

Your Lane or Mine — by Hope H.

Ahh, rage is my most pervasive test in the “first thought wrong” theory. It was a recent Friday when this test occurred. I was coming to the end of my workday, my workweek, and in just another 45 minutes, I could be home to my daughter, that hadn’t been feeling very well. I was not yet to the interstate when I looked up just in time to see a car attempting to pass numerous other cars, 4 or 5 maybe, and speeding right at me on this 2-lane road I was currently on.

The opposing lane of traffic was nearly bumper to bumper at a speed of at least 45, with no opportunity to try to escape this imminent threat between the vehicles to my left. Regarding the shoulder to my right, it was narrow. I didn’t have much room to contemplate as I took my right tire off the pavement, missing a roll into the ditch by mere inches, as that car and mine nearly collided, and that other vehicle was now in a newly contrived 3rd middle lane.

With endorphins still flooding my neurological system, my first inclination was to turn my car around, follow him, chase him down, whoever he was. But as I started to, I caught myself and began to consider what was turning my car around and chasing down this unknown person to prove? What good would come of it?

Here it becomes necessary to provide a bit of backstory to lend a larger perspective of this illustration and even the known associated risks therein. Because if you know me, or maybe you have already quantified, I am a woman. I am of slight build and stand just slightly over average in height. Most of the time, I am peacefully diplomatic, somewhat reserved, and relatively kind. Even though I may not look the part, some years ago, I started carrying a loaded firearm, often in my car.

This situation came about because of an event that happened back when I was still under the effects of the proverbial pink cloud, a time when I was nearly assaulted within the constraints of my car. I was on another, very busy, two-lane street. I had safely just backed out of a driveway and into the far lane when an angry driver flew up over the hill, laying on his horn from behind.

I flipped him off, looking at him in my rear-view mirror, my middle finger standing slender, confident, and upright. I was poised, taken by surprise, as this derelict needed to be put in place by my indignant disapproval. He then came up next to me, into the opposing traffic, and then in front of me, to come to an abrupt stop suddenly.

With both lanes now congested, I had nowhere to go. I barely rolled my window as that man’s fists flew at me, striking my car several times. As he screamed all sorts of offensive names, his passengers, two other men still in the truck, did absolutely nothing to intervene in this situation. I felt helpless.

From the angle I was sitting in my car, I felt vulnerable and trapped. What if the window breaks? He will smash my face, maybe worse than it’s ever been. Will I recover? Will he kill me? Not a single person attempted to stop, turn around, or help.

Once he finally stopped screaming, threatening, and hitting, he walked back and got into his truck. Still, me again, in a currently rather naïve way of thinking, as I had recently come through to the other side of my withdrawals and the world seemed shiny — people give a shit. They are doing the best they can, and law officers are there to serve and protect when you aren’t doing wrong things. (You know, all sorts of fairytale-like bullshit.) So, with shaky hands and shortness of breath, I took pictures of the back of the

truck as it pulled away, including the license plate. I safely merged into traffic and pulled into a nearby parking lot to call the police. They came. I told them what had happened. The marks remained when I showed them where he had been hitting my car.

There was a small dent from one of the strikes. But it would be his word against mine even if the assailant were to be located. They were unconcerned and didn't even make an effort to pretend to glance at the photos I had taken for evidence. There were no charges for assault, property damage, or even the obstruction of traffic. Frustrated with tears in my eyes, I angrily blurted out, "So maybe I should have had my firearm so I could have shot him in the fucking face."

The cop smugly replied, "as long as it's in the face and not the back of the head." So, of course, now to bring us back to the more recent incident. It is true that I briefly fantasized about pistol-whipping this driver. I wanted to scare him. I wanted to hurt him. Maybe I even wanted to 'shoot him in his fucking face.' I felt justified in doing so. Thankfully, these feelings passed relatively quickly as I remembered that I could have been charged for at least brandishing a firearm, assault, and battery, in addition to all the other terrible things that could happen.

You know the stuff that keeps the prosecuting attorney looking good and our taxes allocated to police enforcement, the "Justice System," the media, working against myself and what I believe in, and I would be the bad guy. And even yet, this would have been better than many other alternatives!

Then I realized I didn't know who was in the vehicle or what was happening in their life. They would be making such a reckless choice to attempt to pass all those other cars. Maybe they were on their way to an emergency? Were they on their way to the hospital trying to save a child? Could they be suffering some neurological episode? There are so many possibilities. I can never know why; it isn't any of my business.

I was being driven purely by ego, wanting to follow them in some attempt to teach them a lesson. Who was I to do such a thing? I battled internally against my self-righteous anger. I was the person not doing anything wrong that they put in danger, and they should know not to do it again. And then, as I learned to realize through working in this AA program. Step 4 has taught me to acknowledge my part in my resentments and consider whether it is my self-esteem, security, ambitions, or sex relations being threatened. There was no longer any actual threat.

I surmised in this current situation that my reasoning behind it was that I wanted to teach them a lesson. I wanted to try and make him understand the possible ramifications of his choices. I wanted control over this situation and was trying to play God. Remembering all this served to remind me, in this case, to stay in my lane!

Step 6 taught me to acknowledge my character defects. Because of that work, I could remember and recognize that my anger is often a mask for fear. I started thinking then, what did this experience offer to teach me? Is it that thank goodness I had stopped checking my email while driving, that replying even using talk to text could contribute to catastrophe?

What if I had been glancing to check another message just at that moment that I got to make that quick decision instead? What happened at that point would be just as much my fault as it may have been theirs. What about my little girl at home? I now appreciate how quickly I have the capacity and abilities to turn my thinking around before acting and how my higher power may present opportunities to teach

me about my priorities, values, and perceptions. What if I had been fidgeting with my Bluetooth because I multitasked my workday, combining meetings and collaborations with travel time.

This is all supposedly in an effort toward the outcome of doing what is best for my family. More time with my daughter and less work at home, taking on as much work as I can maintain because more money gains me better advantages for my family. I need to take responsibility for the burdens I assume and the risk assessments I fail to make.

So, I again revisited the understanding that my higher power has, in fact (mostly) restored my sanity as I came to believe it could, working Step 2. Once again, my higher power has presented an opportunity as evidence of my remaining character defects, granting me another perspective on my desire to have them removed. Praying that 7th Step Prayer, "My Creator, I am now willing that You should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that You now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to You and my fellows.

Grant me strength as I go out from here to do Your bidding." And only then, after stepping back and appreciating the insights that have been presented. I, in gratitude, reflect on how far I have indeed come, that thanks to Step 11, I had worked this resentment before my drive was even over, to learn from it and let it go. I wanted to realize where I was wrong. I needed to remember my honest and desperate desire to do and be better. And I was thankful to make it home to my little girl and continue to care for her.

Hope H.