

## Money Talks



Have you ever noticed that many times the majority of the citizens want something, but the opposite thing happens? This is very common. You can pick any issue. Sixty percent of the people favor a certain position, but the exact opposite is what they get. How is this possible?

It turns out there is a good reason for this, found in the time-honored saying, “Money talks, nobody walks.” That’s the secret. Money is more powerful than people. When the big money lines up on one side, the will of the people will lose every time. It won’t even be close. The people don’t have a chance.

Say you are a lawmaker, sitting at your desk. You hear that all the folks in your area want something. Then a gent barges into your office, whips out a checkbook, and scribbles a few figures on it. He tears out or “cuts” the check, and hands it to you. What could this mean?

It is written for a very large amount, for some reason made out to you. In the memo line it says “a little gift between friends.” The date is right, and the signature looks valid. Everything is perfectly correct and proper.

“Yes, I see your point,” you say. “After reading this, I have to admit, I have changed my mind. You can count on me.”

“That’s fine, just fine,” says the gentleman. “I knew you would see it my way. Hands are shaken, and the deal is settled. This is how the system works, and why they say that money talks and nobody walks.

Clearly the man isn’t going to walk home when he leaves this office building. Do you think he is going to hitch a ride? Go by bicycle? Take a bus, for God’s sake? He was on a bus once, when he was eleven years old. His mother made him ride the bus with her, and he never forgave her. Nobody who is anybody walks; let’s put it that way.

But does money actually talk? Does it speak English? Have you ever held a dollar bill up to your ear and listened? I decided to check it out for myself. The results were surprising.

The first one I tried was a single, the basic unit of America. It’s good to keep a stack of them in the wallet, just for your well-being. Even if you use credit cards to buy a pack of gum, there’s something comforting about that row of Georges, lined up in formation, ready to do your bidding.

According to Wikipedia, the source of all truth, single dollars are also known as bucks, bills, and bones. If you work at a fast-food place, you make eight bones an hour. It’s not quite enough to stay alive, but it’s close.

My house only cost 14 thousand bills, but it is in Iowa, near the railroad tracks, with a furnace that didn’t work. When I was shown the house, the family was huddled around the TV, watching the movie *Poltergeist*. They were using the oven to heat the place. It was a cozy scene.

On with the experiment. I picked up one of these bucks, and held it up to my ear. It was a series E bill, green in color, made in 2009, autographed by Timothy F. Geitner. That guy must have a tired hand.

I listened carefully, and I did hear some talking. George seemed to be sad about something, but I couldn't quite catch what it was. Something about things not turning out how he wanted, and how wallets need more ventilation.

Money is funny stuff, and it has a lot of nicknames, like: lucre, scratch, lolly, and honk. Is this where honkies got their name? Also folding stuff, dosh, milk, and scrilla. Money used to be backed by gold and silver. Now it isn't backed by anything except a very nervous guy from the government, and his bags are packed and he is edging towards the door. We trust in God but not him, and for good reason.

If they ever put my face on money, I would look as noble as possible, and I would use a Spanish motto "¿Por qué está aquí?" (Why are you here?) on my bill. Also I would have a picture of my house on the back, with the motto "At least it's paid for" across the top. Then a series of mysterious numbers, which it turns out, is my locker combination from junior high plus my pants size. And then, don't forget the all-seeing eye. Like Santa, it sees you when you are sleeping or awake. No point trying to hide.



## Niagara Falls

I just had a flashback of a family trip we took to Niagara Falls when we were little kids. My parents took us on sight-seeing trips, so we could practice yelling at each other in the back of a station wagon. One place we went was Niagara Falls.

We stayed in a motel up the river from the falls. They had nice bedrooms with TV's, and an ice machine in the hall. If you bought a soda, you could have ice. That is real luxury. We saw the falls from every possible angle, above and below, at night and in daylight, from land and from sea. We took an elevator up a big tower and looked down on them. We stood behind railings at the edge of the falls, and resisted the urge to jump in.

This might remind you of the movie *Niagara* with Marilyn Monroe. In the end the bad guy goes over the falls in a speedboat. He doesn't survive, and neither does the boat. The man was evil, but everybody felt bad about the boat.

We also saw the falls from Canada. This was our first trip to a foreign country. We didn't need shots, passports, or quinine tablets. They are pretty much like us over there, except they put vinegar on their French fries. You can tell a lot about another culture by how they treat their French fries. On the way back we had to talk to a really stern American guy in a uniform, who asked us just what in the world did we think we were doing?

Nothing, we all said. He seemed satisfied with the answer and eventually let us back into the states.

Also we saw the falls from the deck of the USS Maid of the Mist. This is an old WWII destroyer that somehow made it up the Niagara River and is on duty there. She fired off a few depth charges for our amusement. We drove up close to the falls so we were hit by the spray. They gave us yellow raincoats to wear, but we had to give them back.

We saw the falls from underneath, on a slippery wooden walkway, with constant spray making it really slick and waterlogged, but luckily the walkway was protected with Thompsons® Water Sealer. We also got behind the falls, in a secret tunnel that the FBI doesn't know about.

Then we went to some museums that told the history of the falls, and the folks who tried to go over them in barrels and other homemade projectiles. Some of them lived. They all had one thing in common: they were crazy.

The first one was an elderly woman with her cat. They both survived, but the cat never spoke to her again. There was a guy who went over with his turtle but only the turtle made it. Turtles are built for that kind of thing; people not so much.

There was one guy who put a pile of inner tubes around himself. He added a layer of fish net around that, for extra safety. Two days later they found a piece of fish net downstream, and a note to his wife saying: "Honey, don't be mad. I forgot to take the chicken out of the freezer. Please forgive me."

Then there were the two guys who went over together in a barrel. When they came out of the hatch, all they were wearing was cowboy hats. What happens in the barrel stays in the barrel.

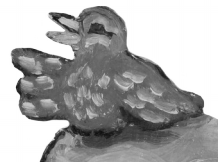
OK! We also tried out the plunge-O- simulator, which imitates the actual experience of going over Niagara Falls in a barrel. We sat on facing benches, and the lights went out. Some water sound effects came out of a speaker, and the benches shook. Then the lights came back on and the benches stopped shaking. The ride was over.

Somehow we all lived through this ordeal. Nothing to do now but get some souvenirs.

We also saw the falls at night. Spotlights made them look red, white, and blue, and we felt patriotic. Then a green light came on, and we didn't know what to feel.

There is a big dam in that area where they make electricity, which is sold by the hour to needy citizens downstate along with plastic Niagara Falls ashtrays. This concludes my memories of Niagara Falls.

## An Audience Experience



Most people have been in an audience. It's not that hard. You have to laugh when they say something funny, listen to the music, and clap at the end. Also turn your phone off for two hours. It won't kill you.

I have been in little clubs with very small crowds. Sometimes there are more band members than audience. This is a bad scene, and a lot of pressure on the audience. What if you don't like a song that much? You have to fake a response. Ladies, you know this isn't easy.

Here's another thing that can happen when you are in an audience: the guy on stage suddenly says, "All right (name of your town here)! How are you doing tonight?"

The only possible responses are: Woo, All Right, or Yeah! What if you are feeling something else? You could try shouting:

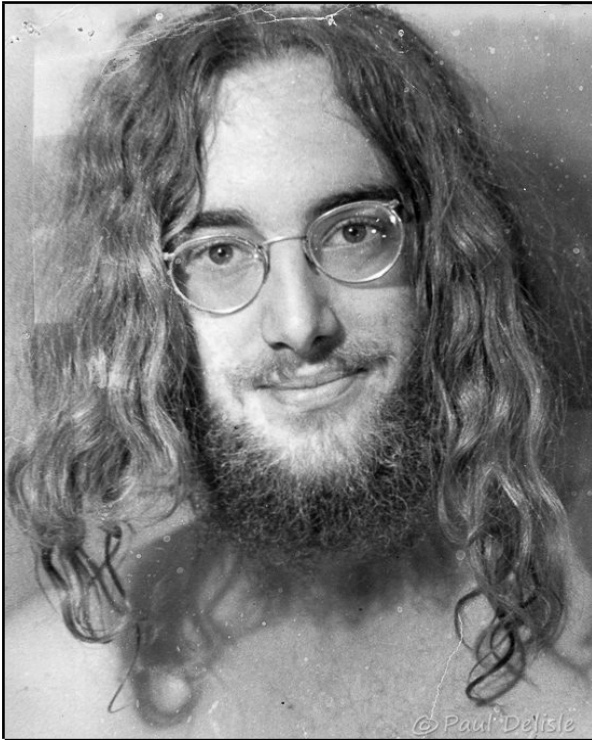
"I am still feeling some childhood wounds!"

"I'm hungry! Can't wait to get home and make a sandwich!"

"After years of meditation practice, I no longer have a small self, so the question does not apply!"

But the guy isn't a therapist. Better stick with woo.

Some of my best memories of audience life happened at the Fillmore East auditorium in New York City. This was in the early 1970's, when I was a "student "at NYU. I had the full hippie look going, with the hair past the shoulders, and the beard growing unchecked for years, like the budget for the department of defense. My friend Rudy used to like to walk behind me at Sears, pretending he wasn't with me, so he could watch the people stare. I was freaking people out, just like young folks do now with pierces and tattoos.



*The full hippie look, NYU, 1971.*

The difference is, I could cut my hair when I felt like it. It's hard to take a tattoo off. This could be a problem later in life. I know a guy who has a swastika tattoo on his neck. That may not work so well at job interviews.

Back at NYU, when I wanted to hear some good live music, I wandered across town to the Fillmore East auditorium. One of the best acts I saw there was the legendary group, the Who. In one memorable show, the Who were right in the middle of their set, when I heard an odd commotion in the crowd. Looking behind me, I noticed that that the lobby was on fire. There was a large amount of smoke billowing into the theater in an ominous way. The regular exit was now blocked.



When you are in a theater that is on fire, it is important to head for an exit right away. It's not something you should put off until later. But this was the Who, and they were doing *Summertime Blues*. I decided to stick it out and hear the rest of the tune. Not the brightest idea, but that's what I came up with.

A fire official ran down the center aisle, and jumped up on stage. Pete Townshend ran over to him and gave him a kick in the personal area, sending him flying back into the crowd, where he landed in a heap, like Uriah. The crowd gave a cheer.

Finally the song ended, and announcements were made that that building was on fire, and that the concert was over for now (boo) and any and all hippies needed to stop toking up and head for the nearest fire escape. Eventually we all made it out.

My biggest audience experience came at the original Woodstock festival. I drove up in my mother's station wagon, with some friends, some food, and Puff, the magic dragon. The car got stuck in the mud, and a farmer pulled it out with his tractor, for a hefty fee. He did so well that day that he probably bought a boat. We didn't need any concert tickets, because the area had been liberated by the People's Free Music Army.

We camped out in some tents and made campfires. One guy was cutting wood with a hatchet, and he accidently sliced his own hand. He was on LSD at the time, and he said it was a cosmic experience.

No doubt we saw many great acts there. One was the Who. At one point, Abbie Hoffman rushed the stage to make some political announcements, and he received the exact same kick as the fireman. This was getting to be a routine.

Years later I saw an outdoor show in Cozumel, Mexico . A reggae band was playing a song called "Do what I do." As the lead

singer danced and moved, hundreds of folks in the audience followed along and moved in unison. We couldn't stop laughing and smiling in the crowd. That's the whole point of being in the audience, and what makes it all worthwhile.