

May 3, 2017

Greetings Chief Mills,

I am writing to you about an incident that has fundamentally altered how I perceive law enforcement officers. I have always considered police officers, for the most part, my friends, and allies. Now, sadly that time has past.

Where one moment last evening I was enjoying a quiet walk along the railroad tracks at Commercial St., the next I was confronted by four police officers, blinding light, and rapid shouting. I simply stood there with my hands up, replying with yes sir, and no sir. This posture was short lived. I was soon thrown to the ground, boots on my ankles, cuffs on my wrists. I was paraded around for the better part of an hour with my trousers about my ankles.

My sin, it appears, was standing atop a long abandoned locomotive, to watch the stars come out. Unfenced, graffiti-strewn, a rusted icon to more productive times. A beam was shined on me from across the road, and I climbed down and moved along. For this, I was not charged.

It is a simple thing in this situation for an officer to buttress his actions with a dishonest statement, and our culture has become sadly tolerant to such grievous acts. I witnessed this last night. Likewise it is clear to me the officers were pre-disposed to arrest me on contact. Chief Mills, my trust in your department is badly broken.

Please do not shrug this assault off. It is very frightening to have a man shouting in an adrenalin streaked frenzy threatening bodily harm with the weapon he is brandishing, red laser beam on the forehead.

Please, let us not descend into gaslighting. I was not, to the best of my knowledge, breaking any law. I was not drunk, stoned, swaggering or belligerent. I was neat in my appearance and I did not resist. My 57 year old, 130 pound body was never a threat to your officers, or anyone. I am a father, of a veteran, a local business owner who for years in Eureka has contributed significant time volunteering for two beloved non-profits here. What we are seeing is a larger issue that haunts the national landscape, has manifest itself here where you have the potential address it and set the tone for other communities.

The police have been militarized. They have been trained to be afraid, and to never trust the very people they live among. They have been stripped of their discretion to use simple common sense, people skills, and empathy. They are mandated to react, to a script. The days of a stern talking to instead of a ride to jail are over. The populace has no reason to engage, and every reason to fear them. Perhaps that is the intent. If so, it is a travesty. Every bit of humanness is drained from a cop on the beat, and that humanness was by far the greatest asset a police department had. A community can rally behind that.

There will always be an argument for a coarser hand, yet in every conflict it is incumbent on the stronger party to exercise patience, and strive for understanding. It is a notion at the core of civility. When the stronger hand is omnipotent, this idea becomes paramount.

I would argue the solution is clear. Empower your officers with the best human attributes: compassion and discernment. Stop rating your officers by their number of arrests, and make the effort to develop more comprehensive metrics. Actively condemn the glorification of brutality in police culture. Eliminate the us/them dichotomy. We are your community. We teach your children, fix your cars, produce your arts. They are us, and we are them.

This trust, so badly bruised, can be rebuilt. Strive for that.

Christopher "Blaze" Boyle

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