

One of the highlights of the conference honoring Gary Backer was a speech given by his wife, Guity Becker. Here are excerpts from her remarks.

This is how Guity and Gary met, according to Guity:

I saw an ad for a table with ten chairs, for only \$200. I called immediately and went over to take a look. The housekeeper showed me the set, which was in excellent condition, but I was disappointed to see it was modern teak.

I called the owner later that evening. I was hoping to do some bargaining about the price. When I heard in our brief exchange over the phone that he was an economics professor, I feared I was facing a stone wall. This is how the conversation went:

Me: Professor Becker I have seen the set, it is in excellent condition, but I am wondering if I could have it for less.

Becker: No you can't. It is in very good condition, and I paid much more for it.

Me: Well, I do not like modern furniture, and I will have to resell it later.

Becker: You don't have to buy it. Go find something you like.

Me: Mr. Becker, I don't have time to look, I have to take my Ph. D. exam in less than two months.

Becker: That is not my problem.

Me: I have just come back from a long trip, and I am not sure how much money I have right now.

Becker: I don't have time to listen to your problems. Someone else is interested in the table, so if you don't want it, I will let him have it.

Me: Ok, I will take it, but can I get it next week.

Becker: No, you have to take right away, I have bought a new table and I don't have room for this one. If you don't pick it up by tomorrow, I will let this other person have it.

Me: I really can't pay you until next week.

Becker: That's fine, pay me later.

I began to wonder about what kind of economist this Becker was, he did not know who I was, and he was not willing to come down on the price, yet he would let me take it without paying for it!

Since I needed a table and chairs anyway, I arranged to have them picked up. And I related the story to my good friend, Marilyn. She said promptly: What else can you expect from a Chicago economist. They are all Fascists.

The following week I went to the professor's office to pay him. Contrary to the way he sounded on the phone, he seemed quite genial. I asked how come he wouldn't come down on the price, but he trusted me with the table before paying for it.

He said: I didn't care about getting the money. But it was the principle, I did not want to sell it below what it was worth.

What surprised me even more was when he asked me to dinner.

Their first date:

We went to a French restaurant, and during that dinner, I harangued him about the terrible political system in this country, the plight of the poor, who were being exploited by the rich, and similar subjects. He did not say much, but looked as if he was listening seriously, and even nodded a few times as if he agreed with me.

The next day when Marilyn asked how the dinner went I told her proudly that I had almost managed to enlighten the fascist.

How Becker turned Marilyn around on that fascist thing:

My friend, Marilyn, also had an epiphany of sorts about Gary and the other Chicago economists. It happened one evening when I gave a big party to celebrate her getting a teaching job. The next day, Marilyn told me she was sorry she had not met "my friend." She knew I was going out with him, so she no longer called him the Fascist economist.

I said to her, you were talking to him all evening.

She was taken aback, and said, "I thought Gary Becker is an economist; that man was fascinating. He spoke about marriage, divorce and all kinds of interesting things."