

## **What is the Value of a \$20 Bill?**

A seemingly simple question, but an experience of mine gave a very different answer than I would have expected.

First, some background. For my sixty-fifth birthday, instead of having a birthday party with family and friends, I took my wife, daughter, son and daughter-in-law on a birthday weekend trip in August 2007 to a location not revealed to them until two days before we departed. We went to a small Central Texas town (population less than 1500) and stayed at a 100+ year old railroad boarding house converted into an intimate 12 room hotel. The area is populated with Texas' famous "Painted Churches," a wonderful tribute to the faith in God of the Europeans who immigrated in the second half of the nineteenth century with little more than the shirts on their backs.

We had a great time. The Painted Churches, the local museums, home style restaurants, antique stores and, most of all the people of these small towns made the trip a delight. On Sunday morning, my birthday, the children hid my presents around the hotel with a series of clues I had to follow. Along with all of this were the wonderful qualities of the lady who ran the hotel, her husband, and those who assisted her. The qualities of these individuals and their care for us was unrivaled by any of the many places I had stayed over my sixty five years.

Upon departing after staying two nights, I left a \$20 bill in our room as a thank you for the outstanding services, breakfasts and other considerations. While somewhat more than I would leave in a regular hotel, I felt it was a small token of appreciation someone might enjoy.

Little did I know the impact the \$20 bill would have, and it was not until a year later I found out. On September 4, 2008 I returned to the town on my way to a meeting in San Antonio the following day. My plan was to enjoy the town's scenic, uncrowded golf course while participating in a couple of business conference calls, to stay in the hotel, and complete the drive to San Antonio in the morning.

When I walked into the small pro shop near 11 a.m., there was a young lady close to my children's age – early 40s – running the pro shop. One of the course's maintenance men was having lunch, and a single member was out on the golf course. She signed me up for a golf cart and bucket of practice balls. I mentioned that I needed to pay a green fee since I was not a member. She asked if I worked in the town and I told her I came to stay in the hotel on my way to San Antonio. We both agreed how exceptional the hotel was in all regards, and I mentioned my first trip in August 2007 to celebrate my birthday.

She looked at me and said, "I made your beds. Your children had the presents in their rooms." She went on to say, "You and your wife stayed in the back corner room." I agreed, and she went on, "When you left, I went to take care of your room and I found the \$20 bill you had left by the Bible." She said, "I cried when I saw the \$20 bill. I was not going to make it through the week, and that \$20 got me over the top."

I went out on the golf course with a lump in my throat and a much better understanding of the value of a \$20 bill. And, I could not help being impressed by this young lady's openness and honesty in relating her experience to me.

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