

Hauling Secrets

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What follows is an edited entry from “Hauling Secrets” an anonymous job-blog written by a handful of waste haulers in the Upper Mid-west. (haulingsecrets.com). The site offers interesting entries on bizarre on-the-job findings, as well as reflections on the cosmology of the waste stream in our over-developed civilization.

... so I'm driving down this stretch of local highway that goes abruptly from 50 mph to 35 mph speed limit. To get down to 35 mph as soon as the new limit is posted, most vehicles would have to brake a little bit. None ever do. It's 8 o'clock at night, no other cars nearby, and I'm at about 40 mph coasting down from 50 to 35, when the light in front of me changes to yellow.

I start to brake, but it's February and I've become accustomed to winter driving conditions, so instead of slamming on the breaks and possibly fishtailing or stopping a little bit past the line, I decide to coast through the light. I see it cycle to red a split second before it goes out of view past my windshield. The next thing I notice is the flashing lights of a police car behind me.

When the officer approaches my window, I immediately hand him all the required paperwork. Politely addressing him as “Sir,” I tell him that I tried to stop. He accuses me of accelerating through the light, which is simply untrue. I'm a little puzzled. Either the officer is lying, or he hadn't seen the incident very well, in which case he should not be making that kind of accusation. I reply politely something to the effect that if he'd been looking he would clearly have seen my brake lights.

He then accuses me of speeding, which is also untrue. I deny this also. Then he asks me if I've had any drugs. I say “No sir.” He asks again, slowly. Again I say no. He then asks if I have anything I shouldn't have in my car. I say firmly, “No sir.”

He asks again.

Perplexed, I quickly scan the empty seats of my car, look back at the officer, and say, “No, sir. I don't have anything I shouldn't have in my car.” He asks, “Are you sure?” I say, “Yes, sir, I'm sure.”

Then comes the kicker: The officer shines his flashlight in my face and says, “You're saying one thing, but your eyes are telling me another.” Thinking that it must have been my quick scan of the empty car seats that seemed suspicious, I explain to him, “Sir, I'm nervous.” (After all, there I am giving a man with a gun an answer he clearly does not want to hear.)

He then asks, “Would you mind if I searched your vehicle?” I think about it for a second and reply, calmly, “in fact, I would mind. I would rather you not search my vehicle.” I realize now that this is not the textbook phrase to use to refuse a search from a police officer, but at the time it seemed a reasonable enough way of asserting what I assumed to be my rights. But the officer responds by immediately asking me to step out of my vehicle. I do so with no argument or hesitation.

He pats me down, makes me lift up my jacket and shirt, and asks me several more times if I've been using or possess drugs. I reiterate my denial. He seems to be annoyed that I'm giving him a hard time, instead of the

other way around. in a tone that conveys that annoyance, he asks if I'm going to make him have to call for the drug-sniffing dogs. (His choice of words here, and in general the subtleties of police language, is important: if I am going to make him have to call ...) When I question whether or not he's allowed to do that to make me wait there, he says in a commanding tone "You WILL wait here!" and heads back to his car with my paperwork.

At this point it seems I have no choice but to submit to whatever it is the police have in mind for me, despite any protest I offer.

As he goes back to his car, another, younger officer walks up to me. This is the first time I realize that another car has pulled up behind the first officer's car. The younger officer studies my appearance and says, in a condescending way, "Didn't get much sleep last night, did you?" Baffled, I ask him what he means. "Your eyes," he answers. Only then do I realize that he might be referring to what remained of a black eye I'd received from a soccer game the week before. I explain this to the officer and try to show him that my right eye doesn't have the same yellowish bag underneath, but he seems to care little about my explanation as he acknowledges it with a patronizing "whatever-you-say" kind of nod.

Cop #2 is standing there, apparently to make sure that I stay put while Cop #1 calls for dogs. I appeal to the younger officer, who seems about my age, to call off what he will soon find out is a big waste of everyone's time. When I plead with him to tell the first officer that I have a black eye if that was the only thing that was keeping me there, he suggests that I smell like marijuana. Again, I'm baffled. The first officer hadn't mentioned smelling anything. I invite Cop #2 to come and smell me as close as he wants, since I don't even smoke cigarettes. He declines my offer, indicating that his nose isn't functioning properly and gesturing in the first officer's direction to suggest that it was the first officer's suspicions I had aroused, not his. I appeal to him, saying that it's terribly cold outside and we both have better things to do. He appears to level with me, agreeing that it was cold outside and saying that he didn't want to be there either. Yet he remains there.

Finally, frustrated at my apparent powerlessness over what I perceive to be the imminent unlawful search of my vehicle, I give the first bit of disrespect I have until now been only getting and say: "Spare me the good-cop/bad-cop bullshit."

Now, I'm not trying to be all bad-ass because I swore at a cop. I realize that that was an extremely stupid thing to say, and I'm actually embarrassed about it, but if you'd have been there and had seen the way they were treating me, you might understand. Anyway, after I say it, for the first time the officer becomes interested in what I have to say and assumes a more animated posture to bellow, "Don't you get lippy with me!"

I see that I have aroused something in him and quickly apologize for my "lippiness" and explain that I'm frustrated. He makes it clear to me that my options are to have the car searched by hand now, or to wait for the dogs to come later. Since I have an appointment to make, I give up and tell him to tell the first officer that I consent to being searched now.

By this time the first officer should have pulled up my information to find a clean driving record and no criminal history. Having been employed to drive trucks for over three years, I can say without any exaggeration that I have logged more drive-time than anyone I know my age. And in my many years of driving experience, I've had only one previous infraction, a minor speeding ticket I got over four years ago.

Still, while Cop #2 searches my car, Cop #1 comes back and asks me several more times if I smoke marijuana. He says, as a kind of baiting tactic I assume, that he doesn't care if I have a small amount in my possession for personal use. I keep assuring him that I have none and that the other officer would find nothing in my car, when all of a sudden I realized that there was something to be found in my car...

Here's where my hauling job comes in: a few months before this night, me and my old partner L.B.G. are doing our last job of the day, a cleanout of a two-car garage filled with renovation debris. All scrap wood in a giant messy pile. It takes us a long time to get to the bottom of the pile, where we discover, inexplicably, sitting there on the concrete floor ... a dildo, nicely-sized and quite lifelike, with veins running along its rubbery length.

So naturally I pick the thing up with my work-gloves and start taunting L.B.G. with it. He pretends to be disgusted at first, but then becomes more &- more playful. This little game continues as we finish the job and return our truck to its assigned parking spot, where my car is waiting to take us back to the office to turn in the day's paperwork. As for the dildo, it ends up in my car, underneath the passenger seat where L.B.G. had left it, completely

forgotten until that moment in this story when, faced with the reality of a cop searching my car, I'm forced-to think of what he might find mingled with the coins and dustbunnies underneath my seat.

I decide to tell Cop #1 a much lighter version of that story. I start by telling him I'm a hauler and we find some interesting things, and sometimes we keep those interesting things, and, well, the other day-

But Cop #1 interrupts me with a stone-faced look and says, "You're sure you haven't been smoking anything?" I assure him I haven't, and we talk until Cop #2 suddenly jumps out of my car, shouting, "Hey, he's got a dildo in there!"

Those words, so informational on paper, aren't quite as memorable to read as was the way that he said them. And the expression on his face at that moment. But somehow the words had the effect of immediately defusing the situation. The tension left the air and I laughed, feeling relieved. as one cop (the one who's been questioning me) walks the other cop (the one who's been doing the searching) back to-their cars.

While I wait for them to come back, all I can do is laugh as I think about that precise moment when Cop #2 had to feel around under my seat, grasp that firm, pink shaft with his hand, and then pull it out to see what he's holding. Thinking about this, I am happy.

When they come back, after a few minutes, they're more polite to me, although they still give me a ticket for running a red light, which really was worth it in the end.

As a public service to readers, Smidge offers the following URL: www.flexourrights.org/traffic_stop_scenario

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