

Takin' a Break

by Smiley McGrouchpants Jr.

. . . so it's getting to be about 6:30, and I've already been through the neighborhood twice. Anyone who'd've been home or would have recently come home from the usual 9-to-5-type jobs would've been home already, and it'll be a little while before the coming-home-from-later-shift-jobs-or-whatever wave of people comes through. I've made, say, \$140 or so, I can't remember exactly, it was a while ago, but it's Wednesday and I've already all but made quota for the entire week. So I figure to myself, "Self," I say, "you might as well take a half-hour or so break; nothing's gonna happen anytime soon, and you've done well enough for the night already."

Whereupon I espy this Italian place I've never tried before. This being a part of town I do not often frequent, due to its not-so-convenience (I guess that's how you'd put it) relative to the bus lines I usually take.

So I figure, "what the hey, might as well eat," and eat I do. The place turns out to have a really nice ambiance, the waitress is both lovely *and* nice (*and* attentive!), and while the pasta is only passable — though I ordered, I believe, the cheapest plate on the menu, so maybe I got what I deserved — the background dinner music playing is, in fact, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* by Wilco. In its entirety. I sit down to "I Am Trying to Break Your Heart" and leave with, if memory serves (or if perhaps I'm not altering it to make the story good, which I realize now may be true), the album still playing. Which, taken with the other two considerations mentioned — lovely tables and lovely waitress — make me overlook the unexceptional pasta and really come to like the place. (In spite of the food, which is the reason you go to such places in the first place, or so I hear.) Though the \$5.50 (I think) Peppermint gelato the second, apparently assisting waitress recommends does prove to be as ridiculously good as she leads me to believe.

So I go back out, after paying the bill (of course), canvass the rest of the night ('till 9:00, officially), and made, I think, \$187 or so.

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All in all, a solid night for canvassing, and I've made quota for the week, and it's just Wednesday. Yippee for me.

So I go back to the office, "cash out" as usual, and "debrief" with my director, Trent.

"Going to Pizza Night tonight, Schuyler?" Trent asks, after the usual how-did-you-do-for-the-night stuff is taken care of. [Wednesday is "Pizza Night" at the Fund (organization we all work for); all canvassers, in each office in each city across the country, go to a Pizza place in their city for free pizza, which the Fund, of course, buys for them.]

"No, I ate on turf," I say. [Turf being the little vicinity of 80 or so houses you are assigned to canvass in whatever given neighborhood each night. You are given a small, hand-drawn map each day with the streets and delimitations of what areas you are to do just for that night from 4:00 — 9:00 p.m., called "turf."]

"Oh, some people invited you in for dinner? That's nice." [This is pretty rare, but happens. Some people just happen to be really nice as a matter of course — and may very well be former canvassers on top of that — so if you show up at their door at dinner time, they might just invite you in to eat with them, just for the hell of it.]

"No, I went to a restaurant." [This never happens. I've heard of people taking half-hour breaks but never going into a restaurant and actually ordering dinner. Tonight, though, I had a restaurant *right on* my "turf," not just *near* it, so I figured, why not? And since I'm considered a "veteran" canvasser by this point — I've been with the office almost a year — and since I had a good night and met my fundraising quota for the week (by *Wednesday*, no less), I figure, why not go ahead and tell Trent. Because, he's known me long enough to know I wasn't blowing off work by doing this — and I certainly did well enough, besides.

[But it's not like, as director, Trent can exactly *endorse* canvassers actually going into restaurants and ordering dinner when they're officially supposed to be canvassing, no matter how much it's understood among the "vets" that breaks of a certain length can help from time to time.

[I mean, what's he supposed to say to me at this point, "Oh, what restaurant? How was the food?"

[I, of course, inwardly find this very funny that I've done this to Trent. Not that this was intentional.]

"Get outta my sight, " Trent says.

Which means:

Debrief's over.

Go home, Schuyler.

