

The Hundred Dollar Walk

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It was Thursday night in the city – my favorite night to go out on the town solo. If all went well Thursday night, I would meet a lovely lady and Friday night would be a dinner date hopefully followed by brunch on Saturday. I had my night planned out and decided to stray from the usual scene and vary my game up a bit. I live central to about 20 different restaurants and bars all within just a few blocks walking distance. Sometimes it is easy to get hung up on the same places and the same things at the same places, so I have consciously become more attuned to the different things in life. If you don't find what you are looking for, then maybe you are looking in the wrong places. However, you should always be on the lookout wherever and whenever you go. Luck is when chance meets opportunity – and – you recognize it and capitalize on it. I don't ever want to miss out on any luck, especially when I am trying to get lucky.

I was on the stride to a local hangout called Banditos which is strategically located approx 2 ½ blocks (or 1042 sober footsteps) from my historic row-house. There was no need to drive and risk a DUI, plus the weather was perfect for a stroll that night. I typically like to bike everywhere I go after work hours, but in this town you are looked at weird when you lock up your bike in front of a night spot. I even went as far as to get two “pimped out” beach cruisers – one with flames, a horn and chrome drink holder - and the other a replica of a nineteen sixties “Woody”. When at the beach, I am “local extraordinaire” on either one of them, but here people assume that if you bike then you must have lost your license or simply can't afford a car – neither being my case. I say, why wait to get a DUI to bike – an ounce of prevention makes for a pound of cure. Why not get some fresh air and exercise in the process of getting from point A to point B. Sometimes getting there is half the fun, but tonight that would not be the case. I thought it might be nice to prolong my journey and walk rather than bike two and a half blocks in thirty seconds. A few more minutes of fresh air would maybe counteract all of the second hand bar smoke I was about to inhale. I would soon regret my decision to walk instead of bike.

As I walked past one of three alleyway intersections I would have to pass en route to Banditos I got a sudden premonition which caused a chill to shoot up my spine and down my extremities. I envisioned something happening and it wasn't good. I quickly dismissed the negative thought as I was relieved to pass the dark alley and its proud row of trashcans to find nothing suspicious. Why should I? This is the nicest area of the city – that's why I pay the highest city taxes and why I spend thousands on yard work. I walk this beat all of the time – same route, different destinations tonight.

With the alley behind me, I put a little spring in my step and recovered from my momentary paranoia. And just as quickly as the thought came and went, a dark figure emerged from the perfectly trimmed shrubbery of the next house past the alley. It was almost déjà vu of my premonition with the exception of the very realistic and pungent stench of booze and cigarettes. Not to mention the fact that I felt the breeze on my face from his fist as he attempted to knock my head off Mike Tyson style. I would like to tell you that it was my cat-like reflexes and lightning speed that narrowly avoided my head being knocked for a loop, but the reality of it is that my assailant's miscalculated and poorly executed drunken move probably would have missed a barn. However, I counted my blessings and was almost amused for a second until the assailant quickly recovered from his blunder, stood erect with one arm extended less than four feet away from me. It's a crazy feeling to realize that you are staring down the barrel of what appears to be a Glock 23 (I know because I own one) in the hand of someone who is obviously desperate and not thinking coherently. Even if I had my gun now, it would be no use right now. If I made a move for anything, he would be sure to take offense and possibly pull the trigger.

"Give me your wallet, cracker – or I bust a cap in your white ass."

My brain instantly processed the jive and came up with my first dilemma – I didn't have a wallet. I have always had this weird OCD thing about having excessive shit in my pockets – that's part of the reason I never carried my damn gun. My "OCDness" was about to get me killed.

A quick mental inventory of my pockets revealed that I had a couple of business cards, Visa check card, Driver's license and a cell phone – definitely no cash. There was no cover charge at Banditos plus I knew the bartenders and always ran a tab – no need to carry cash.

It was time to respond to the wallet demand. Be smart, simple and convincing. I looked into the bloodshot eyes of my aggressor – he was at eye level with me so that meant he had to be about six foot four. He had desperation in his eyes and hate in his face that was illuminated by the streetlight above. I got a good read on him immediately and knew that he wasn't playing. He'd shoot me in a second for the shirt off of my back. I felt nauseous – maybe from the adrenaline and fear welling up inside me or maybe it was the stench from the rat in front of me. Before he could realize that I was sizing him up and getting a good look at his face, I suggested to him that we move into the alley as not to be seen. I figured the gesture would confuse him a bit in an appealing sort of way. If he had his druthers, he would have quickly knocked me in the head with his fist or the butt of his gun and pick-pocketed me by the time I hit the sidewalk. Now he found himself in the obvious position of holding the gun to my face in broad open streetlight on a public sidewalk where someone was sure to walk by any second. Moving into the shadows of

the alley and the trash cans would give him additional time to make sure he checked all of my pockets after he shot me. My goal was not to let that happen.

Propelled by adrenaline, it is amazing the multitude of thoughts that rush through your mind when confronted with a life and death matter. Intertwined thoughts of running, ducking, taking a swing at the gun wielding arm, your fourth grade sweetheart, the square root of nine – they all become overwhelming and could potentially lead to a disastrous decision. I did not want to be laying face down in a puddle of my own blood, urine and vomit. This is not how I am gonna go out. A quick relaxing thought from yoga entered my mind. Then I felt my words well up from within.

“Bro, bro, listen to me, man. I know. I know what’s up. It’s cool. I have the time for you, man. Listen. Just listen. My hands are here. You are cool. Come over here. Don’t shoot. Come over here, please. It’s all good.” The words just came to me and flowed like a river.

“Cracker, don’t mess with me – wallet now or you are a dead man. “

“Bro, that’s the problem, but I have a plan.”

“Your plan better not include moving too fast or you get a bullet in your head.”

“No”. I collected myself “my plan involves helping you out and saving myself. I have a daughter, do you have kids?”

“I don’t give a rat’s ass about no damn kids. Wallet – Now! Or you die.”

It’s really hard to think when you’ve got a gun in your face. It is also hard to suppress all the random things that pop into your mind. I was a huge James Bond fan and I found myself wondering if I could pull off an FBI style move and disarm this drunkard and end up pointing the gun at him. I decided not to risk it. I felt I could put my salesman skills to work and reason with this guy. “Look, man I don’t have a wallet. If you shoot me you are gonna get a credit card with less than \$40 on it and my ID. Plus you will get caught and you will get life in prison for killing me. Not to mention the fact that I will come back and haunt you for the rest of your life in jail. I’ve got a better idea though. You want to hear it?”

“Start talkin, fool.”

“Ok, you are obviously desperate for money. I don’t know why or care why. You are a strong looking man who could easily land a job in the construction field, but maybe you choose not to work. I would like to hire you anyway - to work for me.”

“I ain’t working for you, the man or no damn body. To hell with work – I gotten laid off everywhere I been. That’s why I am out here robbin yo ass so I can eats.”

I could see more desperation and anger brewing in his eyes. I knew I had to do something to derail his emotional angst. “You didn’t hear my job proposition yet. Please lower the gun and listen to me for a minute.”

There was a long hesitation and silence, but surprisingly, he lowered the gun out of my face, but kept it pointed at me – hip level. I knew I was intriguing him and building some sort of weird rapport. My heart rate began to calm down and my adrenaline rush began to subside. It became a little easier to think and think before talking without the gun directly in my face. I knew I had better say all the right things now. One wrong word or movement could set this guy off and I could end up with a gun back in my face or a bullet in my head.

“I didn’t mean to insult you with a job offer – you don’t even know what I do. I am not trying to hire you hourly to come dig ditches for me or something. I am a business man and a humanitarian. I want to help you.”

“Good, cause I ain’t diggin no damn ditches. I ain’t even diggin yo grave if I bust a cap up in ya.”

“Ok, man, no need for that. I am gonna offer you a job that will be the best job you ever had. Based on our encounter here, I have determined that the perfect job for you would be taking money from someone. I am going to hire you to take money from me. Your pay will be \$100 per week – starting tomorrow.”

“You think I stupid or somethun, cracker? Why tha hell you gonna pay my ass every week? You gonna call da cops on me first time I come get da money.”

“Do you believe in trust?”

“Hell, no! I don’t trust no damn body. I been screwed so many times, it don’t make no damn noise when I fart.”

I suppressed the urge to laugh. “Well, trust is essential in life. If I hadn’t trusted people in business and my personal life, I may not have succeeded and I may be the one pointing a gun at someone now too.”

“Go on.”

“I’ve certainly trusted people before and gotten let down, disappointed, back-stabbed and burned. But you can’t throw the whole bag away if it has one bad apple in it. I am a good guy and I feel like you are too. That’s why I am gonna trust you to let me go and then not shoot me tomorrow when I meet you to hand you \$100. I need you to trust me too. \$100 is a lot of money for some people – and \$100 a week is \$5200 a year – a ton of money – for doing nothing more than not killing me – and trusting me. This job is going to be great for both of us. I live

(most importantly). You get money every week so you don't have to rob people for food anymore. And both of us learn the value of trust. This trust may be the start of a new life for you."

I tried not to make it obvious that I was still looking at the gun, but I noticed in my downward periphery vision that his arm was now fully extended by his side and pointing at the ground. I felt relieved. I had made progress. I had intrigued a desperate killer. I had planted a seed and began the growth of trust – maybe for the first time in this guy's life. He stood there motionless and silent for a bit before he broke the silence.

"If you screw me, I will shoot you tomorrow – and if you bring the cops I'm gonna shoot them too. I ain't going to no jail."

"You won't even need to bring your gun. I'm not gonna let you down. My life is worth a lot more to me than any amount of money. I promise. Do you trust me?"

"I guess I'm gonna try. You sound like you straight."

"I am – I'm not playing – this is no game. It's business – on a personal level. You will meet me tomorrow at noon in the parking lot of the gas station on the corner of Meadow and Main. Do you know this place?"

"Yeah. I know it."

"Ok, good. I drive a big, white, four door Ford truck. You can't miss it. I will pull in to the parking lot. I will be alone. You can get in the passenger seat of the truck. I will have \$100 in cash for you. Sound good?"

"Sounds crazy, but I'm gonna trust you tonight. Don't make me kill yo ass tomorrow."

"You'll get your money tomorrow and every week thereafter - and I will keep my life and my promise. I am going to turn and walk away now. I will see you tomorrow at noon. Have a nice night and please don't rob or hurt anyone between now and then – or better yet, ever."

I slowly turned away from the assailant. Very slowly and deliberately I pivoted on my feet and began to walk away. I tried to be completely relaxed and confident that he wouldn't change his mind and shoot me in the back. I kept walking with slow even strides with my hands by my side. When I was about twenty steps away, I gave a quick glance over my shoulder and saw him still standing in the shadows of the alley where I had left him. I sped up a little, but not enough for him to notice. My house was so close, but I decided not to walk directly there. As much as I wanted to be in the comfort of my home as soon as possible, I wasn't about to lead this guy to where I lived. So I continued past my house and turned down the next road and once out of

sight, picked my pace up to a brisk walk or even a trot. I darted into an alley and then behind a fence. I waited patiently to make sure I wasn't being followed. I had to piss and I also had to check my pants to make sure I hadn't shit myself during the ordeal. As I stood hiding in someone's back yard urinating while peering through their fence, I felt fortunate and lucky to be alive. I could be lying dead in a puddle of my own blood and piss just two blocks away in a different alley. I stayed in surveillance mode behind that fence for a good hour. During that time, I made a mental checklist of all of the things I should and shouldn't have done in my life so far. I decided even though I was young and healthy, I should visit my lawyer and draft a will as soon as possible – you never know when you may encounter death.

After my long wait, I determined that the coast was clear and I stepped out of the alley and into the street. I walked calmly back to my house and entered my back door – checking over my shoulder periodically. When I got back home, the first thing I did was to call my best friend who was a police officer. I recounted the whole story to him. He quickly reminded me how he always warned and advised me to carry my gun with me when walking around the city alone at night. I reminded him that I had been walking the city for years and this was the first instance of trouble I had ever experienced. Plus – I reminded him that the most important fact of the matter is that I was alive to tell him about the ordeal. If I had been carrying my gun, it may have not worked out this way. I may be lying dead with my own gun in my hand – or worse, there may be a killer on the loose with two guns instead of one! I told my officer friend of my promise and plan for tomorrow. He told me I would be a fool to actually follow through. I told him I was a man of my word, and had every intention of following through. He told me that for \$50 a week, he would arrest or shoot the guy – save me half of my money and take a killer off of the street before he hurt anyone else. I laughed and declined his offer. I thought my plan was better. I told him I had control of the situation. He begged me to at least call the police and alert them so they could keep an eye on things. I knew that it made sense to do that, but I didn't want the police to be the reason the deal went sour. I had gotten this far and didn't want to do anything to jeopardize my life, my promise and the principle of trust.

So that night I slept unbelievably well. For the first time in years I prayed. It wasn't your typical "God help me" or desperation prayer, but more of a thank you and an appreciation speech. I looked around my house at everything and realized that only a couple of hours ago I had thoughts that I would never see home again. My dogs lay in the floor next to me oblivious to my ordeal. Who would feed them if I was gone? My apartment was clean, but not presentable for guests – I could picture my family here, grieving and mourning and packing up my furniture and personal belongings. I realized that every time I left the house, I may not return. I thought that when I fell asleep I might not wake up. But instead of fear, I felt fortunate – to put my head on my pillow – one more time.

The next morning I woke up before the alarm went off. I didn't hit the snooze button. Instead, my feet hit the ground and carried me to the shower. I sang in the shower loudly and thought about what clothes I would wear. I pondered my schedule for the day. In a weird way, I looked forward to my meeting at noon. I wondered if my friend from last night would show up. I gave him a 50/50 chance. I was sure he would think I would not show – or worse, bring the cops. I couldn't wait to prove him wrong. When I exited the shower I stood mesmerized in front of the bathroom mirror. I had seen my reflection thousands of time in my life, but today it looked better than ever. Even fresh out of the shower, my hair looked great – and my face looked perfect too – and I couldn't help but notice that I had no bullet holes in me!

I went to the closet and grabbed my favorite shirt – the one I never wear because I save it for special occasions. Then I put on my most comfortable socks. I sprayed a generous amount of my high-dollar “A-list” cologne on. I looked at the Kenneth Cole cologne bottle as its sweet, alluring scent hit my nose. I realized that bottle of cologne was 5 years old. It had lasted an eternity because I never used it – Why? What was I saving it for? I was glad I had one more opportunity to enjoy the fragrance. I also had the notion to add to my will a clause that would require the morgue to apply the same cologne to my corpse right before visitation!

I ate my usual breakfast of berries and cereal and it tasted more delicious than ever. I put my cereal bowl and spoon in the dishwasher instead of the sink. I felt the urge to deal with everything now, in case I didn't come home again. I let the dogs outside and gave them three treats each instead of the usual one. I let them linger and sniff as long as they liked. I looked up at the big puffy white clouds and wondered if the same clouds were above last night to witness my ordeal.

My first order of business was a trip to the ATM machine. I withdrew \$100 cash. I then went to my office and sent some emails to friends and clients I hadn't heard from in a while. I didn't dare mention my ordeal from last night, I just wanted to say hi. I looked at the clock - three long hours to go until noon. For some reason I was eager for the time to come. I had a special plan to teach my new friend a lesson - a lesson in trust.

Promptly at noon I pulled up in gas station and parked in an obvious spot. Before I could even survey the parking lot, he came out of nowhere. I unlocked passenger door and he got in my truck. His stench was familiar from the night before and almost made me wretch. I handed him the \$100 cash as I promised. He snatched it out of my hand and counted the five twenties. I looked around for fear that someone I knew was watching the transaction and getting the impression it was a drug deal or something. I did not want to have an encounter like this again. So I laid out my plan.

“Look, there are 51 more of these waiting for you this year as I promised, but there is a condition. We cannot meet like this every week. It will raise suspicion. So I have a plan. Do you have a bank account?”

“Nope.”

“Do you want one? I can make it happen. I will direct deposit your money every Friday automatically at noon.”

“I don’t trust banks man. I deal in cash.”

“I know, but it is the most convenient way. Plus you will get an ATM card so you can get cash at any machine. Come on, I am well connected at the bank.”

He reluctantly agreed, as he still seemed amazed that he had \$100 cash in his hand – this time without the use of a gun or violence. I drove stinky to my local bank branch. On the drive there, I realized I didn’t even know his name, but I didn’t ask. I stayed quiet and turned the music up loud. I had enough rapport with him and did not want to get any more personal details. Plus, it was a short drive to the bank.

I took him in the lobby and waited for Bonnie the relationship banker to free up with a previous customer. She was happy to see me waiting to see her, but seem perplexed why I had this guy with me. I took my acquaintance in her private office and introduced him as my new employee. I explained that he needed to set up an account so I could direct deposit his pay each Friday, plus he would need an ATM card. She began the process of filling out the paper work. Surprisingly, my friend actually had an ID with a valid social security number! His name turned out to be Lamont Biggins. I had not been properly introduced to him until this point. I hadn’t really cared what his name was. I had nicknamed him “Stinky” in my mind and that was enough for me.

The paperwork process continued and Bonnie made several trips to the Fax and copier. I told Bonnie to go ahead and transfer \$100 from my account to his new account for the initial deposit. “A pay advance for next week, okay man?” Lamont nodded in acceptance and agreement.

I was ready to get out of the bank as soon as possible. I was a regular there and didn’t want to have to answer a lot of questions from everyone next time I came in. All of my employees also banked there and were well known too. It was unspeakably obvious that this guy was not the same caliber as the rest of my employees. Thank God we had our backs to the rest of the bank. I nervously turned to look at the teller desk and the clock overhead. I was glad we were in the private office and not in the line that had developed at the teller. He finished the paper work

and much to my surprise he could read and write – and his handwriting was surprisingly neat. Lamont had used a PO Box address to receive his ATM card and statements. I thanked Bonnie and we were on our way – easy as pie. Based on the looks I was getting from Bonnie, I could tell it would not be easy to answer so many questions on my next visit. I planned to return to the bank later that day after I had concocted a good explanation story.

As we walked out of the bank, I lowered my sunglasses from my head to my eyes. I was hoping no one would see me with this guy. Just as I hit the key fob to unlock the truck, I heard a commotion behind me. I turned to see two guys wrestling Lamont to the ground and another three guys coming around the corner of the bank with guns drawn and SWAT logo on their bullet proof vests.

“You ratted me out, man. I trusted you cracker. I’m gonna...” I heard no more because his face went into the mulch of the flower bed where the police had been hiding. Within seconds, he was cuffed, patted down, relieved of his gun in the back of his belt and put into the back of an undercover squad car. He stared a hole in me with a look of death, but did not say another word.

Apparently, he had robbed the very same bank the week before – in broad daylight with no mask. Bonnie recognized him and had alerted the police on one of her trips to the fax machine. The police waited for him to exit because there were too many civilians in the bank.

As I would learn later, they took him straight to the magistrate and he was arraigned on multiple armed robberies and other aggravated assault offenses. I had not been his first victim. The police assured me that he would not make bail and that he would be behind bars for a long time. I went to his court case, but I did not testify. I didn’t have to – there were ample witnesses, bank video tape as well as an officer who had witnessed him mugging someone, but was unable to apprehend him. He was found guilty and given 30 to 35 years in prison. I felt relieved that I would not have any more face to face encounters with him and that he would not be robbing anyone for a long time. However, I felt a weird sense of guilt that he thought that I had violated his trust, betrayed him and not followed through with my end of the bargain.

I decided I didn’t want that guilt on my shoulders. I visited Bonnie at the bank and told her my whole story. I validated the account she had set up for Lamont and she assigned me as custodian. I had the bank mail go to the state penitentiary in Lamont’s name. I followed through with my promise and deposited \$100 into that account every Friday. I had my accountant label the expense as a “life appreciation payment” for my life that had been spared. Every month when I reconciled my account, I saw that \$100 debit and felt a warm sense of appreciation and good. I knew I was doing the right thing for multiple reasons.

I waited several months and then paid Lamont a visit in the pen. We chatted through the thick glass on the phone. I spent the first several minutes trying to convince him that I had nothing to do with his arrest and the ambush at the bank. He told me he already knew that – he had received his bank statement in the mail. It was the first one he had ever gotten. I told him that when he got out of prison, he would have a nice savings account waiting for him and he wouldn't have to ever rob anyone again. I was relieved that he was showering in prison. I am sure I could have still smelt his stench through the bullet proof glass had he not been clean.

We mutually thanked each other. I especially felt grateful and very appreciative for my life which had been spared. We chatted about all kinds of things for the better part of an hour. I discovered a lot about how a good person turned to crime. I said goodbye, but promised to visit him occasionally. I found a lot of good in my life because of one bad encounter.