**The Parking Ticket**

Steve Slavin

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*Another flash piece focusing on the past, but without brain-housing robots this one is much less spectacular in scope - at least on the surface. How much here is truth, and how much fiction?*

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You know the feeling when you get a parking ticket that you don’t deserve? Should you fight it, or just pay it?

I’ll never forget one I got back in 1979. This ticket was so unfair that I went out and bought a cheap camera, took pictures, brought them into court, and got the satisfaction of having the ticket dismissed.

But what should I do with the camera? I had absolutely no interest in photography, but I decided one spring evening to take pictures of the sunset from the Brooklyn Heights promenade.

When I got there, the sun had just begun to sink behind the Jersey Meadowlands and the sky was a deep orange. And so, along with perhaps another dozen *real* photographers -- all with fancy cameras – I snapped away.

As the sun sank, the sky began taking on hues of purple. I included two or three people who leaned over the promenade railing, watching the sun almost imperceptibly slipping below the horizon.

I hoped that each of my photos would be at least a bit different from the previous one. Sometimes a spectator shifted, or was replaced by another. I moved along, a few feet from the railing, slowly changing my perspective.

Minutes after the sun had set, I was well into my second roll of film. I kept shooting, until maybe half an hour later, I had come to the end of the roll.

I hoped that I might have gotten a few good photos, but I wouldn’t know until I had the film developed. When I got back the snapshots, I had to admit that they were not half bad. So, I bought a small album and filled it with my sunsets.

A few weeks later I hosted a small get-together and one of my friends picked up the album and then passed it around. Everyone liked the pictures. Then a woman who came with one of my friends asked if I’d like to join her co-op photography gallery.

I thought she was joking, but she insisted that my photos would definitely sell. If I chipped in just a hundred fifty dollars a month, they could hang there for as long as I wanted.

At first I thought it was some kind of scam, but my friend vouched for her. The next day, I visited the gallery, which was just a narrow space on Atlantic Avenue down the block from some Syrian restaurants.

There were a few dozen photos hanging, none of which impressed me. But what did *I* know? I had a creepy feeling that I was being taken for a ride, but a hundred fifty bucks was all I was paying for a parking space.

A week later the gallery held an opening for my work. I had made multiple eight-and-a-half by eleven copies of each photo, mounted and ready to go at twenty-five dollars a pop. I was pretty sure that I was charging too much, but twenty-five was the minimum that any of the other photographers charged.

I was amazed when the second customer who looked at my photos bought one of them. Ten minute later, someone else bought two more.

In just two days I had almost sold out. I quickly had more copies made, and even got a nice review in *The Heights Press*. Then I doubled my prices, and my sales actually increased. The more I charged, the more I sold.

After a month, I was charging two hundred dollars for my photos and *still* selling out every weekend. Some of the other photographers were getting jealous of my success, even though the crowds I brought in bought some of *their* photos too.

I knew that each of them had a lot more talent than I did. I decided that I would never take another photo. I was clearly a fraud.

It would be much, much better for me to quit while I was ahead, rather than be discovered for what I really was. Surely the other photographers had my number, and maybe even were looking forward to witnessing my fall.

So I announced my retirement. The woman who had persuaded me to join the gallery asked me to at least continue to exhibit the photos I had shot that spring evening. “If you never take another photo, your place in the world of photography is secure. I wish you would change your mind, but either way, I will support your decision.”

Quickly, word spread. Dozens of newspaper columnists and even writers of letters to the editor begged me to reconsider. But I stuck to my guns.

By now my photos were fetching one thousand dollars. I had more money than I would ever be able to spend. But something about this whole chain of events was bothering me. I fell asleep each night trying to figure out what it might be.

And then, one morning I jumped out of bed and found the photos I had taken of my ticketed car. I could make out the writing on the ticket and the lettering on the sign next to my car.

Something didn’t jibe. And then, there it *was*! I realized immediately what a fraud I had been! I quickly dressed, and hurried to traffic court with the photos and ticket.

When I got to see a referee and told her what had happened, she could not stop laughing. “You are the first person I have ever met who wanted to enter a guilty plea after having been found innocent.

“And the fact that you had not realized your error – and *ours* – until months later, and *still* made the trip down here. Well, I don’t think that has ever happened in the entire history of the Department of Motor Vehicles!”

Then I noticed my photo hanging on the wall of her office. She saw me looking at it, and then glanced at the name on the ticket.

She smiled. “I’ll tell you what: Autograph the photo and we’ll call it even.”