

Oprah Win-free

By Reg P. Wydeven
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“No good deed goes unpunished” is a popular cliché, and like most clichés, it’s rooted in truth. Oprah Winfrey discovered recently this saying is all too true.

Winfrey recently spent \$35 million to build and maintain a state-of-the-art girls’ leadership academy in South Africa. The academy gives 150 South African 7th and 8th grade girls a world-class education that they otherwise would have no hope of receiving.

While Oprah has been heaped with well-deserved praise for building the school, she unfortunately has received just as much criticism. Detractors assert that although Oprah’s school is beneficial, her money could have been much better spent on education here in the U.S.

Oprah’s harassment doesn’t end there. Keifer Bonvillain was recently arrested for allegedly attempting to extort \$1.5 million from Oprah Winfrey by threatening to release taped telephone conversations that he claimed would hurt her reputation.

According to a criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court, Bonvillain purportedly met an employee of Winfrey’s at a party. He then asked the employee about Oprah and her show and the employee allegedly made disparaging comments about the media mogul. Apparently, Bonvillain recorded 12 hours of conversations with the Winfrey employee.

Bonvillain then emailed Winfrey, informing her that the employee was making these unfavorable comments. Without hearing anything, he then sent a letter to Winfrey. Another of her associates responded to the letter and Bonvillain warned her that he was going to publish a book based on the “shocking” and “newsworthy” tapes. He even claimed he received offers from tabloids and publishing houses for the tapes ranging from \$500,000 to \$3 million.

Wisely, the associate secretly contacted the FBI and then allegedly agreed to pay Bonvillain \$1.5 million for the tapes. She wired him a \$3,000 down payment and arranged to meet him in the parking lot of an Atlanta hotel. In a classic sting, authorities were waiting for Bonvillain in the parking lot and arrested him, later releasing him on a \$20,000 bond. His extortion trial began last week.

My wife is a huge Oprah fan. After years of trying, I’ve finally given up on getting her tickets to appear in the studio audience. I settled for getting her an autographed picture off ebay instead.

My wife’s dream would be to get on Oprah’s My Favorite Things show, where she unveils her favorite gifts for the Christmas season. Every member of the audience gets one of each gift, such as iPods or jewelry. Oprah obviously gets lots of flack for these shows as well, because she’s spending all this money while there are starving children in Africa.

The fervor generated by Oprah’s My Favorite Things episodes could only be compared to the brawls at European soccer games. A similar bum rush at a taping of one of Oprah’s shows has resulted in a lawsuit.

Tanya Milner recently sued Oprah’s production company, Harpo Studios, claiming she was injured in a mad dash for seats during a taping of the her syndicated talk show. According to her complaint filed in Cook County Circuit Court, Milner alleges she was pushed down the stairs between a waiting area and audience seating at the studio.

Milner accuses Harpo Studios of failing to properly control the crowd, causing her to fall and suffer unspecified injuries. Milner is seeking more than \$50,000 in damages.

Maybe my wife doesn’t want tickets after all.

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