

# Dear Terry

By Linda Mauk

Editor code 109 Police Officer's Newsletter

Dear Terry,

Gosh, I don't know quite where to start. First off, I understand your anger. I'm angry, too. The crime rate is climbing out of sight and it seems like nobody cares. I care, Terry. Most cops do. See Terry, nobody would put on a badge and a gun and purposely subject themselves to derision, abuse, ulcers and physical danger in order to put 4 million dollars a year at the disposal of City Council. You don't exactly get a lot of awards or recognition doing this job. So you see, most of us depend on the really good feeling we get when we take a dangerous destructive criminal off the street. Or save a life. Or spot some guy we know is up to no good and at least make our presence felt so maybe he decides this isn't such a good night to pull a stick-up or burglary after all. This is satisfying. Its also fun.

Traffic tickets are not fun. No kidding. As a matter of fact, they are a pain in the place you sit down on. Drunk drivers aren't bad. I mean, they aren't fun because they have a tendency to throw up on you and urinate in your car and try to remove your teeth with their feet. But drunk drivers kill more people than stick-ups, so at least there is satisfaction in knowing you got him off the street. But regular tickets? Not fun.

Let's talk about that. You said: "Every patrolman is under pressure to write a large number of tickets every week. His job, his promotions . . . depend on it" Terry, that's ludicrous. Other than special traffic cars of which there are very few, nobody cares. I mean its silly. Look, your average district patrol officer, the guy you're talking about, writes maybe two a day on the average. Some days he doesn't write any. Five is a lot. If he wrote ten he'd be an oddity. More than that and his sergeant is going to want to know what's with all the tickets and tell him to start patrolling his neighborhoods more. Honest, I saw just that happen to a guy in District Four.

Terry, Terry, Terry. We aren't sitting on those corners to put little marks in the "moving violations" box. You know. I got tired of spending practically every afternoon on the same corner writing accident reports. You want to talk money? These days even a minor fender-bender is going to cost at least \$500.00. We won't even mention injuries. So, like I said, I got tired of

writing those reports and always issuing the same violation: Taking the Right of Way on a Left Turn. You know what I did, Terry? I sat on that corner. I surely did. Not all day, but a lot. And I wrote that violation every time I saw it. I wrote a lot of tickets on that corner. A lot. And in a few weeks I was writing maybe one or two accidents a month, instead of three or four accidents a week. It wasn't fun. But it was part of my job.

Okay, listen up. This is what we are taught in the academy. This is also what is true: "The purpose of issuing a traffic citation is to get voluntary compliance with the law." Voluntary compliance. See Terry, if everybody simply obeyed the traffic laws that are on the books, 99% of all accidents would never occur. That's a lot of lives and heartache and money that could be saved.

One last word on tickets. If I stop ten violators, I write maybe half of them. The other half I warn. Terry, if I wrote every violation I saw I could write fifty tickets a day, no sweat. And I sure wouldn't have to wait for you on any corner.

Now I really want to talk about the burglaries. You threw a bunch of figures out. I don't know where you got them but I won't argue that here. However, you said: "Among the things the police don't do: they don't dust your house for fingerprints . . . they don't go door-to-door in your neighborhood." Who doesn't?

Fingerprints. In January our crime lab responded to 1218 crime scenes. January is not the busy season. 85-90% of those calls were burglaries. Its their most frequent call. Terry, they were not there to play canasta with the victim. They were looking for prints. At about 1000/month, the Denver Police Crime Lab responds to over 12,000 business and residential burglaries a year. To take prints, photograph footprints, take blood samples where the burglar sometimes cuts himself breaking out a window. Now, Terry, I don't want to offend you, but that is a pretty ignorant statement you made there. The only thing I can think of is that you, yourself, had a burglary and the officer didn't call for the lab. Look, Terry. They don't just stick a uniform on us and put a pen in our hands with the admonition: "GO

YE FORTH AND PRODUCE REVENUE!!" They train us. Really. For months. Then they put us into cars with Field Training Officers and they train us for some more months. Part of the job of that highly trained officer who came to investigate your burglary, is to determine if there is a possibility that prints were left on a printable surface. If not, no reason to call the lab. I've called for prints plenty of times. I've not called for them, too. Hey, I'm not saying I'm perfect or all other cops are. Cops are individuals. But you have a pretty weird view of policework. As far as neighborhood investigation, I knocked on a lot of neighbors doors. I was trained to.

Terry, those same burglars aren't committing all those burglaries because we don't catch them. We do. Over and over again. Because if he's a juvenile, and 90% of all burglars are, they don't do anything to him. I mean nothing. If he's an adult you have to pick him up 5, 6, 10, times before he's put away to do any time.

Terry, I want to serve and protect you. Its the job I came here to do. And its getting harder all the time.

Consider:

A suspect charged with murder who is out on bond awaiting trial on two previous murders.

A juvenile charged simultaneously with 125 felonies who was placed, to await trial, in a non-lock-up facility. I think he stayed five minutes. He committed three more burglaries before we caught him again.

A police department that is the same size now as it was five years ago. They assume that the city population froze, I guess.

That one-quarter of this city, from Sixth Avenue south and Downing St. west, from 3:00 am to 11:00 am is patrolled by a grand total of twelve police officers and a couple of sergeants.

Terry we are not the enemy. Yes, changes need to be made. But its not corruption that's the problem. Its politics and bureaucratic bull. We want what you want.

Sincerely,  
Linda L. Mauk

P.S. Please Write.

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