

Downturn

by Ted Gross

I had to get somewhere but the problem with driving of course, especially in LA, was you couldn't actually go anywhere.

This was reinforced 30 seconds into it, the right turn out of the apartment, the light, then the left onto Sepulveda . . . and here you were, not even 3:30, and all 3 lanes stopped and plugged like the Hoover Dam.

So this wasn't going to work, terrible idea, except getting out of it was going to take some serious maneuvering, and not one, not two but three drivers gave me the finger and I made it into the far right lane before the next intersection, just shy of Globe Tire and Automotive.

I picked up 8th across PCH, then 6th, and you could probably park by the elementary school since school had let out, and take care of your business.

But there was an idiot double-parked talking through the window to a woman watering her plants.

Guy had room to pull over, but he chose not to. I needed like a foot, foot and a half. I give a little tap to the horn, smile and spread my arms out, but son of a

gun, the guy goes right back to the conversation.

Sheesh.

I pulled up to the guy's bumper and shut the engine and got out.

Rich guy, late model Mercedes, big guy too. The kind you wouldn't be surprised wrestled or played rugby at an eastern college.

I asked the watering lady how her day was going. I told her have a good one and propped myself up on the guy's hood and pulled out my phone. And a little scroll and found a headline of interest and clicked on it.

"Yo f***lips," the guy said. "Get down."

"Hi," I said.

"Get off the car. I'm not going to tell you again."

"Sure," I said. "Just give me a minute." The LA Times sports page came up. The Dodgers at the trading deadline.

The guy looked ready to use his hands. The lady called out, "Terry! Don't do anything."

"Wait a second . . . Terri?" I said. "With an i?"

"I'm calling the police, c***sucker," the guy said.

"That's the best idea you've had. We can finally make some progress here."

I wondered what the dude was going to tell them, and

might as well stick around on the hood and find out.

Meanwhile two more cars were behind mine, and the front person got out.

This guy was older, had a straw hat with some decoration, and Hawaiian shirt and shorts.

“Fellas,” he said. “We need to move these vehicles, *please.*”

And he threw in, kind of sing-songy, “Miles to go before we sleep . . . You know how it is.”

“You say that,” the Mercedes guy said, “like it’s all a big picnic in the park.”

I had to admit, I agreed with Terry(i) on this, we were in the middle of a legitimate confrontation and you don’t come waltzing in all la-di-dah.

“It just seems to me,” the straw hat guy said, “if the front gentleman would merely step down.”

“Yeah?” Terry(i) said. “Why don’t you remove him then.”

“Surely you’re kidding,” straw hat said.

“Let me tell you something,” Terry(i) said, poking a finger, “if you’re as spineless as I can tell you are--and you value your health--you’d be strongly advised to stay out of my business.”

I had to agree. Don’t be the third-man-in from the

cheap seats if you're not going to back it up.

Interesting of course how I *caused* the current problem and now you had Terry(i) mad at the new guy, who for God sakes just wanted to get through.

The car behind straw hat guy was working it and managed to turn around . . . and then straw hat goes back to his car too, which makes sense, just leave it alone.

I should have done that too, at the start, but of course it wouldn't have sat quite right letting someone block you while they ignored you.

So fine, the older guy leaves, where we at?

Except . . . the straw hat guy doesn't turn around, and he has something out of the car, a golf club, pretty hefty one, 4-wood would be my guess . . . and he's coming back toward the front of the Mercedes.

He's going to smash the headlights like they do in the movies, and you'd better extract your hiney off the front end now, you made your point.

What the guy did though was not worry about headlights or windows or putting a dent in the door, he winds up sidearm and lets fly and smashes Terry(i) in the ribs.

Terry(i) didn't double over or stagger around or

attack the guy back. He collapsed like a sack of potatoes being dropped off a truck, and he didn't move and I wondered did the golfer sever his spinal cord or some really scary shit.

The golf guy had a crazed look like he hadn't finished the job, and the garden lady screamed and ran out there and after a moment the guy put the club down.

Guy'd gone into a trance and I knew the feeling, you did get to the point of no return . . . but man, you still needed to control yourself, keep your poise, Jeez, didn't you?

Some neighbors had gathered and it was a good time to go, except golf guy was blocking me and I asked would you mind, and the guy got in his car and gave me room, and screw the maneuvering, I backed it all the way to the intersection and across.

There was a siren in the distance and you still had that errand, might as well finish it off, don't waste a trip.