



BY BRENDA WARNEKA

The Traffic Stop

It was after midnight in late February 1962,

and bad weather had kept most drivers in Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan, home for the evening. Bone-chilling sleet, followed by snow, had made for icy, slushy roads in the small Detroit suburb.

The old, shiny green Packard moving east on Jefferson Avenue caught Patrolman Hank Wilson's eye for two reasons. First, he loved that line of cars, and this one was really nice with customized rear bubble skirts. Second, the car was too clean for this time of year, with no mud or salt stains. Hank was a policeman who trusted his intuition. Imagining that the car might be going a little too fast for road conditions was reason enough to stop the driver.

Hank maneuvered his police cruiser out of a side street where he had been parked, turned on his siren and gave chase. The Packard swung quickly over to the curb and stopped. Hank got out of his vehicle and approached the car, leaving his partner, Bill Crandall, slouched in the passenger seat, chin on his chest, snoring peacefully. Police protocol required the second officer to be alert to provide assistance in case of trouble, but Hank did not want to disturb Bill.

The driver of the Packard, a man who appeared to be in his early 20s, rolled down his window. He had a bulky wool coat folded across his lap. A young woman, who appeared to be a few years younger than the driver, sat next to him. Hank stood back at an angle from the driver's window, a defensive stance that allowed him to move quickly if a problem arose.

"Good evening," Hank said to the driver. Then, without waiting for a response: "How do you keep your car so clean in this type of weather?"

The driver seemed taken aback with the abruptness of the question. "Oh, me and Bonnie—this is Bonnie," he said, nodding toward the woman beside him. "We just got married. I washed the car for the wedding. We're supposed to be on the expressway on our way to Chicago now, but I took a wrong turn."

In spite of the biting cold of the night air, a warm feeling flooded over Hank. He was only a few years older than the driver, and it had not been that long since he and Mildred were married. He thought of her at home now, undoubtedly fast asleep.

"Let me see your license," Hank said. He was now at the driver's door, bent over a little, looking slightly down at the driver and into the interior of the car.

The man shifted his weight to one side and pulled a wallet out of his back pocket. He removed a driver's license and passed it to Hank through the open window.

Hank shined his flashlight on the document. It was a Michigan license in the name of Bruce Hemelberg, and it had expired a few days earlier.

"Bruce, did you know your license is expired?" Hank asked.

"Yes." The driver flinched at the question. Cold air was pouring in through the car's open window, and he slid his hands beneath the warmth of the coat on his lap.

Then he looked up earnestly into Hank's eyes. "It's only just expired. Bonnie and me are moving to Chicago to live, and times are tough. I didn't want to waste money getting the license renewed here when I'd have to pay for a new one as soon as we hit Chicago."

Hank could relate to that. He had experienced how tight budgets could be for young newlyweds. Every dollar made a difference.

"Let me see your registration," he said.

"It's my mom's car," Bruce said. He motioned to Bonnie with his head to look in the glove compartment. She pulled out some documents, peered at them in the dim light from the glove box, and passed them over to Bruce to give to the officer. Hank examined the registration first. It was for another car in the name of Norma Hemelberg, but there was a bill of sale to this car, and the license plates belonged to Norma. He handed the paperwork back to Bruce through the open window.

"Got any outstanding tickets?" Hank asked.

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“No—no.” Bruce shook his head, but Hank detected a note of uncertainty.

“Now you need to be sure, Bruce, because if I check, and you do, I’ll have to take you in. You were going a little fast just now, but I’m ready to let you go. If you have any outstanding tickets though, tell me now before it’s too late.” Police procedure required Hank to check for outstanding warrants once he had stopped a driver, but he was thinking again about what it was like to be newly married and broke.

“No, I ain’t got any tickets,” Bruce assured Hank.

“Wait here,” Hank said, and walked back to the police car, where he woke up Crandall to radio Hemelberg’s information into headquarters. A few minutes later, the radio crackled back the report of an outstanding warrant for running a red light in Detroit. It was not a major warrant, but now the officers had less latitude in how to proceed. Because an arrest was involved, they were required to call a second patrol car to assist in taking Hemelberg to the station.

Hank walked back to the Packard, shaking his head. “I told you to tell me if you had any outstanding tickets, Bruce. Why didn’t you tell me you had an outstanding ticket for running a red light? I don’t have any choice now that we’ve checked. We’ve got to take you in.”

“I’m sorry,” Bruce gulped. “I forgot about the ticket.” In spite of the cold air, beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead, which



Brenda Warneka, JD, CPA, is leaving the private practice of law after almost 25 years. She is now the financial vice-president and in-house legal counsel for MasterTax, LLC, in Scottsdale. She is known for her family law articles in *The Maricopa Lawyer*. In 2003, she co-edited and contributed to a popular anthology, *The Simple Touch of Fate*. A longtime friend read the book and told her about his own encounter with fate, which became “The Traffic Stop.”

The author graduated from Wayne State University Law School in Detroit, not far from where this story takes place. She lives in Paradise Valley with her husband, Dick, and two black standard poodles, all of whom have appeared in her stories. One of her sons, Robert Peak, is a member of the Arizona State Bar.

Nonfiction

Hank took to mean he could not post the bail to pay the ticket. Bruce was nervously hugging the coat on his lap.

“Look,” Hank said. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you the money to pay the ticket. Based on the citation, the bail should be \$50. I’ll give it to Bonnie, and she can post the bail after we get to the station. But I’m going to have to formally arrest you and book you at the jail first.”

“Well, that sure is decent of you to give me the money to post bail.” Bruce shook his head in disbelief. “Give me your home address, and I’ll mail the \$50 back to you as soon as I can.”

“Mail it to me at the station,” Hank said. He figured he would never see the money again, but he felt good for his small act of charity—somewhat in the nature of a wedding gift to Bruce and Bonnie. “When the other patrol car gets here, you need to follow my car to the station.”

As it turned out, when they got to the police station, additional information came to light that showed Bruce Hemelberg had more than an outstanding ticket for running a red light. He was

a hold-up man, an alleged killer of a Mob runner, and he was wanted by five different law enforcement agencies, including the Michigan State Police. His girlfriend, Bonnie—whom Bruce had met at a Saturday night dance at a mental facility where they were both confined—was his accomplice in crime and the mastermind behind the hold-ups. They had escaped from the mental institution some time back, after Bonnie got them a weekend pass in return for sexual favors she was said to have granted one of the facility’s psychiatrists.

The Packard was stolen from Hemelberg’s mother’s garage, where it had been stored all winter, which accounted for the lack of mud or salt stains, and Bruce admitted during questioning by the police that he and Bonnie had been scouting for an all-night store to rob when he was stopped by Patrolman Hank Wilson. When Hank searched the car after Bruce was booked, he found a loaded shotgun,



Arrested Speeder Turns Out to Be Wanted Criminal

Youth Nabbed with Girl Friend by Park Police for Minor Infraction on Sought List of Five Enforcement Agencies

An 18-year-old Mt. Clemens youth, who was arrested by Park police early Wednesday morning, February 21, for speeding, turned out to be a hold-up man and a potential killer wanted by five police agencies, including the Michigan State Police.

A girl who was in the youth's car when he was stopped, was also taken into custody. She admitted being with her companion during the hold-ups.

Field for investigation of robbery armed, presently by Royal Oak police, are Bruce C. Hemelberg, who gave his address as 18923 Faulman, Mt. Clemens; and Bonnie D. Macorkindale, 18, whose last known address was given as 19343 Woodworth, Redford Township.

Nabbed for Speeding

Their crime spree ended at 2:45 a.m. Wednesday, when they sped past Patrolmen Henry Wilson and William Crandall at Westchester, at 40 miles an hour, going east on Jefferson. The officers gave chase and stopped Hemelberg at Yorkshire.

Hemelberg could not produce a driver's license, so he and his companion were taken to the station. While the officers were checking the ownership of the car, they spotted the butt-end of a sawed-off .22 caliber rifle on the back seat, covered by a jacket. The gun was loaded, with a shell in the chamber and a full magazine.

Park Police Chief Arthur Louwers said the barrel and the shoulder rest of the rifle had been completely sawed off, so that the weapon could be used as a hand gun. The gun was confiscated as evidence.

Taken Before Belanger

Hemelberg was given a ticket charging him with speeding and not having an operator's license on his person, and was arraigned before Park Judge C. Joseph Belanger later in the day. The youth was found guilty on both counts, and sentenced to 10 days in the Wayne County Jail.

Det. Lt. Arnold Hough immediately after, placed a technical charge of carrying concealed weapons against Hemelberg, and ordered him held in the police cell block. Miss Macorkindale was also kept in custody.

Patrolman James LaPratt, (Continued on Page 2)

sawed off at both ends, almost to the size of a pistol, hidden under the heavy wool coat that Bruce had left in the back seat when he got out of the car at the police station.

Hemelberg later admitted at trial that



Hank Wilson and author Brenda Warneka

Wanted Criminal Nabbed

(Continued from Page 1) working with the plastic clothes detail of the Detective Bureau, went to a motel at Thirteen Mile road and Grand avenue, where Hemelberg and Miss Macorkindale said they had been living. With Rosville officers, LaPratt searched the couple's room and found the sawed off portion of the gun.

Find Abandoned Car

The policemen investigated the mode of transportation to the motel by the couple and found an abandoned car in Detroit that the youth and girl had used to drive to Detroit from Chicago. Chicago police relayed information that the car was reported stolen in their city on February 12.

At the Park station, Hemelberg and Miss Macorkindale were questioned by Hough and LaPratt, and finally admitted using the gun in five hold-ups in the Detroit area. The youth committed the actual robberies, while the girl remained in the car, it was said.

The two confessed to the following robberies: King's Grill, 8051 Eight Mile road, Warren, on February 15; Thomas Dairy Bar, 36000 John E. Madison Heights, February 16; Johnson's Milk Depot, 26406 Grand River, telephoned by the State Police, February 17; Bob's Restaurant, 8013 Middlebelt, Garden City, February 18; and Brickley's Dairy, 4322 North Woodward, Royal Oak, February 20.

Sent to Royal Oak

Following Hemelberg's sentence in Park court, the couple were released to Royal Oak authorities for investigation of the robbery in Royal Oak.

Hemelberg is also wanted by Detroit police on three traffic warrants.

Chief Louwers said that the young couple had been in the Park prior to their arrest, looking over two sales places, with the possible intention of holding up one or both places.

The chief said that it had been proved that Hemelberg had a violent temper, with possible homicidal tendencies. Wilson and Crandall took a chance when they arrested the youth and his companion, the chief added.

Officers Commended

"Both Officers Wilson and Crandall will receive commendations for their excellent police action," Chief Louwers said. "While the arrest took place at 2:45 a.m., when there is little or no traffic present, these officers were alert to the violation that took place.

"As a result of the immediate arrest, a possible crime of a more serious nature was stopped. At this hour of the night, this type of traffic violation could very often be bypassed by policemen because of time and the element of danger involved.

"Wilson and Crandall made the arrest, not because of the violation, but because they had a job to do. Their detention of the couple, and the finding of the gun, possibly saved the lives of people who might have been Hemelberg's victims. Hemelberg, it has been shown, is a very, very dangerous criminal."

at the time of the traffic stop, he had been driving with the sawed-off shotgun concealed under the coat on his lap. He and Bonnie had agreed, when they realized Hank was pulling them over, to shoot the officer. Bruce had his hand on the trigger underneath the coat, aimed at Hank, while Hank was questioning him.

"I meant to kill him," Bruce testified. "I really meant to kill him. But I couldn't pull the trigger—he was just too nice."

Patrolmen Wilson and Crandall received commendations for their outstanding police work in arresting two dangerous criminals. Bruce Hemelberg was sentenced to Jackson State Prison in Jackson, Michigan, for a term of 5 to 30 years for his crimes, not including the alleged murder of the Mob runner, which the authorities were unable to pin on him due to lack of a body. Bonnie was sentenced to one to five years in the Detroit House of Corrections.

Three days after Bruce's release from the state prison in 1972, after he instigated a three-hour siege and shootout at a Hazel Park, Michigan, party store, including taking a 25-year-old woman hostage, he was shot to death by a police marksman. He was 29 years old. He is buried in Macomb County, Michigan. Bonnie's whereabouts after she was released from the House of Corrections are unknown.

Hank Wilson, the policeman whom fate favored because he was "nice," today lives in Scottsdale, Arizona, with his wife, Mildred. He is an executive with a computer software development and licensing company. **AT AT**

A police officer's close call, recounted in a Michigan newspaper.