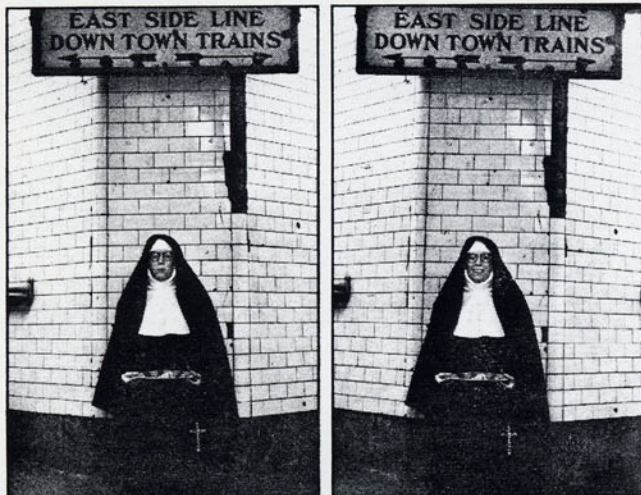


## Sister, Can You Spare a Smile?



When you're smiling: "Sister Dove" does 30 percent better.

### By Dove Bradshaw

The good Sisters who sit collecting in the subway corridors under Grand Central Terminal generally look pretty glum. One day I saw one smiling, and the activity at her basket seemed unusually brisk. Cause or effect? As a performance artist, I saw the makings of an experiment. What is the value of a smile, anyway? I'd pose as a nun on two successive days—deadpan the first, smiling the next.

Armed with permission from the Transit Authority, a rented habit, and a folding chair, I set out one Tuesday morning. I arrived at eight, after a truly first-class subway trip—seats had been offered, hats doffed, doors held.

I planted the chair in an empty corner and, with a wicker basket balanced on my knees, gazed vacantly before me. Coins began falling into the basket.

People of all kinds came up. A white-haired executive softly asked me to pray for him as he dropped a \$5 bill into the basket. At a moment when the passage was empty, three rough-looking boys approached, their hands in their pockets. I thought they meant to rob me—until two of them gave me money.

I looked up at one point to see a smartly dressed woman standing before me.

"Does God forgive an abomination?" she asked.

*This* I was not prepared for. I recalled something from a conversation with a Catholic friend. "With a firm purpose of amendment, it is possible."

The woman looked relieved. She made no offering, but thanked me.

In late morning, when traffic was light, a shopping-bag lady sidled up and stood at my elbow. She did not look at me. At last I held the full basket out to her. She carefully picked out two quarters, then moved quickly away without a word.

The first day's collection with a straight face amounted to \$143 and change; "service with a smile" on the second day reaped a 30 percent improvement—a \$186 total.

My plan at the outset had been to honor the intention of those who gave by sending their offerings to a Catholic institution. I learned that the nuns in Grand Central are out-of-towners from White Plains. I called the mother superior; would she accept what I had collected with my good wishes? She would not. She didn't sound displeased, just unreceptive. She suggested that I choose a charity. I'd always heard good things about CARE. They're the people who got the check.