

In the Margins

I live in a nice suburb with lots of nice houses and fancy yards. Rich gringos always need their lawns taken care of and that's all we do. We do weekly mowing, trimming and mulching. We also repair sprinkler systems, fix broken fences, clean chimneys and replace blown shingles off the roofs. We're a full service company called Green Yard Lawn. I started my business three years ago and worked hard and long hours by myself to get where I am. Now I run a successful business with two trucks and total of five employees, four cousins and one nephew

With two of my cousins I share a mobile home in a trailer park community, the cheapest place to live in this city. The rent is seven hundred and fifty Dollars a month plus utilities. The rent is high but not when you divide it by three. I'm the only one in the company who speaks English and answers the phone. We manage more than thirty yards a day in summer. Most of my customers are from the a few neighborhoods close to one another so we don't have a long drive from one customer to next otherwise with high price of gas it'd be difficult to make money. In summer I can clear about two thousand dollars a month and send \$500 to my family in Vera Cruse. But in winter it's more difficult to make good money. Grass does not grow and my cousins go back to Mexico to have fun with senioritas. There are lots of Mexican girls here too but they cost too much to maintain. In winter I do five to six yards a day by myself and pay the full rent. I can't save money in winter but by the way I manage my finances I get by. I'm very frugal, I don't waste money.

My major expense after rent is food. So I don't do my grocery shopping in my neighborhood. Stores are crowded full of gringos who look at me funny. Once every two weeks I go grocery shopping close to downtown where I can buy meat, vegetables and whatever I need to fill my pantry. In Fiesta I can buy five avocados for one dollar when here in Tom Thumb they sell them for 60 cents each. Onions, tomatoes and jalapenos are three times more expensive here than in Mexican Mercado. Although gas is expensive these days, my total grocery savings justifies the high cost of gas, I just can't afford being wasteful especially in this economy.

Yesterday I had no yards scheduled to mow so I woke up late and around ten o'clock I decided to go shopping. I drove twenty five minutes on highway to get to downtown. When I reached under the huge mix master close to down town I normally make a U-turn and take the service road to the Mexican Mercado to do a bulk of my groceries before I go to the Fiesta. Vicente Fernandez was singing on the radio and I must have been daydreaming because I missed to turn into the dedicated lane for U-turn so I drove to the intersection to make the left turn under the bridge and come back to the north-bound service road. Under three layers of highways I stopped at red light and waited for almost ten minutes and light didn't change. I was the only one needlessly waiting for green and monitoring the U-turn lane ushering cars to the same road I was trying to get to. I felt like this light was programmed to say red for ever to punish me for my negligence. No other car shared my fate, I was alone. I waited another five minutes and nothing happened, the red light was not going to turn green. Something was wrong with the traffic light, it was not functioning. Impatiently I waited another five minutes looking around to see if there were cameras installed on the traffic light poles, there wasn't any in sight. I didn't want to break

the law not only to avoid legal troubles but because I couldn't afford paying the fine. I had bad experiences with cops before and learned my lesson.

One night I was stopped by a cop because I didn't have the license plate on front bumper. I never had one and was never pulled over for that reason but that night I was. The officer said it was the law and he was right. After that night I paid attention to so many cars on streets without the license plate on their front bumper. Then I realized there were so many laws marinated in books waiting to be enforced on people like me. The smartest thing is to keep a low profile and avoid unnecessary brush with the law especially if you're undocumented.

Yesterday under that damn bridge I didn't know what else to do but to break the law. I could not keep waiting the entire day behind a red light so I turned off the loud radio and cautiously made the left turn hoping my felony had gone unnoticed. This traffic violation would've cost me a minimum of one hundred and fifty dollars if I was caught. God knows in winter time, I can't make that kind of money in two days.

As soon as the traffic violation was committed I looked in the rear view mirror and saw no cameras on traffic poles or flashing lights of a police car following me, I sighed in relief. I turned the radio back on and made another right turn after a couple of miles to get on the service road. There I noticed a few police cars blocking the service road. About ten other cars were ahead of me stopped bumper to bumper waiting to be ordered to take the alternate route. It took another ten minutes to slowly drive up closer and see what was going on. An SUV was overturned on the road, two police cars blocked the road and one cop stood in the middle of the road ordering incoming traffic to turn into the only ramp adjacent to the service road. A fire truck with its lights flashing was parked on the side of the road and a few firemen were doing their duties. One was sweeping the shattered windshield off the road and other was guiding a huge tow truck to park close to the capsized vehicle. The accident didn't seem to be a serious one with fatalities.

It was now my turn to turn. I had no idea where this detour would lead to but I had no choice but to obey the officer. So I lowered my gaze to avoid eye contact with the officer in front as my truck was still missing the front bumper license plate and slowly made the turn into the ramp. Then I noticed it was clearly marked for high occupancy vehicles only, a huge diamond was painted on the road. I was the single occupant of the truck. I'd just broken another traffic rule by obeying the lawman on foot.

At least this time I had a good excuse for breaking the law. But if a cop had stopped me in the middle of the busy freeway I had a lot of explaining to do. I knew if I was caught, the cop wouldn't even listen to my story but gave me a ticket and advised me to go to court and explain it to the judge. It would've meant one day of skipping the work and explaining why the violation was not my fault in my broken English to a white judge.

As I was driving in HOV lane I kept looking for a way to go back to my original destination. The damn lane was completely barricaded for protection and to expedite the traffic flow. I kept looking for an exit lane with no luck. I ended up driving all the way back to my own neighborhood before I could exit the HOV lane and finally got off the freeway. I was forced to drive twenty miles back to my home

wasting at least five dollars gas and two hours of my only day off for nothing. I still had to do my grocery shopping.

As angry as I was about my entire morning, the event of today seemed weirdly funny. I was hungry yet too frustrated to drive back to downtown to do my grocery and it seemed senseless to go back to an empty refrigerator. As I was dwelling what to do next driving in the neighborhood close to my mobile home park I noticed a Salvation Army store and turned in the parking on a whim and parked the truck. Why would they build such a store in this town? Rich people don't need salvation they have money, no wonder the parking lot was empty. I went inside just to browse for a few minutes as I had no money to spend on clothing or furniture I didn't need. Prices were all high for a store designed to sell used merchandise to low income customers like myself. I walked out of the store hungrier than before wondering what to do next.

Before I got to my truck I saw a man on the opposite side of the street in a deserted gas station forced a little boy into his truck and hurriedly drove off and disappeared. I could not believe what I saw. His truck was the same year and model as mine, an old white Ford F-150. That was not good. What if someone saw him kidnapping the little boy and gave the description of my truck to police? My God, what an awful day, nothing was going right for me. The smartest thing was to get away from there before I was arrested for nothing. So I jumped into my truck and rushed back home and forgot all about the damn grocery shopping.

This morning I heard the news reporter saying on television, "The first twenty four hours after kidnapping is the most crucial time to recover the missing child. Police is urging citizens who have any information about this crime to contact the law enforcement authorities or FBI immediately."

Hum, maybe I should sell my truck. I can be in a lot of trouble if one of these days cops knock on my door asking question about the missing boy.