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Please Send Me One Dollar

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Please Send Me One Dollar

Doyle Wesley Walls

This was my original plan. I would take out an ad in a major newspaper requesting that readers send me money. I would tell, in the ad, what the ad had cost me, and I would predict that I would come out ahead because people would admire my having taken the risk.

But I don't have enough cash for an ad in a major newspaper. Still, I want to pan for gold, to wildcat for oil. So I've written this short essay which I hope will provide some justifications for my appeal, and I've received a little money for it instead of spending money for an ad. That part of my plan has changed, but you can still participate in the bonanza I had in mind from the very beginning.

I am a professor of English in Oregon where I am doing my best, like T. S. Eliot, to purify the dialect of the tribe, where I'm engaging students in talk about Becoming as I explain what Keats meant by "negative capability." I've dedicated myself to what Camus called the "forces of dialogue." Like Martin Luther King, Jr., I believe in "constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth," and I believe that creative tension is often best produced through the literature I assign my students. And I have spent years writing my own work--critical and creative. These activities, however, do not pull in the big dough.

Now many people I know get tips in their line of work. Cabbies, hair stylists, street musicians, cocktail waitresses, letter carriers during the holiday season. What's my gratuity, my bonus, for dragging someone up and out of Plato's cave? Resentment from a student who earns a C- instead of an A+? My desire for greater financial remuneration isn't just selfishness on my part, really. I want to have ample financial resources so that my wife and sons and I can travel. Why shouldn't I ask for my abundant recompense? Those 900 numbers are bringing in oodles of money. Are those payments commensurate with the services provided? On a more positive note, think of all the people in business who have made mounds of moola because they had one good idea that met a need. Well, here's my one shot.

Beyond the problem of low salaries in my field, compared to other professions that demand an equivalent amount of post-graduate study, the work I do is often lonely work. It's prep, grade, prep, grade, prep, grade. What I need to know is that this work is respected, appreciated. And what better proof could there be in our culture of your respect and appreciation than your contribution of an almighty dollar bill? (Let's face it--you've tipped more for bad service in a restaurant!) Imagine this: I arrive at my office after a long night of grading, my eyes burning and my right hand still twitching from writer's cramp, and I find my

mailbox stuffed with envelopes from near and far, each with a dollar bill in it. There's no need for you to write a thing. In fact, please don't. I see truckloads of writing as it is.

Look, I could compose an article asking for a million dollars, and all I would have to do would be to convince one multi-billionaire to fork it over. What I really want, what I so desperately need, is the approbation of one or two million of my fellow human beings who, in a profound and selfless gesture of goodwill, say, with each contribution, "Yes, Doyle. Thanks for all you're doing. You're the backbone of civilization. We wish you the best."

We English professors know that our colleagues in the business department often make lucrative deals off campus as consultants for companies. That's fine. But what reward do we in literature get for our published poems and stories and personal essays and critical articles? The supermarket won't swap me a box of cereal for one of the complimentary copies I receive of a literary magazine in which I've published a poem titled "A Little Life Every Day." I pointed out two errors on signs inside the local Safeway this past year--"Do" instead of "Due" and "Your" instead of "You're"--and all I got was a stare.

Be a part of something historic. I feel a groundswell of generosity. I could make the Guinness Book of Records with this one essay: MOST MONEY EVER EARNED FOR A SHORT HUMOR PIECE. This might be my one chance to whip Norman Mailer, make his huge advances for big books look puny next to my take for this short essay. And you can be part of this record-breaking event, just like the many people who worked to make a two-ton carrot cake or a tortilla the size of Amarillo.

Here's my address (please copy it correctly on your envelopes):

Professor Doyle Wesley Walls
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Pacific University Oregon
Forest Grove, Oregon 97116-1797
U.S.A.

I recommend that you send your dollar in an envelope people can't see through. Please, don't expect any reply from me. I hope to be too busy. If I receive checks, I'll try to remember to write "Thanks!" under my signature.

I hear America (and the world!) rattling envelopes and crisp dollar bills even now. This sound is applause for my initiative, hoorays for my chutzpah.

Tomorrow, in "Introduction to Literature," we discuss Hamlet. When I speak the words "outrageous fortune" aloud, I'll be thinking of you and my dream that is now in your hands.