



Marshmallows

Because I have a number of different 'venues' for communicating with my customers/supporters/fans/friends, it's sometimes a bit difficult to decide just where any particular bit of news will appear. Should I talk about it in my quarterly newsletter? Perhaps the 'Woodblock RoundTable' blog would be more suitable. It might be that the 'Mokuhankan Conversations' is the best place, or alternatively, the 'A Story A Week' series ...

Well something happened to me earlier this week that carries with it no such problem. There was so much 'news' wrapped up in one event, that the question of venue is moot. This one is going to appear *everywhere!*

But it makes no sense to simply repeat the whole story again in each place, so here today we'll pick up the story from last Wednesday morning, when a couple of boxes were due to arrive at our workshop, where three of us were busy with our printing work. Exactly what was in the boxes was as yet unknown to us. The contents were the 'winnings' from an internet auction that I had won two days previously, having taken a flyer and entered quite a substantial bid, based on rather vague contents visible in a low resolution photograph.

Before making the bid, I had studied the photograph intensely, and had convinced myself that the contents of this auction - tools for woodblock printmaking - were indeed quite valuable, and what is more important, very useful for our work. But the auction had turned out to be extremely competitive, and I had been forced to pay a much higher price than I had originally anticipated.

So here we were, waiting for the arrival of the boxes and the chance to find out if the investment had been worthwhile, or a waste of money. The suspense was prolonged somewhat by the arrival of a couple of unrelated deliveries. Each time I returned to the workshop from having answered the doorbell upstairs, the two ladies who were working here with me looked up eagerly. "Sorry, not yet; that was something else ..."

But the third time the doorbell rang, it was the real thing, and I made two trips down to the workshop carrying the heavy boxes, which I then placed in one corner, returning to the work on my bench.

"Aren't you going to open them?" said one, and "You're not just going to leave them there!?" from the other.

"I don't want to disturb our work," I replied. "We'll have a look after lunch ..."

They were not so happy about this. For the past few days we had all been in a state of intense suspense about the auction, and were eager to see what was in these boxes - junk or treasure? So while we waited for lunchtime, I told them - as we worked - a story about some marshmallows.

That story began back in the 1960s, when a researcher studying child development performed an experiment in which he offered young children a marshmallow to eat, at the same time adding that if they could wait for the experimenter to return before eating it, they could have two instead. They were free to eat the marshmallow before that if they wished, but in that case they would not receive another one.

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As you might expect, some children (they were 4-year-olds) could not wait, and ate the marshmallow immediately. Others were able to wait a while, but not long enough, while others were indeed able to wait about 15 minutes for the experimenter to return - while sitting there staring at the marshmallow all the time.

The point of the experiment was to see how these differences in behaviour were expressed when the children were adults, and the results were indeed dramatic. *"The resisters were more positive, self-motivating, persistent in the face of difficulties, and able to delay gratification in pursuit of their goals. They had more successful marriages, higher incomes, greater career satisfaction, better health, and more fulfilling lives than most of the population. Those who had eaten the marshmallow were more troubled, stubborn and indecisive, mistrustful, and less self-confident, and still could not put off gratification. This impulse followed them throughout their lives and resulted in unsuccessful marriages, low job satisfaction and income, bad health, and frustrating lives."*

After hearing me tell this story, the two ladies became very quiet. To make a woodblock print requires extensive planning and preparation, a long and extended construction process, and the ability to accept the fact that your 'reward' is going to be a very long time coming. You *have* to be able to leave that marshmallow alone.

So get back to work and forget about the boxes!

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