

Reverse Car Jacking on Main Street
By Charles R. Scott
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Car jacking, that violently sudden process whereby a car owner is separated from his ride, usually at gunpoint and sometimes lethal, was once the subject of many a media headline when the crime first gained popularity in the 1980's – perhaps in tandem with the first wave of inner city drug epidemics. However, today car jacking is common to our culture and no longer generates media headlines, but merely appears as another listing in the police blotters, at most.

So what happens when one is witness to a Reverse Car Jacking? Yes, a reversal whereby a car owner is reunited with his car based on a sudden act of love, perhaps even a violently cheerful act of love by a complete stranger. An act whereby the car owner is perhaps guilty of the crime – e.g. lack of gratitude, racial profiling, self-centeredness.

The following is an eyewitness account to a Reverse Car Jacking that took place in downtown Ridgefield, CT, during the late summer of 2005. It did not make any media headlines and occurred at such a speed that even my sidewalk companion did not fully comprehend the spontaneous act of love witnessed. Even I did not fully understand what happened until it was over, since I had never heard of a Reverse Car Jacking. But, then again, I live in Ridgefield, CT – an area known for being family-friendly and rich with smart, caring, sensitive people dedicated to community and old-fashioned values. And yet, even in this New England Yankee backdrop, I was not prepared for what I am about to share with you now. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it. But it was true, and I did see it.

It was a beautiful Tuesday evening in August on Main Street as my wife and I were out walking our Guide Dog Puppy in Training, VanDyke – a wildly loving eight-month-old male Labrador at the time. His toasted-marshmallow coloring and winning tail-wagging personality has always been a huge hit with strangers on Main Street, especially families with little people. And this evening was no exception.

As my wife was distracted handling VanDyke on his leash and looking left towards some store windows, I just happened to be looking to the right side of Main Street. We had just passed the library walking south towards the Chez Lenard hot dog stand, across the street from CVS and the Cortina Shop. It was here that the Reverse Car Jacking took place.

While the summer sun was starting to give way to the evening twilight and a gentle breeze, musical sounds from the live concert behind us in the park resonated off in the near distance. To understand the balance of this account, it is important to understand whence the music came from as its harmonic backdrop is significant to the Reverse Car Jacking.

Since 2002, cultural town leadership has been sponsoring summer concerts on Tuesday evenings in Ridgefield's downtown park, Ballard Park, under the umbrella of CHIRP (i.e., Concert Happenings in Ridgefield's Parks). These CHIRP events bring in a wide variety of musical

talent from many genres (e.g. country, folk, Latin, solo acoustic, jazz, rock, etc). On this particular evening, August 23rd, they featured a band from Mexico, Sones de Mexico.

Now most musicians will confess that whenever they gig, they like to invite their family, friends, and groupies to be part of the audience to share and support. And while we can talk about globalization, the truth is that different cultures and different regions still retain differences in appearances, manners, sensibilities, et al. And August 23rd was no exception.

The concerts typically start around 7 PM and end around 9 PM. No dogs are allowed in the park – thus my wife and I were strolling by, but with appreciative ears listening to the Mexican folk grooves bouncing along Main Street. Coming down the opposite direction on the opposite side of the street was a young tribe that looked out of place in Ridgefield. They had colors and oversized clothing that might have been more at home in an urban hip-hop environment, but that was just an outside observation. They had some women with baby strollers, some older grandparents, and a mix of others, but mostly appeared to be in their late-teens / early-twenties.

There was one young man, seemingly typical for the hip-hop crowd. Baggy pants, hooded sweatshirt, a tad gruff, short cropped hair, but a huge smile. He seemed to be very much enjoying the wonderful evening stroll as they appeared to be heading toward the park concert. Their garb suggested to me that they shared kinship with part of the band. I say this not to stereotype, but in part because Ridgefield is also one of those places whereby it is more common to see SUVs, blonde hair, Wall Street Journals, and cafe lattes than it is to witness hip-hop types. Note, I'm also not referring to the junior high school-ers who tend to stroll Main Street after school mimicking a pseudo hip-hop look, but I digress.

The man whom I mentioned caught my eye because of his genuine joy for the evening. And it was while observing him but for a moment, that I spied him commit a Reverse Car Jacking.

While I had been watching across the street, I saw another man, one who was a typical white bread, uptight, Wall Street-er, get out of his car – a nondescript, beige four-door sedan – could have been a Mercedes as easily as a Lexus or a Camry, as they all tend to blend in these days. He parked his car in the last spot on the side opposite me and was walking in my direction (yes, jaywalking) and seemed really moody.

All of a sudden, I see his car rolling backwards, about to go right into the traffic lighted four-way intersection, and at the same time, I see our hip-hop hero jump down the small hillside, fly down the street, open the car door, one foot on the inside of the driver side, the other foot hopping on the outside of the door trying to stop and/or steer the car to safety.

The grumpy middle-aged white dude turned back, was aghast to see his car going backwards and that a hip-hop dude was now behind the wheel, and rushed to his car. By the time he got to the car, the hip-hop guy had found the parking brake and brought the car to a stop. He got out of the driver's side, leaving the door open for the grumpy guy to take over.

The smile and pride that the hip-hop guy had was undeniable and radiated more glow than the setting sun. He proceeded to bow to the grumpy guy, much like a Tibetan Monk might do, with both hands folded in prayer-like manner, a big smile, and a gentle leaning forward from the hip, as if to say, "Blessings to you, and you're welcome." With that, he proceeded back up the hill to reunite with his tribe. You could see them all clamoring with excitement and honor as they continued to stroll into the park to hear their friends play.

What really got me, though, was the reaction of the man who almost lost his car and caused an accident or seriously hurt someone by his carelessness (or lack of proper car maintenance).

He never smiled, never said thank you, but instead was this stiff reptilian who just got in his car and sped off. Maybe he was in shock. Maybe he was preoccupied and was scared. Maybe he had heaviness in his heart from recently losing his job or having a sick wife, or perhaps was diagnosed with dreadful disease himself. I know not what stopped him from showing gratitude. A smile would have been great. A thank you even better. Perhaps reaching into his pocket and providing some beer-n-pizza change for his car-saving friend, even better still. But none of this happened.

As he drove away, I noticed he had NY plates. Maybe it's just me, but over the years, whenever I've heard or witnessed obnoxious traffic behavior (e.g. hurried honking, cutting in front of others, illegal parking, speeding, flipping fingers, etc.) almost always there is the NY license plate common denominator.

Don't get me wrong, I've seen said bad road manners with CT plates too, it's just that I'm reminded of a comment heard on a Hawaiian dive boat about how New Yorkers (and others from the East Coast) are tweaked. "Chuck, whenever anybody comes out for the week on our dive boats, we don't talk to them for three days. We leave them be since it takes them a couple of days to shake their NY tweakedness. After about three days they become human again and we can talk to them then, but usually not before then."

One of our Nations great literary minds—I believe it was Ralph Waldo Emerson—stated that man loses his civility the further he moves from the land (e.g. the closer to NYC). And while there is a lot to love about NYC, one of the things I love about the burbs is the occasional sparks of humanity that thrive out here, like the Reverse Car Jacking witnessed on August 23rd, 2005.

Mahalo :->