

Not a Bad Driver, All Evidence to the Contrary

My driver's-side car mirror suddenly exploded a few weeks ago.

I was driving west on Church Street in Iowa City one afternoon, turning left onto Dubuque Street when my mirror just seemed to detonate. There was a bang and the next thing I knew it was folded flat against my door with its housing broken and the mirror glass hanging by wires.

I said out loud, "What the hell?!" and came to a stop. Looking over my left shoulder I could see cars back at the intersection still at the stoplight and I thought I must have clipped one of them by cutting the corner too closely.

I jumped out of my car and ran the 20 feet back to the intersection where a guy was standing in front of one of the stopped cars with his hands extended, palms out as if to say, "What the f*** did you just do?" which is exactly what he said to me when I got closer.

He appeared to be college student; he had a beard, was dressed all in black and was carrying a backpack. I wondered how he had gotten out of his car so quickly when I noticed there was still a driver in it. Surprised, I said to him, "You're a pedestrian!"

He looked at me like I was crazy. "You just hit me with your car!" he shouted, which I finally realized at almost the same exact moment. I was mortified. I said, "I am SO sorry, are you OK?" Another pedestrian shouted the same question from across the street.

The light had turned green, so I guided him by his elbow to the sidewalk. "Didn't you see me?" he demanded. "Where the f*** were you looking?" He was hopping mad, which I completely understood. I quickly replayed the incident in my head.

"OK, I'll tell you," I said. "I was following another car - probably too closely - that was making a right turn in front of me. He suddenly stopped because there was a pedestrian crossing in front of him. I swerved left to avoid him and I must still have been looking at him on my right while turning left."

Before I could add, "Not that it's an excuse," he said angrily, "I could report you to the police for this." I said, "I get it, I'm totally at fault." We were drawing a small crowd as he continued to berate me loudly in colorful terms. I had stopped listening to his exact words, thinking to myself, "I deserve this, let him vent."

He finally drew a breath and I asked him again if he was sure he was OK, and I tried to give him my name. "Get the f*** away from me," he said, and stalked off. I drove the short distance home, shaken.

Back in my garage I noticed the mirror housing wasn't really broken; it had just popped apart. I managed to snap it back together and pressed the mirror glass back in place after bending some metal tabs with my fingers. I then noticed there was a two-foot-long black scuff mark about an inch wide on the left fender in front of the mirror where contact had been made.

Having only limited experience in trying to conceal the evidence of Attempted Manslaughter, I googled up paint repair techniques and ended up using a soft cloth, WD-40 and elbow grease to remove all traces of my crime.

LuAnn and I don't keep many secrets from each other - as far as I know - but I haven't told her about that day's drama yet. Hopefully she isn't reading this. No need to reinforce her belief that I'm a terrible driver, as evidenced by her constant commentary while riding shotgun.

She tells me when I'm driving too fast or slow, where to turn and which pedestrians or squirrels are likely to run in front of me (all of them). Occasionally she'll helpfully reach over and change my radio station, adjust my zone's temperature or honk my horn at someone she thinks deserves it. Of course, the one time some of these behaviors might have been helpful she wasn't in the car.

I suppose the most distressing aspect of this incident was the realization that I evidently have now become one of those clueless geezers who can accidentally hit the gas instead of the brake and/or strike a pedestrian at a crosswalk in broad daylight without realizing it. God forbid that LuAnn might be right about my driving abilities after all.

Writers Group Member Dave Parsons can attest that driving while distracted isn't cool.