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From the E-Mailbag...

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I got this the other day from Johnny Achziger. Capa-Alpha, by the way, was kind of a fanzine club and I should write about it here someday.

I've known you for some 40 years, we met at least a few times at San Diego Comic Cons back in the '70's, we were in Capa-Alpha together for awhile and we corresponded briefly. It doesn't matter if you remember me or not, but I am an avid reader of your blog. I especially enjoy the stories you post of your childhood, in fact it inspired me to do similar stories of my own childhood on Facebook.

Now and then you make comments about religious people coming to your door and trying to convert you. I assume you mean either Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons as I don't know of any others who go door to door with their religion. Maybe there are others in your area. I became one of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1979 (and I'm not going to preach to you here, so please read on — I'll keep it short), and have gone to 1000's of doors over the past 35 years.

If you want to make comments about such people, feel free (some of them are quite funny), but perhaps I can clarify a couple items (in 25 words or less). We never ask for money (though we may state that we accept donations), we don't believe in instant conversions (nobody becomes a Witness without months of personal study), and we don't tell people that they are going to hell (we don't believe in a literal burning hell), and we only come to your door because we truly believe that Armageddon is coming (believe me, I do not enjoy being cussed at and threatened with deadly violence).

Okay, that was more than 25 words, but I recognize you don't wish to be preached to and I respect that. I'm not asking you to do anything. I just wanted to briefly explain a couple things. I know how annoying it is to be interrupted when you're busy but they're basically good people.

Have a nice day and best wishes for your continued health and, again, I love your blog.

I do remember you, Johnny, and would be pleased to run into you again at a convention...or really anywhere except my doorstep. Part of what I object to here is unsolicited appearances on my property and the expectation that I will interrupt whatever I'm doing (once in a while, it's sleep because I work odd hours) and answer my door and just stand there and listen for as long as it takes to hear a rehearsed sales pitch, usually for a product or service that's of no conceivable interest to me.

I've never liked that and I've gotten less tolerant of it since I've been having trouble with my knees. I'm usually upstairs in my office so I have to trudge down, just in case it's a signature-required delivery or a neighbor with a problem. Years ago, I tried posting "No Solicitor" signs but discovered that people who are selling door-to-door never think those apply to them or they fib and go, "Oh, I didn't see that."

My annoyance applies to those who are peddling religion but it also applies to realtors who want to sell my house for me, Girl Scouts hawking cookies, kids who claim they can get through college if I'll subscribe to magazines which will probably never be delivered, political activists even when I agree with their politics, and vendors of small kitchen appliances. Frankly, I think that if my "product" was along the lines of an acceptance of Jesus Christ, I wouldn't want to trivialize it by selling it via the same business model people are using to sell aluminum siding.

The least annoying, by the way, are the realtors. At least, they leave you free memo pads and occasionally a pot holder with their name on it.

I have had Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses at my door and also a few others. Most of them never get far enough to identify their particular cause. You may be pleased to know I never cuss or threaten. I sometimes tell them that my spiritual life is fine and then I see either great disappointment or disbelief on their faces. It's apparently never occurred to some of them — or perhaps they just don't believe — that anyone could survive in this world without their particular religion. News flash: Billions do.

That's one of the things I don't like about most organized religions — the disrespect of other religions. I am also very suspicious of any order that sends its followers out to recruit and raise money. I'd be more impressed if they sent out their followers to help people in actual need and without proselytizing.

I'm afraid I don't see a whole heap o' difference between asking for donations and saying you accept them. I also don't see much

difference between (a) telling people they're going to hell if they don't sign up or (b) warning them that they'd better enlist because Armageddon is coming soon to a planet near you.

You can mock me when it really occurs but I do not believe Armageddon is approaching...or if it is, that the people so prophesizing have any sort of inside track as to when. I think it's just something that religions have learned to say for the same reason that companies that sell Home Security Systems try to convince you that the burglary of your house is inevitable and imminent. The key difference is that some homes do get robbed, whereas the world does not end, no matter how often we are told it's about to.

You say they're good people. I don't doubt that most are and for me, that's part of the problem. It's much easier to slam the door on not-good people. I am less certain that the folks who send them out to go door-to-door are good people.

Johnny, I am not questioning your sincerity or good intentions. But the folks who come to my door on missions are questioning — actually, doubting — that I could possibly have my life and head together without what's in their pamphlets and books.

Three days ago at about this time, a band of them — all dressed as if attending an upper-scale church, of course — rang my bell about this time of day and forced me to trek needlessly downstairs on a knee that's full of cortizone and short on meniscus. The lead pitchman started in asking me if I'd accepted Jesus Christ as my personal savior. I interrupted to tell him he wasn't selling Jesus Christ; he was selling his organization's particular marketing of that esteemed figure.

I live in a pretty nice neighborhood but for some reason, we have homeless people sleeping in nearby alleys. They're not hard to find. You just look for the shopping cart full of discards covered with old trash bags and a homeless person is usually sleeping right next to it. I asked the gent on my doorstep why he didn't go try to "save" that guy...because that guy's in a helluva lot more trouble than I am or will probably ever be. Every day is a potential Armageddon for that guy.

My visitor stopped and stammered and didn't know what to say...because I'd knocked him off his memorized speech and he was used to letting it do his thinking for him. So I gave him the answer: "It's because homeless people don't have any money to give you."

Now, I remember you as a bright guy and I'll bet you'd have had an answer. And I'll further bet that some of the doors you knock on are opened by people who are not unhappy to see you...maybe even some who buy what you're selling. The kids pushing the overpriced, bogus magazine subscriptions make a sale every now and then, too.

I used to be much nicer to these people. I thought it would be rude not to listen to the whole dog 'n' pony show before I told them I wasn't interested. Now I figure I'm doing them a favor to cut them off and let them get on to the next house because they absolutely, positively ain't going to make a sale at mine. The reason some (as you say) cuss at you and threaten deadly violence is because though from your point of view, you just bothered them the one time...from their point of view in their neighborhoods, it's an endless parade of salespeople who drag them away from more important matters. Going door-to-door is an ignoble, pestering way to sell what are sometimes scams and sales campaigns that, like those e-mails that tell you you've won millions, hope to luck into the really gullible and desperate. I don't think it speaks well of any cause — again, including political ones I otherwise support — that it chooses to go this route.

As I was typing the last sentence of the above paragraph, my doorbell rang and I thought, "Oh boy! I have a great finish for this piece! I can limp downstairs in pain, have a blunt exchange with some annoying religion vendors, then limp back up here and write how they inconvenienced me. As it turns out, it was my gardener wanting to be paid. But if I'd written this three days ago at this time, I would have had the perfect closer. That's another annoying thing about door-to-door salespeople: They always seem to show up at the most inconvenient moments.

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