cars there are in this county? That's like sayin' it's a tree. Which one? I dunno. You wanna make a report, ok. You understand, there's not much we can do unless we have a lot more information than that."

Other times, you pay beforehand. I was walking up to a set of apartments in Memphis with a tray of butterflies one evening when a young guy grabbed my jacket.

"Wassdat you sellin?" "Butterflies, from all over the world". "Gimme your money!"

"I just started, and all I got is a check." "Ah said gimme your money!" I looked down, he had his hand in his jacket pocket, finger pointed to look like a gun, his other hand grabbing my arm.

"Look, I'm working for my church. I'm going to walk over there and start selling. You want to shoot me, go ahead and shoot me." His angry face melted. "Ohhh man! You sanctified!" He patted my arm, wide-eyed. "You sanctified! Go on in there. I hope you sell the lot of 'em for ya church!"

Not much later, two young black guys invited me into their apartment. I sat on the couch between them and one guy had lots of questions about the butterflies and looked at each one as I explained. The other guy was quietly looking on, picking up one here and there. I kept answering the other guy's questions. After about five minutes, the quiet guy said, "How much for these?" I turned around to see a pyramid of butterfly cubes on the coffee table, that he'd quietly assembled while I was yakking away with his friend. "Um, eighty-five dollars." I said, getting ready to haggle. He just reached in his pocket, pulled out a wad and counted off seventeen \$5 bills. That was often as much as I could expect to make in a whole evening run. I guess for that evening at least, I was sanctified.

Pay now, or pay later. What's your experience with that?