

**The “Looking For Bagpipes” campaign is not affiliated in any way with Humans of New York. Any work done through the campaign, and implications and consequences of this work, are independent of HONY.**

**Brief Summary:** A June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014 Humans of New York photo leads to an incredible outpouring of support for a homeless bookseller who has had his bagpipes stolen. I, Maxim Pekarsky, a recent college grad, set up a crowd funding campaign that raises \$1800 in 1.5 hours. I then track down the man in the photo without knowing his name, and get his story. According to his wishes, I contact a renowned bagpipe maker - first in Scotland, then in Bulgaria - and order a custom-made set of bagpipes, all without any support from HONY. The bagpipes arrived on Aug 19th, and were delivered to Malcolm, the man in the photograph and a musician of 40 years, on August 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**The Full Story:** On June 28th, 2014, Humans of New York posted a photo of an older man by a makeshift bookstand in Union Square. The caption was a quote from the man; it read: “I built this book cart after my bagpipes got stolen, because I couldn't afford a new set of bagpipes, and I needed to support myself. I used to sell teddy bears too. But one day last year, three undercover policeman showed up and took me to jail...” There was an immediate rally for support in the comments - the top comment, with 10,000 likes, read: “Can we all band together and buy this man some new bagpipes???” I, Maxim Pekarsky, am a recent economics/music graduate and a longtime HONY fan with a background in finance and business development. I've recently been learning a lot about crowdsourcing, so I decided to give everyone an outlet to donate. A GoFundMe page took exactly three minutes to set up, so I did. I researched the price of bagpipes (about \$1400,) set our limit at \$1500, and put the link in a comment on Facebook. Then I sat back and watched - I didn't ever actually consider that we'd ever hit the goal. I figured we'd raise \$150-200 at best.

When the donations started coming in, I'd write individual thank you notes. Suddenly, we were up to 40 donations and \$300, and I knew that something big was happening. Money was coming in too fast for me to write thank-yous anymore, so I quickly started researching what happens next, and getting in touch with HONY - via Facebook, Twitter, email - to try and figure out the next step.

Around an hour-and-a-half into the campaign, we had raised over \$1750 from 130 donors. I got in touch with GoFundMe, and had them close the campaign down. I was worried we'd gather too much, and the level of accountability - plus the thought of trying to decide to do with all the excess money with 130 people - told me it'd be best to stop there.

I was overwhelmed by how generous and trusting people were being - donations ranged from \$5 to \$100 (\$5-\$10 on average.) So, I made accountability and transparency my number one priority. I didn't know much about non-profit work, but I knew I wanted everyone to know where **every single cent** went. So, I started a blog that I've been updating since: [www.lookingforbagpipes.wordpress.com](http://www.lookingforbagpipes.wordpress.com)

The next step was to track down the man in the picture. I didn't even know his name. I heard back from HONY; Brandon's (HONY founder) manager, Olivia, had written a few emails back and forth with me and was polite, but ultimately told me that **they'd remain unaffiliated with us**. We were running the campaign without their blessing, and with no ties to them. That evening, I went down to Union Square, and tracked down the little bookstand. On a whim, I thought I should stop by the Barnes and Noble there, *just in case* I might run into the man in the photo. I just had an inkling. Sure enough, there was the stand! I pulled up the HONY photo, and compared the books, and there was no mistaking it – same books in the same order; it was definitely the same stand. However, the man at the stand was not the same man. I introduced myself, he told me his name is Michael, and I asked him if he knew the man in the picture.

“Sure,” he said. “His name is **Malcolm**. I’m his partner, we run the stand together.”

We continued on chatting. Michael is in his forties or early-fifties, a cleanly-shaved man with kind eyes and a warm smile. I found out that both Michael and Malcolm are homeless, and live off the stand, which received donations of books. Michael knew about the HONY story – he stepped away to get coffee when Brandon Stanton, the HONY photographer came by. A few seconds difference, and he would have been in the picture. I gave him my card, he assured me that Malcolm comes by often, and promised to pass my number on.

I spoke to Malcolm, the man in the original photo, a few days later, and we have met several times since. Malcolm is quirky and exciting, more spontaneous than the measured, intelligent Michael. Malcolm told me he had been playing over 40 years, and his dream had always been to own a pair of MacPherson pipes. That evening, I did some thorough research, and found that Douglass MacPherson, from Scotland, is indeed a well-known maker. I’ve grown up playing viola (and studied music in college,) so I had an idea of how to approach buying an instrument - but knew nothing about bagpipes. I called, and then emailed Doug. I also found a blog of someone that had bought pipes from Doug before, and contacted this person. I heard nothing but glowing reviews; I also learned that Doug moved his workshop to Bulgaria. The following day, I got an email back from Doug himself. Indeed in Bulgaria, he was friendly and willing to chat. It took us a few days for us to conquer the time differences, but eventually, we chatted. From there on, the process was fairly straightforward. His quoted price was perfect - I tried to fit into our budget, and came in just \$8 under - and his demeanor was fantastic. Doug MacPherson received the order in early July, started work on the pipes a few weeks ago, and they arrived at my doorstep on August 19th.

On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, we went down to deliver the pipes. My two friends, the photographer Jonathan Rios and videographer Nekoro Bunsie, generously agreed to come along to tape photograph the event. Angela Li, one of our donors, also joined. Malcolm was overjoyed to receive the pipes – he says given MacPherson’s work, they’ll be the best he has ever played.

The outpouring of generosity and support has been incredible. I’m amazed by how trusting people are to a stranger on the internet, and humbled by the opportunity to have led this project. I know Brandon and HONY are interested in the outcome, and I’m 100% committed to showing that every penny is accounted for. All the updates and financial info are on the blog:[www.lookingforbagpipes.wordpress.com](http://www.lookingforbagpipes.wordpress.com)

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