



"I talked about it yesterday with my teacher," Anne said, "and she said the laws are made to protect everybody"

## Go Fight City Hall

By CHARLES EINSTEIN

GEORGE LAWRENCE and his eight-year-old daughter Anne had a fine time at the Bronx Zoo. They saw the animals, Anne rode on a pony, and bought a pinwheel which, when she stuck it out of the car window on the ride back to their suburban home, went round and round like crazy.

But she did not give her total attention to the pinwheel. Just as they had crossed one intersection, on one of the side streets leading away from the zoo, Anne turned to her father. "Daddy! There's a policeman friend of yours!" she said.

"I have no policemen friends," George Lawrence said hollowly, instinctively braking the car. "What was it?"

"A policeman shouted and waved. Look, back there. On the sidewalk. He's still waving."

"Oh-oh," George said. He pulled the car over to the curb. He waited. The patrolman came around to George's side of the car.

George looked out at him. "Anything wrong, officer?" he said.

"You run red lights often?" the policeman said. "It was just changing," George said.

"That's what they all say," the policeman said. Anne said nothing the rest of the way home. This did not bode well.

George told his wife about the ticket that night after Anne had gone to bed. "I have to go before the magistrate," he said. "Next Tuesday."

"What will the fine be?" his wife asked.

George shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "First offense—maybe three dollars."

At that point they heard an all-too-familiar sound. Anne had waked up. She was crying.

Mrs. Lawrence went in to see what was the matter. Shortly, she returned.

"Better go in and talk to her. She says you're going to go to jail for speeding."

George went into Anne's room. Anne was sitting up in bed.

"You got a ticket for speeding, didn't you, Daddy?"

"No," George said, "you never get a ticket for speeding from a foot patrolman." He sat down on the edge of Anne's bed. "You see, honey, only policemen riding in patrol cars give you tickets for speeding, because they have to follow you for a while and watch their own speedometers to make sure you really *are* speeding, and besides, a patrolman on the street wouldn't be able to catch up to you unless he had a car too. So this policeman didn't give me the ticket for speeding, because he was on foot, and—"

"What other kinds of tickets are there?"

"Oh," George said, "parking, and—"

"Were you parking?"

"No. I went through a red light."

"But the light was changing."

"I know it."

"Then why do you have to have a ticket?"

"There is an old expression," George said to her, "called 'go fight city hall.' It is too late to explain this to you tonight. But if you plead not guilty to a thing like this it means you have to go back to court again, and it really isn't worth it."

"So now you're going to go to jail. For something you didn't do."

"Look, Anne," George said, "going to court and going to jail are two different things. In this case all I'll have to do is pay something called a fine."

"Is that what it says on your ticket?"

"I have the ticket in my pocket," George said. He snapped on the light and took out the summons. "Here's what it says. 'A plea of guilty to this charge is equivalent to a conviction after trial. If you are convicted, not only will you be liable to a penalty, but in addition . . .'" His voice trailed off.

"In addition?" Anne said.

"That's just the way tickets are printed," George said. "Believe me, I'm not going to jail."

Anne began to cry again.

Mrs. Lawrence came to the door of the room and said to her husband, "Anne's out of school Tuesday—a teachers' convention or something. Why don't you take her with you? Then she will *know* you're not going to jail."

George took Anne with him to the courthouse in the Bronx, and Anne was visibly impressed. There was a long line of violators, and a bailiff stalked the corridor, intoning, like a circus barker, "Parking to the left. Speeding, running a signal light, and *de*-fective hand brakes to the right. All others straight ahead to Room four-oh-four. Parking to the left. Speeding, running a signal light, and *de*-fective hand—"

THE WAIT TOOK the better part of an hour, and Anne sat there beside her father, never saying a word, listening to the drone of the magistrate and the ring of the cash register close by, where the fines were being paid.

At last, George's name was called, and he took Anne by the hand and advanced to the bench.

"Have your license ready and opened," the court attendant told him. He took George's license and handed it up to the bored-looking magistrate, along with the police copy of the summons. "Running a signal light on Webster Avenue," the attendant said, and looked at George's license. "First offense."

The magistrate nodded. "How do you plead?" he said.

"Not guilty!" It was the voice, not of George Lawrence, but of his daughter Anne, loud and clear.

The magistrate peered through his glasses. Something moved him. Perhaps he was bored. Perhaps word had reached him that one of the reporters from the press room downstairs had dropped into his courtroom for a moment, and this might be a human-interest story that would get the magistrate's name in the papers. "Young lady," the magistrate said to Anne, "who are you?"

"Anne," the little girl said. "Anne Lawrence. This is my daddy. The policeman said he drove the car across the street when the light was red."

"I see," the magistrate said solemnly. "Were you with him?"

"Yes," Anne said. She paused for a moment, thinking, and then added, "Your Honor."

The judge smiled, in spite of himself. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Eight, Your Honor."

"And you say your daddy didn't go through the red light?"

"It was just turning red," Anne said, "and I talked about it yesterday with my teacher Mrs. Grace, and she said the laws are made to protect everybody."

"And so they are," the magistrate said, "and so they are."

"Well, then," Anne said, "there weren't any cars coming from the right or the left on that cross street, and the light was just beginning to change, and if my daddy had stopped our car for that light he would have had to stop in a hurry, and I was in the front seat, and I might have hit my head on the front of the car. And then I would have been hurt, and this way we weren't hurting anybody else, and the laws are made to protect everybody, so if I was hurt it would have been against the laws." She smiled. "Your Honor."

The judge grinned from ear to ear, and George Lawrence felt a sudden exultation. He was going to get off without even a fine. Not only that, the way Anne put it, he was in the right.

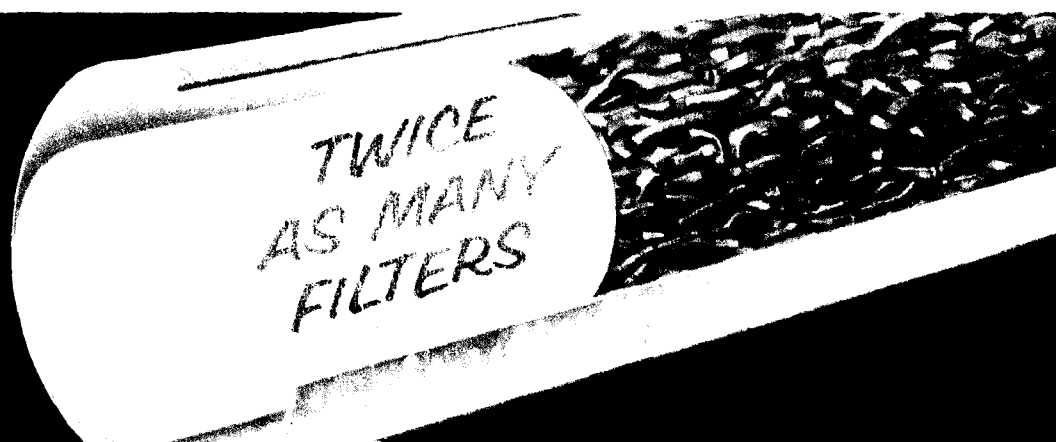
Pleased and nodding his head, the judge leaned forward. He wanted to test this eight-year-old some more. "Of course," he said, in what now was mock solemnity, "that was in a twenty-five-mile-an-hour zone, and at twenty-five miles an hour you can stop a car without hurting anybody. Or do you have an answer for that, too, young lady?"

"Of course I have an answer," Anne said. "My daddy was doing forty."

THE END

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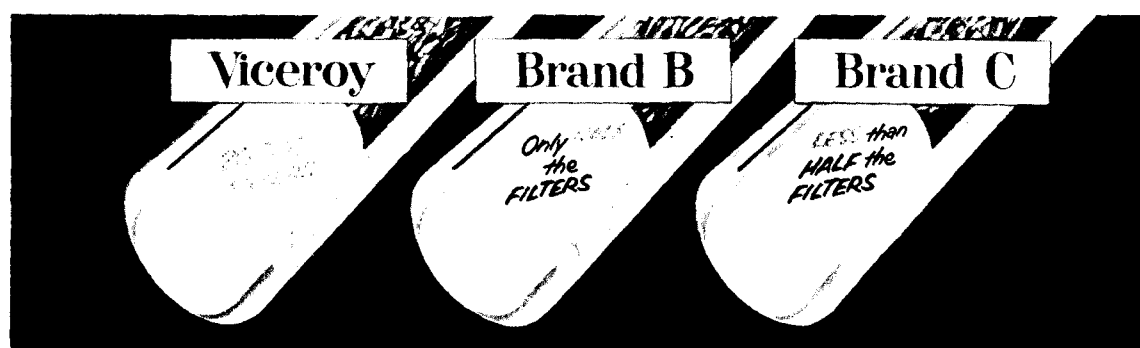


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