

Game Turned Shame: I Actually Bought It!

Jim Elliff



Many moons ago, when I was in college, I went with a few friends to the neighboring city of Hot Springs, Arkansas. At one time there were more millionaires in Hot Springs than anywhere in the country. I was not one of them.

We ambled along the streets, ate some food *very* much improved over our cafeteria fare at college, messed around in the park, went into some stores, and laughed a lot—nothing planned. As usual, I thought of myself as the ground and support of all humor for the group.

There was one famous stretch along the main avenue where the auction houses were lined up. You think, “Mafia” when you walk by. These were glass-front buildings, loaded up with silver items to the ceiling and superintended by men dressed in fancy pinstriped suits. When not at the door luring people in, the auctioneers were at the microphone before a set of chairs—twenty or so. The doors were wide open so that unsuspecting, gullible, naïve, unsophisticated, wide-eyed fools could walk in. I was none of the above.

But I did want to *prove* that I was none of the above.

And so I went in and sat down. My idea was to play along with the auctioneer by doing a little bidding, just to court danger before my friends. It was part of my obligation as a humorist.

A diamond ring was held up before the group—a huge one. As I remember, the auctioneer walked down the aisle placing it before the gaze of the group.

The rest is a bit of a daze. I bid, but for the life of me, I don’t know how I ever bid \$300! And to my utter shock, before that whirling moment had passed, I bought the thing!

You have to understand my situation a bit to appreciate this. I was a *poor* student. I was paying my own way and barely squeaked by using the money I made from preaching on the weekends. I had to trust God to make it. I had *no* discretionary funds. Nada.

I sheepishly followed the attendant to the back room where I could look over my new prize. He asked me what I intended to do with that fine ring. I stammered and palpitated, and wrenched something out of my tight grinning lips like, “It’s for an engagement ring.”

Of all the dumb things to say! The ring was a macro-gaudy, oversized dinner ring that even Liberace wouldn’t wear. It bore, glued to its center, a tasteless chunk of yellow stone called a diamond.

I signed the papers with trembling hands, received due congratulations, and walked, even more sheepishly, past the people and out to my friends—my incredulous friends. I may have been mistaken, but I think I detected that they were laughing at me, not with me. None of us could believe what had transpired.

It was not long before it quit being funny—maybe less than a minute. The realization came that I had to talk with Dad about this. It never occurred to me *not* to talk to Dad.

When we got back to the campus, I stood at the pay phone and made my quivering call. “You did whaaaaat?” OK, he wasn’t always perfect in his initial responses. But I called him because I was absolutely confident of one thing: Dad had my best interest at heart. Over the next moments I received a rebuke that I deserved. He could see that it didn’t take much.

He vindicated my confidences. Dad soon had called a lawyer friend in Hot Springs and arrangements were made to deliver the bird from the fowler. Within days Dad and I met in Hot Springs and took care of business. As I remember, Dad wisely had me pay for the lawyer’s service out of my own pocket amounting to something like \$50, but he paid plenty with his precious time. I’ve wondered if he made a deal with the lawyer to pay the balance himself. Either way, he wanted to make sure I learned my lesson.

This is one of many episodes in my life that endeared me to my dad. At the end of the day, he always wanted the best for me. He would pay a price to see that it happened. He could get me out of a jam. He always had a way. Solutions were found there. And I could experience his love in that.

To this day, I feel the same way about my dad. I get myself out of most of my own predicaments now, but I know where I can turn if I need to. At 85, Dad still wants the best for me. I can’t even begin to question that, because it has been proven over and over again.

If he corrected me, or warned me, or even shook his crooked finger at me (oh that crooked index finger!), it was because he loved me. I can honestly say that I never once doubted that—nor do I doubt it to this day. And he prayed for me. I heard Dad and Mom doing that, in their bedroom, every night.

A few decades away from that experience, I’m now glad that I bought that yellow diamond ring. I got to meet my dad in the valley of my humility where I could get a better view of the kind of man God had made of him.

Dad sins just like you and I do. He’s far from being perfect. But I honor him because he loves me. My guess is that his father, and especially his heavenly father, has gotten him out of a few scrapes even worse than mine. And the lessons he learned about loving and correcting have been wisely and thoughtfully applied to me.

For whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. (Proverbs 3: 12)



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