

My Car Accident

In 1959, not too long after arriving in Berkeley, I was driving my '49 Ford through an intersection. As I entered the intersection, a bicycle plowed into the driver's side of my car and the handlebar penetrated the windshield. I applied my brakes, and then got out of the car to see a young boy lying in the street with his bicycle beside him. Needless to say I was extremely upset. Many of the neighbors came running up and were very excited and yelled at me "look what you have done!". Fortunately, it happened that the young fellow was not seriously injured.

The police arrived and asked me to write down on a piece of paper everything I knew about the accident, including my speed. I wasn't really sure of my speed so I put down 30 mph which I thought was approximately correct. I described being in the intersection when the bicyclist hit the side of my car. I was immediately issued the citation because in an unmarked intersection with no stop or yield signs, the speed limit is automatically 15 mph.

The young boy, named Joe, was taken to the hospital to be checked out. I went there as well and met his father. To make a long story short, we became good friends, and I visited them many times. Now comes the interesting part of the story. When I appeared in court for my citation, the judge announced before beginning proceedings, that anyone who wanted to, could work off their fine for the City of Berkeley at the rate of \$20 a day. When I stood before the judge, he sentenced me to a \$10 fine. As a student, I had little money in those days, so I asked to work off my fine for the City of Berkeley. He then sentenced me to work 1/2 day. I was then given a form to take to the court clerk. The clerk said that since I was an "emancipated minor", I would need to get my parents' signature before I could work for the city of Berkeley. Well, as you might imagine, I didn't want my parents to know about all this, so I signed father's signature on the form and gave it to the clerk later.

I then received a notice to report to the city nursery to work off my fine. My first job was to clean the urinals in the men's room. Then a truck pulled up with many different people who are working off their fines, and I was told to get into the back of the truck. Everyone was complaining about how many days they had to work. When I said I was "in for a half day," they all laughed. I was taken to a grass median strip, given a bag and metal-tipped spear and told to collect all the paper in median. Finally, 12 o'clock rolled around, the truck came back, picked me up and took me back to the city nursery. I had worked off my fine for the city of Berkeley and could get back to my studies!