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Seat belt scofflaws sometimes wear uniform and badge ; A motorist upset over a ticket turns the table on police officers-- and makes an unsettling discovery; [Chicago Final Edition]

Christopher Thomas Christopher Thomas is a Chicago. Chicago Tribune. Chicago, Ill.: Dec 28, 2003. pg. 7

Abstract (Summary)

In fact the other day we were talking and he told me he had pulled over a police officer on the way home from work. I asked what he meant and he explained that while stopped at a light, he looked over to his left and saw an officer not wearing his seat belt. So my father motioned for the officer to roll down his window, and when he did, my dad asked him if there was a reason he wasn't wearing his seat belt.

Full Text (627 words)

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Until recently my father did not wear his seat belt. After years and years of telling me to wear mine, he finally started buckling up himself. It was because of an Illinois state trooper who pulled him over on the St. Charles Road exit of the Eisenhower and gave him a \$75 ticket.

My father wasn't happy that night, saying that he shouldn't have to wear a seat belt if he didn't want to and that \$75 was just a little high for such a minor offense.

But ever since my father received his fine, he has been on a mission. Every time he passes police officers, he checks to see if they are wearing a seat belt. And sadly, a lot of the time they are not.

In fact the other day we were talking and he told me he had pulled over a police officer on the way home from work. I asked what he meant and he explained that while stopped at a light, he looked over to his left and saw an officer not wearing his seat belt. So my father motioned for the officer to roll down his window, and when he did, my dad asked him if there was a reason he wasn't wearing his seat belt.

The officer explained that he had just gotten in the car, to which my father responded, "If you pulled me over and I told you that, you would have given me a ticket, right?" The officer said nothing as he buckled up. The light changed and my father pulled away.

Now I can't say that pulling over a police officer is necessarily the smartest move that my father has ever made. After all there is a little risk involved when you do this, especially in the city, where word and license plate numbers travel fast. But regardless of the risk, this is not the only officer that my father has done this to since getting pulled over. He has continued on with his mission, unconcerned about becoming a target for every city, suburban and state officer. And frankly I don't think he should stop. Although I am very appreciative for what not only police officers, but also firefighters and paramedics do for us, I also am appalled at how often I see them breaking the law.

In the last month alone, I have seen nearly 10 officers driving without seat belts. I have watched as both police and ambulance drivers have made turns on red. And, not that I am complaining about this one, anytime I see police officers on the highway, they are traveling nowhere near the speed limit.

The point of this is to ask the people who are in charge of enforcing these laws to obey them themselves.

People learn by example. It only makes sense that every police officer obeys and upholds the laws. After all, if we see an officer breaking a law that police are sworn to uphold, how can we be expected to have any respect for

those rules? The police, and all public officials, need to lead by example. Simply telling us through commercials and citations to do as they say, not as they do, is not enough.

And if they are not willing to lead by example, then watch out, because not only has my father taken to "pulling over" offending officers, but so have I. And we are not out to embarrass or harass officers, but rather to ask them to respect and obey the same laws we are supposed to. Risks or not, someone needs to hold the officers accountable, and if they cannot police themselves, we the drivers are just going to have to do it for them.

Credit: area freelance writer

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