

EAST VALLEY OPINIONS

When I was a freeway and you were the main drag

I got cussed out good the other day in a parking lot.

Having recounted the event ad nauseam to friends, I still don't know quite what my offense was.

What happened was this: I needed to pick up a package at the office building on the corner of Scottsdale and Camelback roads. You may know the place ... right across from the Robinsons-May and normally a hotbed of shopping activity on a Saturday. However, I was there on a Wednesday afternoon and, though I generally avoid malls like Sheriff Joe Arpaio avoids a media vacuum, I was pretty sure I'd snag a parking spot for my five-minute stopover.

Sure enough, I'm pulling down an aisle in the lot and see this: one SUV pulling out in front of me, one truck way down the aisle apparently waiting for a spot and one other truck pulling out of a spot down there by the waiting truck. Well, as you can imagine with all the trucks and SUVs, visibility wasn't great — but good enough for me to see that two open spaces and two waiting vehicles equaled parking satisfaction for all concerned.

I idled for maybe 20 seconds while my spot opened up and proceeded to pull in. As I get out of my car, Mr. Waiting Truck comes zooming forward, window down and face all lathered up. My anatomy, my sexual orientation and some other things I'm not really sure about all came into question in the next moments. I went back to my car and got out the digital camera I now keep handy for such "special occasions," but this jacked-up divo had hightailed it out, toot-not-so-sweet.

I remembered an incident a few weeks before. I was angling my way through the Lakes Village strip shopping center in my best Green Hornet method ("Back streets only, Kato!") I'm moving along maybe eight mph, toward a con-



JIM VEIHDEFFER

Special for The Republic

struction site on the corner and make a perfunctory stop at a four-way stop. Yeah, I know, it was probably not a perfect textbook driving-school stop, but my car did manage to hesitate between "stop" and "go" for a good half second. A woman coming at a right angle at her own stop sign apparently didn't like my tactic, flipped up a finger, yelled out that I didn't stop to her satisfaction and then called me a "freak." Ouch.

OK, I'm not exactly known for my own patience in driving matters, but I'm getting a little tired of being cussed out, birded and honked at. Especially in no-harm, no-foul situations.

I get especially ... um, aggravated, shall we say, when I get honked at *after the fact*. See, what good does that do, folks?

So here are a few new rules of the road I'd like to propose that we give a try.

■ If you see someone about to bump into your precious SUV, sure, go ahead and honk him. Someone drifting into your lane? Honk away. Got a friend whose attention you need? A little toot will do it. But when someone cuts you off, it does no good to blare your horn. The evil is already done and all you can accomplish now is to get a face-load of something you won't like.

■ If you see someone dawdling in the far left lane of the freeway, it's OK to flash lights — once — provided you haven't already scooted up his muffler. Give them a chance to do the right thing. This isn't France.

■ The light turns green and the guy in front forgets to go? One polite horn tap is allowed.

■ If you're getting to your car in a crowded parking lot and you see people lined up waiting for spots, try to move things along for crying out loud. Inventory your grocery coupons on your own time.

■ Did I mention staying out of the fast lane if you're intent on being a slug?

■ When the light turns green and you plan to make a left turn, pull into the intersection so at least two cars can get through.

■ What is it about these people who hunch up over the steering wheel with their knuckles all scrunched into a death grip and looking like they'd rather go to a Cardinals home game than move their steely glare one inch from the center line of the windshield? I guess that's not actually a rule ... it just bugs me.

I've got a few more but let's try to absorb these before we get into Driving 201. In the meantime, here's an example of How To Play Nice. I was in an uncustomary pokey mood as I got ready to turn onto the 101 one morning. I saw a vehicle coming up quickly behind me on Indian Bend so when I got to the on-ramp I sort of pulled to the right and tried to wave him on. As he passed I saw his passenger raise a hand. Fearing the worst, I put down my cell phone, breakfast sandwich and Palm Pilot (just kidding!) and tried to look small. I saw the driver's hand come out from his window with the unmistakable thumb-and-forefinger "OK" gesture. See how it works?

It would also help if you tried to not be in front of me on the road.

Jim Veihdeffer is a freelance public relations writer living in Tempe. Author of the e-book, *Stories I Never Told My Family*, he can be reached at Veeds.J@aol.com.