
Would you like to trade? You would?

Contributed by Bill Webb
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At a very recent Word&Way event, a guest handed me an envelope with what felt like fabric padding inside. It was sealed, so I set it aside until after the event, a retirement luncheon for Word&Way Bookkeeper Margene Neuhart.

I should have known something was up because the person who handed me the mysterious envelope was Walter Lockhart, one of Margene's former supervisors in the Missouri Baptist Convention accounting office. Today Walter is pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Fulton. Walter always has something up his sleeve.

I was fingering the envelope as the luncheon group dispersed and as I said goodbye to Walter and his wife, Shirley. I admitted to being curious about the contents and asked Walter if I could go ahead and open it. He suggested I should.

Inside was a neatly folded necktie that I recognized immediately. It had images of fishermen on it and was a genre of ties that are not as easily accessible today. It was vintage neckwear.

Walter managed the Missouri Baptist Credit Union, located in the Baptist Building in downtown Jefferson City, when I met him. He was -- and remains -- a bit of a character, the kind of character that everyone likes and appreciates.

If I recall the tie story correctly, I was in the credit union one day and complimented Walter's tie. Either I said something like "Nice tie; would you like to trade?" or Walter suggested "Since you like it so much, let's swap ties."

Anyone who knows Walter will not be surprised.

The upshot was that he took off his tie and I took off mine right on the spot. Then we exchanged them. I don't know if we did a follow-up swap or not. But the fisherman tie was easily recognizable. Now it was coming home with me. Walter had a characteristic twinkle in his eye as I opened the mystery gift and pulled it from the envelope.

Recalling this experience reminded me of another on a trip to the Kingdom of Jordan in the Middle East. A group of Baptist editors were given a briefing by Prince El Hassan bin Talal. The Prince, the uncle of King Abdullah II, was the brother of the late King Hussein.

Following a lengthy briefing and a question-and-answer session, we posed with Prince Hassan on the steps behind his residence. An official photographer composed the photo and took the shots. He kindly took similar shots using each

editor's camera.

As we were preparing to leave, I visited briefly with the photographer. Admiring his high-end camera, I asked with tongue-in-cheek if he would like to trade. Like Walter, he said, "Sure," and extended the camera to me.

I was quickly reminded of the legendary hospitality of the Arab culture. At my request, he was willing to swap his expensive camera for my outdated and worn camera.

I had to decline and explain that my "offer" was simply my way of complimenting him for his selection of photo equipment. I regretted my approach, lest I might have offended my new acquaintance and created some form of international offense.

He smiled and responded graciously, and I was relieved. But I really need to get over this habit of compliment-by-an-offer-to-swap and simply say what I mean.

I also need to find a shirt and slacks that will compliment my vintage tie so I can wear it before it finds it's way back to Walter some day.