

Pardon Me

OBSERVER

By Russell Baker

Wendell H. Howes
Chief of Police
Nantucket, Mass.

Dear Chief Howes:

I have your traffic ticket which was left on my automobile in August for a parking violation, said violation having occurred when I briefly left my car in a forbidden space while shopping for wine at Henry's package goods store near the Steamboat Wharf. Your ticket instructs me to remit a payment of \$5 in punishment, and I would do so immediately were I not firmly persuaded that such punishment would constitute an injustice with which neither you nor the Town Selectmen wish to have your names forever linked in history.

I, therefore, request a full pardon from this \$5 parking fine, in support of which proposal I cite the following precedents for pardon:

1. The "already suffered enough" precedent — Before being driven to commit the violation at Henry's, I had sought parking spaces in the vicinity, first, of Murray's Liquor Store,

and second, of the Islander Liquor shop.

In each case I was waved out of illegal parking spaces by meter maids, who indicated their intention to ticket me if I persisted in parking. In both cases I gladly made the sacrifice out of my respect for law and order. By the time the illegal parking spot near Henry's was located, it was quite clear that I had already suffered enough in satisfying the law's harsh demands, and so I parked the car.

At Henry's I purchased two half-gallon jugs of domestic red wine at \$4.55 each for serving at a large dinner. An oafish dog later knocked one of these jugs off the kitchen table and smashed it, thus putting me out \$4.55. Moreover, the guests criticized the remaining wine as inferior stuff and suggested that I had shown meanness of purse in serving it.

In the \$4.55 financial loss caused by the dog and in the loss of face suffered before my guests, I contend that I have already suffered enough and, therefore, should not be asked to bear the additional burden of a \$5 parking ticket.

2. The "hanging is enough, you don't have to draw-and-quarter-em" precedent — The paper shortage prevents me from listing all the money

Nantucket extracted from me this summer, but even a summary must persuade you that I have already been hanged, financially speaking, if not drawn.

I mean, really now, \$93 for water? And \$62 a month for electricity. And \$75 a month for oil? In a month when there was no heat running. And the ferry service. It costs more per mile to ride the ferry from Wood's Hole to Nantucket than it costs to travel to Europe first class on the France.

In view of the sums Nantucket has already exacted from my bank balance, I am certain you will agree with me that the insistence on yet another \$5 check amounts to drawing and quartering the already hanged. As pardoned President Nixon once asked, do you want to pick the carcass?

3. The "American tragedy" precedent — I have never committed a mugging, cracked a safe, stuck up a gas station or stolen fancy bicycles from children. In short, I am not a crook.

Is it not an American tragedy indeed when someone as eminently law-abiding as I finds himself caught parking in a forbidden space? When that space is in an area as crowded as the Steamboat Wharf, the tragedy is compounded, for his shame is flouted before hundreds and hundreds of passers-by who inevitably see the park-

ing ticket tied to the door handle of his humiliated car.

It is surely better for the country to put tragedy of this order behind it, and to grant its victim such poor mercy as is within temporal government's limited power.

I, therefore, urge the Town of Nantucket to rise above a too scrupulous passion for law enforcement and pardon me this \$5 parking fine as a gesture of appreciation for the high quality of the tragedy with which my car and I have enriched Nantucket's otherwise humdrum summer season.

Assuming that the town will act favorably on my pardon, I will also take this opportunity to notify town authorities that I shall soon be requesting a substantial sum of money from the Nantucket treasury.

If I am to grant the town the boon of my residence there next summer, I shall require a considerable monetary allowance for office expenses, travel costs (that murderous ferry!) and miscellaneous, whatever that may be. A detailed estimate of these charges will be sent later. I mention them here only to give early notice that it may be necessary to increase parking fines in order to finance my continuing residence on the island.

In the meantime I await notice of my pardon.
Yours in law,