

Enter the Agora



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“One Voluntaryist’s Perspective” is an original column appearing most Mondays at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Sklyer J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Scott surveyed the damage. His front yard was once again flooding around his stop-and-waste valve, which lay six feet beneath the surface, at the bottom of a four inch wide service shaft. This isn’t the first time his valve failed him. He’s replaced it twice now. To get down to it, he’ll have to once again dig up several cubic yards of earth. The dread of performing such a nightmarish task, yet again, in mud, was filling him up. He began feeling angry at the circumstances and the prospect of all that laborious work.

As the dread and anger swirled around inside his entire body, he suddenly made a realization. He recently determined to be more charitable in the way of paying those in need to help him with odd jobs. He paid his neighbor eighty bucks to fix all of his sprinkler heads; as well as a friend of his mother-in-law to clean his blinds. Such work he could do himself, but by paying someone in need he got to economize his time and help others without creating any sort of dependence. They were voluntary trades. Win-win solutions. Why not find someone able and willing to dig all that earth for him? He knew just who to call.

“Carlos, would you like to earn some money today, and get some great exercise, too?” he asked over the phone to his brother-in-law.

He replied, “Actually, I’m busy today, but I have a friend that would love the work. I’ll bring him over in about an hour.”

“Sounds good. I’ll start working and he can finish up for me.”

He hung up and went to his his room to change into some work clothes. Thinking about how good the exercise will be, and about taking the time catch up on his podcasts got him excited enough to make the commitment to get the job done. That and he won’t be doing it alone.

The sun was shining in full outside, but where he needed to dig was under the shade of the

biggest tree in his yard. He grabbed two shovels and a tarp from his garage and walked to the dig spot. He laid the tarp down at the edge of his dig outline. He began by cutting a four feet by four feet square around the valve in the grass. Then he started uprooting the grass in hopes of salvaging it when he was done re-filling the hole. How sweet it will be to have this done. He'll have to replace all of the pipe and the valve in order to ensure the fix. He has a friend that's better with plumbing. He'll have to give him a call once the work area is clear of obstruction. He remembered he needed to turn off the water to the yard. He went back to the garage to get the valve crank, went to the side of his house, found the main outside valve, and turned it off. He then returned to his work.

An hour later he was halfway done and completely dead. There's no way he could dig anymore. Perfect timing as his wife brought him out a big glass of ice cold water. Just what he needed. As he gulped it down, his brother-in-law arrived with his friend. They got out of their car and walked over to Scott.

"Hey Scott! This is my friend Victor. His English isn't too good, so I'll translate a little before I go. What do you need him to do?" Carlos asked as he and Scott shook hands.

Scott then shook Victor's hand and replied, "Well, I've done half the work so far, but I need to dig another three feet, down to the stop-and-waste valve. Can he dig?"

"Oh yes, he's very good at digging." Carlos translated the instructions to Victor, who nodded his agreement and then said something back. Carlos listened and then, speaking to Scott, said, "He wants to know if twenty dollars is fair."

Scott's eyes went wide. Twenty dollars for the remaining labor seemed more than fair. He decided to accept the deal and then offer to buy him some lunch and pay him another ten dollars. "Uhh, yes, that sounds fair."

"Great," said Carlos, "You won't be disappointed. I've got to run. Do you think you could give him a ride to his place when he's done?"

"Sure, no problem. Later." Scott and Victor turned to the work that Scott had already started. Victor picked up a shovel and jumped into the hole and began working. He was quick. Scott watched him for about ten minutes and then went inside to get some more water for himself and for Victor. While he was in the kitchen his wife walked by carrying a load of laundry.

"Thanks for the water," he said. She nodded and smiled. He continued, "Hey, do you know Victor?"

"No, I've never met him before." she responded.

“Oh, okay. He’s your brother-in-law’s friend so I thought maybe you’ve met him before.”

“No, never. Is he doing what you need him to do?”

“Oh sure. He’s very quick. He’s digging much faster than I was. He must do it a lot.”

“Great,” she said and then gave Scott a kiss. He grabbed Victor’s water and went back outside. When Victor looked at him, he held up the water and said in his limited Spanish, “Quieres agua?”

“Si, gracias.” Victor responded, taking the water and drinking all of it at once. Scott noticed that the valve and plumbing was already exposed. “Oh my hell, that didn’t take you very long.” Victor just smiled, nodded, and continued digging. Ten minutes later the plumbing was sufficiently cleared. It took Victor half as long as Scott to dig the lower half of the job.

“Wow. Nice job,” said Scott, “Let me get some cash for you, and then I’d like to take you to lunch. Are you hungry? Tienes hambre? Quieres comida?”

Victor responded, “No, es okay, es okay. I not hungry.”

“Oh come on, let me buy you a burger. Hamburguesa? Rico, esta bien. Por favor?”

“Si, okay, no problem.”

Great. Scott ran inside to get his keys and his cash. He let his wife know that he was going to take Victor to get a burger and then back to his apartment. He returned and he and Victor got into his car. As he pulled out of the driveway, Scott asked, “So, how long have you known Carlos? Umm... quanto años sabes Carlos?”

Victor, with a puzzled look, answered, “No. No Carlos.”

“Carlos, tu amigo?”

“Mi amigo, no.”

Scott was confused. It seemed that Victor was saying that Carlos wasn’t his friend. They arrived at a burger joint and got out. They walked inside and Scott ordered himself and Victor a double cheeseburger with everything. As best as he could make out, that’s what Victor wanted. Their order came. Scott grabbed the tray and then found a table. They sat and began eating.

They both seemed to be fast eaters. When they finished, Scott asked Victor, “Where is your place? Donde es tu casa?”

Victor responded, “No mi casa. Home Depot.”

“Home Depot? Drive you to Home Depot? Uhh, okay, sure.” Scott thought that driving him to Home Depot instead of home was a strange request. As they walked back to the car, Scott pulled out thirty dollars in cash and gave it to Victor, and said, “Gracias. Treinta por tu.”

Victor was quite thankful, “No, gracias por te. Muchas gracias!” He took the money. It made Scott feel good to give the guy more than they agreed on. They got in the car and Scott drove to Home Depot. Victor pointed out where he wanted to be dropped off. Scott noticed that not far away stood several other men, all Hispanic like Victor. They said their goodbyes and Victor got out of the car, closed the door, and headed over to where the other men were. Scott knew that those men stood around waiting for contractors to offer them a job. They were called day workers. Victor stood with them and talked with them. He seemed to be good friends with them.

Scott then realized what his brother-in-law had done. Victor wasn't his friend. He was just a day worker. Carlos probably thought that Scott wouldn't be interested in hiring a day worker, so he told him that Victor was his friend. But he really wasn't. Carlos just picked up someone willing to work and brought him to Scott's. Scott then realized what hiring a day worker meant. Hiring a day worker and paying him cash was illegal. Victor was probably also an illegal immigrant. That seemed obvious in hindsight, with his poor English. Not only did Scott hire a day worker, but he hired an illegal immigrant. That's wrong. Scott could get in trouble!

But why would he get in trouble? Nobody knew what he did. It's not like somebody was watching the day workers and writing down license plates. He never heard of that happening. And Carlos wouldn't turn him in, and certainly not Victor. Scott felt a little rebellious to know that he hired an illegal day worker. And why not? Victor needed the cash, and Scott needed help digging. It's not like he forced Victor to help him, or paid him less than was agreeable. It was a fair trade, an equitable trade. Why should Scott care if Victor was “an illegal”? He probably had a family to support, and he was working for his pay instead of stealing it. Good for Victor, thought Scott. And good for Scott. Next time he needed help like that, he knew where to go. And he would. He'd hire a day worker. Victor did a great job, and did it quickly, quicker than Scott, and for cheap.

Scott was excited as he drove home. He couldn't wait to tell his wife about her husband, *the criminal*.