

Carpe de Moolah

BY EDWARD PITTMAN

When opportunity knocks, it may not be at your door — but on your head.

A few years ago my personal balance sheet was out of whack: not enough profit and way too much loss. Something had to give. What did? Well, actually, my double latte with three sugars from the drive-through at Jumpin' Java after I accidentally lanced the bottom of the paper cup with a stirrer. I boiled my lap, leaped up, and let out a holler that could scrape off what little paint was left on my '73 Karmann Ghia.

When I went inside to ask for a replacement cup, the cashier's eyes widened when he heard what had happened. He called the manager, who listened to my story, turned pale, and picked up the phone. Five minutes later I was chatting with Mr. Franken, chief counsel for Jumpin' Java.

"Mr. Pittman, ah, considering your situation, we're, ah, prepared to settle for a reasonable sum," he said.

I started to protest — I mean, I was the one who stuck the straw through the cup! But when I heard what Mr. Franken thought was a "reasonable" sum, it was all I could do not to let out a whoop of joy. Ten minutes later I was a millionaire. And I want to tell you that it can happen to you.

Some of my friends say that making a livelihood from litigation is wrong. They tell me I should take responsibility for my actions. A few weeks ago I bought a

new convertible after my Karmann Ghia skidded on a puddle and through the front door of the Chez Pussycat Late Nite Lounge and Pool Hall. Am I to blame simply because the tires had 100,000 miles on them? I don't think so.

I used to believe that the key to success was hard work, dedication, and honesty. But it's pretty easy to send my high ideals on hiatus when I can collect a check whenever an absentminded bag boy runs into me with his cart at the grocery store, or when turbulence takes me for a spin in the airplane bathroom. I paid off my condo with the proceeds from a broken collarbone at my health club. (Just because the barbell slipped while I was trying to beat Vasily Alexeyev's 1976 Olympic record doesn't mean it was my fault!) A settlement from an ex-girlfriend is covering my travel expenses, in payment for the emotional trauma I suffered during our four-month relationship. She insisted on squeezing the toothpaste tube in the middle, and once she actually yelled at me.

Checkbook justice has opened my eyes. Just listen to my litany of lawsuit largess. I took my country club to the cleaners for \$50,000 when the wing of a low-flying Cessna blocked my tee shot during a recent round. (Well, it was a tournament!) My eyes were traumatized by the flicker of the films at a Fatty Arbuckle retrospective. So

what if I sat there for an entire weekend and ate enough popcorn to turn Lake Erie into a parking lot. The theater settled for \$200,000. A rhinestone-studded bust of Elvis split my noggin during a rambunctious, margarita-fueled evening at a local restaurant. I don't know how it fell off the wall, but my attempts to lasso it with a friend's garter belt may have had something to do with it. I ended up with five stitches, but I pocketed a cool \$1.4 million after paying off my team of attorneys and expert witnesses.

I'll tell you, personal injury (real or imagined) is the key to big payoffs. I used to have a conscience, but with an annual income pushing eight figures I can afford a little moral relativism. And I don't have to lift a finger; I just have to squash one once in a while. ■

Associate Editor Edward Pittman used to want to win the lottery, but now he's on the lookout for a juicy civil suit.

