

## ***“License and Registration, Please”***

Peter Grumbacher November 2021

I flunked my driver’s exam four times. The last time I took it I passed only because I had gone through all the mistakes the first three times; there were no more for me to make, and I never repeated one so I knew I’d pass. When I took it the first time I flunked before I even opened the car door. I think it was because I walked into the street to get to the car before it was necessary and therefore walked parallel to oncoming traffic.

Having nothing to do with what I just wrote, my driving experiences involved traffic tickets of one form or another.

It was Spring break so there was no urgency to be super-extra-careful when passing schools. I drove by Springer Middle School and came to a screeching halt about a thousand feet past the school. I had seen a patrol car in the parking lot. I knew I was driving too fast and had that sinking feeling that the officer knew it as well. All of a sudden I hear the siren. He careened out of the lot and he, too, came to a screeching halt right behind me.

He got out of the car, approached my window with a smile on his face, and said, *“How’d ya know?”* Maybe he said, *“This has never happened to me before that a driver stops before I stop him.”* Maybe then he said, *“How’d ya know?”* I asked him why have a chase when I realize that I had been in the wrong. *“I figured I’d wait for you. If you didn’t show up I’d leave.”*

*“License and registration, please,”* he said with a grin on his face. Well, I already had those at hand...more of a grin.

He went back to his chariot and after what seemed to be ten months, came back. *“This is just a warning...and I’ll have lots to talk about when I get back to the station!”*

And then there was the time I went a bit too fast on Miller Road. The cop who stopped me knew the script from a thousand television shows, *“Late for a funeral, sir?”* I was late for a meeting but I chose to keep my mouth shut except to tell him I was clergy. Sometimes that helps, but not that time. *“Oh, I just gave a ticket to an Episcopalian priest. I’m open to any faith.”* And when I walked into court determined to fight the ticket there was Father So-and-So. I asked him if he had been stopped on Miller Road. Before he could ask me how I knew, he figured it out.

And then I was stopped outside Milford, Delaware. One of my congregants was Delaware’s Chief Magistrate so I asked him what to expect. *“Tell them you have questions to ask the trooper, assuming he even shows up. If he doesn’t, you’re free*

*to go. But ask him these three questions: (whatever they were). And be careful, those 'judges' down there don't like New Castle County people. They won't take a check and he'll probably invite you to fight the ticket 'because you've got clever lawyers up there.'"*

When I entered his court I noticed he had a major tear in his robe. Before I could ask the questions, the officer answered them. I had "no further questions, your Honor." I didn't even have the first question let alone "further" ones. The judge said to me, "*Oh, I see you're a rabbi. Well, we usually don't take checks but I'll take yours, and if you want to fight the ticket....*" and said virtually the exact words my magistrate-congregant told me he'd say. When I walked into the other office to pay the clerk, I realized the clerk was none other than the judge.

Upon my return to Wilmington, I called the CM. All he could do was laugh knowing the script would be as he told me it would be.

But the best one ever was being stopped on I-70 just before the exit to the Baltimore beltway. We had just returned from North Carolina and still had a couple of hours to drive before arriving home. Suzy and my three young kids were in the mini-van. When we saw the flashing lights we assumed they were aimed at another driver as we couldn't figure out what I had done. The officer came out of the patrol car, asked for my license and registration, went back to the car and after a while returned to my window. "*You know why I stopped you?*" he asked. "*Honestly, officer, we can't figure it out.*" His reply? "*I'll tell you why I stopped you. I'm stopping everybody. I have to go to a dinner I don't want to go to so this way I can procrastinate. Here's your license and registration. Have a nice day and drive carefully.*"

Thank God I had witnesses because no one – absolutely no one – would believe that story. It sure makes life interesting.