

Appealing to pity doesn't always work

Someone always sees through the scam

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BEAUTY, WEALTH OR EVEN A handicap often can be used to get what you want. I learned this at the age of 6 during a brief stay for some orthopedic surgery in a children's hospital.

A few days after surgery, a student nurse came along and found me sitting in bed with my dinner tray in front of me. Noticing that I had only one arm and two fingers, she offered to feed me. Realizing even then that the attentions of an attractive young woman were not to be discouraged, I let her.

But just as I was beginning to enjoy the attention and the meal, my mother descended on us like the goddess Juno, bellowing: "What are you doing? He can feed himself!"

Mother took the fork from the nurse, handed it to me, and said "Eat!"

Thus ended my first real romance.

It seems that whenever I tried to pull such a scam, someone was there to thwart me. In the eighth grade, I had convinced my brother who was six years my junior to carry my 20-pound book bag home from school every day, but a hitherto friendly nun intervened and commanded, "Carry your own books!"

Soon after, I told my mother it was hard for me to wash dishes without breaking them. She handed me a towel and said, "Dry!"

As a teen-ager, I had learned to drive and for a number of years thereafter I would exceed the posted speed limit from time to time. Thus, I was somewhat frequently apprehended by the police but never cited. That was how I developed my theory that there was not a police officer born who could give me a ticket if I acted pitiful enough--not so pitiful that I shouldn't drive, but far too pitiful to punish with a citation.

That all came to an end the day I made the acquaintance of an officer in the vicinity of a stop sign that I had drifted past. Unimpressed by my helpless fumbling for my driver's license and proof of insurance, he ticketed me without any sign of pity.

Sometime after this scrape with the law, I was on a camping trip with my family and I realized that I had forgotten to pack the ax with which I had taught my 8-year-old son to chop firewood.

"No matter," I thought, "we will start splitting wood with the tools we have, a hammer and screwdriver. A neighboring camper will notice and come to the rescue well in time for dinner."

It took about an hour to split that first log with me holding the screwdriver while my son swung the hammer nervously above my only hand. But split the log we did. Only then did a neighboring camper come to the rescue, saying, "I would have done that for you, but I wanted to see whether you could really split wood that way."

In five minutes he split the rest for us, the fire was started and dinner was cooked.

Undeterred by these past experiences, I came up with yet another foolproof plan when I had to install a new mailbox and post in front of our house. The metal support for the plastic post had to be pounded into the ground a foot or two, and at first I had no idea how I was going to get it in.

Then I saw our young neighbor across the street and sprung my plan.

"Hey, Mike, you got a sledge hammer?" I knew he would help.

"Sure," he said, "it's right there on the shelf in the garage."

And with that he walked back inside his house. This time it was my wife's hands at risk as I lifted and dropped the hammer on the support.

I know I really ought to give up these tactics, but success would be so sweet that I cannot stop striving for it. Besides, I saw a ladder in Mike's garage and my gutters are full of leaves. "Oh, Mike ..."

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