

# Op-Ed: The next time a nice driver lets you cut in, take four seconds, roll down the car window and say thanks

By MICHAEL KRIKORIAN  
OCT. 29, 2018

Not too long ago, I was rumbling along on the 405 in Orange County, doing about 80, 85. Off to my left, in the fast lane, were five bikers in single file, Hells Angels, based on their jackets, from the Chatsworth chapter. They all sped up to cut over to the right to get on the fast approaching Garden Grove Freeway. Four of them sliced in front of me, but the fifth guy didn't have enough space, so he stayed in the fast lane.

I have a special place in my outlaw soul for the Angels. I eased off the accelerator and nodded over to the guy in the fast lane to go ahead.

He gassed it to catch his comrades and, as he zoomed across my lane, his right hand on the throttle, he crossed his left arm across his body, and gave me a thumbs up, nodding his head.

Courtesy. Politeness on the open road. From a Hells Angel. When almost no one these days on L.A.'s streets or freeways bothers to lift a hand in a gesture of thanks to another driver.

*Driving is about the one place in L.A. where everyone is created equal; we're all on the same maddening journey.*

Los Angeles, where are your manners? Does anyone here even remember that line?

My parents taught me to be polite, but I got a master class in manners a long time ago in New York City. .

I was about 20 and walking down Broadway on a crowded sidewalk, around 45th Street, when I bumped into a guy, about 6-feet-3, 240, walking the other way. We both stopped. I didn't say anything, but I thought to myself, "I'm about to get my ass kicked."

He wasn't looking for a fight, just common courtesy. He said, "Can't you just say excuse me?"

I've never forgotten my quick slide from fear to human connection. From that moment on, I've been quick with "excuse me."

The best among us will do the right thing just because it is right. I say, do it for the reward too: When you extend the slightest kindness to a stranger, or vice versa, doesn't it make you, if only for a few seconds, feel good?

The manners thing ought to be on the driver's test. A prearranged "nice" driver lets you cut in and if you don't wave, the DMV examiner deducts a point or two.

I don't really know if the country is more divided politically than it usually is, but it sure appears to be. Some things though, cross party lines. We are all stuck in traffic in Los Angeles. Even when it's moving, the joke goes, it's a traffic jam at 70 mph. The least we can do is take four seconds, roll down the window and give a nod or a little wave when someone lets us merge.

A couple of Saturdays ago now, during that brief but exhilarating — and much appreciated — lightning show that lit up L.A.'s normally blah night sky, I was driving on Third Street in heavy stop-and-go traffic. Instead of blocking an intersection, I stopped to let an oncoming car make a left turn in front of me. The guy to my right, in a new, glistening white Mercedes AMG C 63 S — normally a car whose driver thinks he or she owns the road — actually backed up about 10 feet to let this other car make the turn. The driver who sailed by in front of us didn't even bother to look our way.

I rolled down the passenger side window and nodded at the Mercedes driver, who rolled down too.

"Man, she didn't even thank you," I said. He hunched his shoulder, smiled and said "Manners. Where did they go?"

Driving is about the one place in L.A. where everyone is created equal; we're all on the same maddening journey. Let's make the ride just a little more pleasant.

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