

The Dedicated Canvasser From Greenpeace

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by PENELOPE BURK

The other day a canvasser rang my doorbell. I had seen him coming up my walk, so I made sure I had an armload of papers and a harried look on my face when I answered the door. (This is usually all it takes for a quick dismissal, no matter what the person's selling.) I opened the door and waited for the first few words of the inevitable sales pitch which, nine times out of ten, consists of a pasted-on smile from a stranger inquiring after my health. The thirty-something, casually dressed fellow just stood there, file of papers under one arm, head cocked slightly to one side. He said nothing; he just stood there sizing me up. I stood in the doorway saying nothing myself and thought, "two can play this game."

Eventually he said: "I'm with Greenpeace and I'd like to tell you about our two most significant accomplishments in Ontario over the past year. I hope you will give me a moment because it's important information that directly affects you."

Stunned, I said, "OK." He proceeded to succinctly outline Greenpeace's work and accomplishments in genetically-modified foods and Ontario's coal-burning plants. As he continued to talk, highlighting the work Greenpeace was planning to do this year in both these areas with the money they were now trying to raise, I noticed my purse was sitting on the floor right by the door. (Note to self: don't leave your purse by the door.) I picked it up, found my wallet, pulled out all the cash I had and handed it to him. (Note 2: don't carry so much cash in your wallet.)

He hesitated for a moment, probably because not too many people hand him money before he actually asks for it, then took the contribution with a pleasant "thank you." "Here is a one-page fact sheet on our progress on coal-burning plants" he said, handing it to me. "Can I give you three more copies to pass on to others who might be interested in this issue?" "Don't press your luck", I replied. He smiled. I smiled back.

I asked his name and how he knew so much about Greenpeace and its work. He talked about their mandatory training program for canvassers and how dedicated he was to the cause. I told him his dedication was obvious. When he's on the job, David talks face-to-face with about thirty donors every night. "Do you work for Greenpeace all the time?" I asked. "Only when their canvassing program is on," he replied. "What do you do the rest of the time?" "I get by," was all he said.

We said our goodbyes and I watched him head down my walk. Fifteen minutes later the bell rang again. I opened the door and on the other side stood a well-dressed middle-

aged woman with a clip-board in her hand. "I'm collecting for X Charity", she said and waited for my response.

I felt that old familiar irritation well up inside me. "Sorry," I replied, "I just gave all my cash to Greenpeace." "Oh, you mean someone else is canvassing on this street?" she asked with alarm. "Yes," I replied, "and he's good!" "Well, can I leave this with you?" she asked, as she handed me something. "OK," I replied unenthusiastically. It was a pledge card with an envelope — nothing else. As she walked away we both knew I would never send it in. Too bad she didn't know why.

This article is dedicated to David. I hope he is out there tonight knocking on more doors on behalf of Greenpeace. He won't see this because he could never afford a subscription to *Canadian FundRaiser* but I wish him well all the same. It does make me stop and think a moment, however, about the people who can afford this publication and who are reading this article right now. I wonder ... how many donors have you talked to today? ~

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