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Hugh's News

A rural education

By Hugh Turley

What follows is a true story, recounted to me by a mutual acquaintance of the man I call "Joe."

Joe and "Bob" were sales representatives who had made their living closing deals on the phone. They were highly competitive with each other and with the top producers at their company. They came from large cities on the East Coast and felt smugly superior to other people. Joe, a native New Yorker, often boasted that the best scientists, doctors, lawyers and musicians all shared his particular urban heritage.

After they retired Bob used his phone skills to buy antiques from widows he found listed in the obituaries. He would convince the widow he had been a friend of the deceased and ask if she might sell him some cufflinks as a memento. Once inside a widow's home, Bob would flash \$3,000 and inquire if she might sell something else, perhaps a silver bowl or a watch?

When Joe found out about Bob's antique business he wanted to get in on the action. They became partners, with Bob doing the buying and Joe the selling. Joe rented a stall at an antiques mall as an absentee seller; other merchants would handle his sales for a commission. Joe only showed up once a month to collect the money, pay the rent, and set out more items to sell.

This arrangement was ideal for Joe, who spent his days in bed watching video and computer screens. He only left home to buy cigarettes, booze, and snacks. Any visits to friends were combined with his monthly drive to and from the antiques mall.

The operation was a success for the boys, but their lust for money and aversion to labor were not satisfied. Waiting a month to turn over their profit seemed too long. They decided that an auction could sell a whole table of merchandise in one evening.

After scouting several auction houses they found the perfect place in a small community on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The auctioneers got good prices for similar antiques and the commission was less than at the antiques mall.

Bob and Joe viewed the rural people as hayseeds and their inferiors. They were confident they could put one over on the locals and maximize their profits. Bob would deliver their merchandise and Joe would enter the hall later, pretending to be a prospective buyer. Joe would bid up the prices of their items so they would get even more money.

Everything seemed to be going as planned, until one evening the auctioneer called for a break and, with his assistant, summoned Bob and Joe to the office. He informed them that he knew what they were doing and did not appreciate it. At first Joe protested, but the auctioneer told him they had been captured on video tape.

He told them to pack their goods and leave, but Joe protested loudly. "We drove a great distance," he said, "At least let us sell our merchandise tonight and we promise not to come back." The auctioneer talked it over with the assistant and agreed to let them sell their remaining merchandise.

Bob and Joe's entire table of antiques was taken up on the stage. The auctioneer held up several items pointing out the fine qual-

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were final. Bob and Joe, smart-
ing from the lesson taught by the
hayseeds, blamed each other and
are no longer speaking.

"SOLD!" The auctioneer
banged his hammer down.
"Oh, no, no, no," cried Joe.
All sales at the auction house

ity of each. Then he announced,
"What do I hear for everything
on the table?"
"Six dollars," someone shouted.