

It seemed to be a typical morning in February of 2007 as I started out for work destined for Siemens Energy and Automation out in Norcross where I worked as an Associate Electronics Test Engineer. Most mornings I got started by rolling out of bed and onto my knees for a few minutes of praising the Lord with outstretched arms, lavishing superlatives on him for his grace and mercy towards me, then settling into a moment of prayer. Nothing was different about this particular morning. My routine for getting to work was pretty consistent also. I rode my bicycle down to the local community college, which was about a mile away, and parked it. I then got on a bus for a short distance and transferred to another express bus en route to downtown Atlanta. After I got downtown, I would transfer to the Marta rail and get off at the Doraville station. Then I would catch the GRTA express bus going to Norcross and get off directly in front of Siemens. This was my routine in the mornings, and in the evenings when I got off work, I would do it in reverse. Sometimes on the return trip I would catch a taxi once I got to my side of town. I usually did this if I stopped for groceries or if I had had a particularly hectic experience traveling with Marta, which was usually the case. Marta was the number one reason for me continuing to drink liquor and being able to justify it. I allowed my traveling experience to constantly fill me with rage and I couldn't seem to get a handle on it. Afterwards, I would use this experience to justify drinking liquor, just to help me to unwind. The problem was rooted in my scheduling for the morning trip, and in my hurried attempts to get home in the evenings.

Because of my morning scheduling, I only had a 10 or 15 minute window to link up with every leg of transportation, and I had 4 individual legs of transportation. I used to get up at 4:30am just so I could get to work at 8:15am. I started my first leg of transportation by riding my bike down to the local community college, locking it up and then waiting for the 6:12am bus. Normally, I would cover my tracks in reverse but, as stated earlier, sometimes I would deviate from it depending on how hectic my evening travel had been. My evening return trip was always filled with uncertainties and because of my urgency to get home, and away from the madness, I was constantly subjected to Murphy's Law, which states that for any given situation, whatever can go wrong, will go wrong. In my case, this was on a regular basis. On one occasion while returning home, I almost lost it because the bus that was scheduled to come didn't come until over an hour later. The buses were supposed to run every half hour, but for over an hour not a single bus for that route came. I was furious, and my demeanor reflected it. When the bus did come I decided to flash my Marta card at the driver instead of swiping it through the card reader like I was supposed to do. Normally, this isn't a problem with most drivers but this particular driver was not going to let me get away with anything, in spite of him being over an hour late. I was intentionally challenging his authority and he knew it. As I went and took a seat, he started calling me back up to the front to swipe my card like I was supposed to have done.

Blame it on the stars, but my Taurus zodiac sign began to get the best of me as I gave in to nature, the bull. I was being stubborn as a bull, to say the least, and continued to sit there stewing. I was not going to move, regardless of his very real threats to call the Marta police. The fact that I was about a city block from the Marta police headquarters was insufficient to

diffuse the rage that had built up in me. After the driver continued his threats, some of the lady patrons began trying to coax me up to the front but I was not hearing any of it. Then one of them came back where I was and asked if she could swipe my card for me. I reluctantly agreed. The driver and I were locked into a battle of wills at this point and he told her he wanted me to do it. I immediately saw visions of me being arrested and going to jail because I was not getting up. Thanks to the persistent pleading from that lady, and the other patrons voicing their pleas to get them home, the driver reluctantly decided that I was not worth adding to the already excessive lateness of the bus. I'm sure those people saved me from going to jail because I was not going to swipe my card for anyone that day.

This particular leg of my journey is always problematic, and the bus is normally late because of the traffic on the interstate it has to traverse. The fact is that sometimes it's on time, and then for unexplainable reasons, it's not on time. This is the problem. In my ordered and always explainable world of engineering, I am always clashing with the chaotic processes of the real world. I would much rather the bus be late consistently than to be late for no reason at all. I need it be one way or the other. The other tough part of my return trip has to do with catching a taxi if I decided to leave my bike at the community college because I needed to either stop for groceries or stop to pick up a bottle of liquor. Sometimes I would have to wait for over an hour on the taxi and then use that as an excuse to need the drink of liquor, regardless of the fact that I bought the liquor first. Needless to say, I have quite a number of impossible incidences I've had to deal with getting to and from work so I won't bore you with them all. What I'm trying to do is paint a picture of the stress factor I had to endure on a frequent basis during my normal work week. It is under these circumstances that my life was suddenly and terrifyingly interrupted as I was making the last leg of my journey home from work.

On this particular evening, everything had gone very well and I had not be frustrated by Marta at all. I think I was simply becoming acclimated to the uncertainty of the whole travel process. I had decided to stop at the food store so by the time I got to my bike I had several bags with me which I had to hang over the handle bars and try to keep my balance while peddling. I peddled for a short distance then got off the bike when I approached a somewhat inclined hill and started walking with the bike. I was going to walk up to the intersection and then ride down the hill that skirted the part of the sub-division that I live. It was mostly steering because the hill was too steep to peddle down until it leveled off, but by then I only had to peddle for about a hundred yards. This was my plan until it was abruptly interrupted. As I was walking with the bike, I approached this young black guy dress in black pants and sweater with the hood pulled over his head. I didn't think anything of it because that's how a lot of kids his age dress. I didn't consider anything strange about him walking down the street in my direction. I didn't tense up when he passed me and thought nothing of it until he said something to me in passing. He asked me if I had a lighter as I passed him and I turned to him and told him I didn't. He stopped and put his had to his ear, indicating that he had not heard me. He then asked me again, and started using the idea that he was having a hard time hearing me as an excuse to come up close to me, grinning with a mouthful of shiny gold-capped teeth as he approached. I kept repeating myself but then started to get a little leery of his walking up on me that way. He continued walking up on me with both hands in his sweater pocket with his eyes locked to mine, and glancing about from side to side. I turned at the intersection away from him and

started walking towards the hill that was about 25 yards away where I could get on my bike and remove myself from harms-way if I needed to. Just as I began to walk faster I saw him still approaching me with my peripheral vision and then realized that something wasn't right about what he was doing. He made a quick move towards me and stuck a gun in my side and said it was a robbery, and if I moved he would kill me.

Again he told me not to move or he would shoot me. Suddenly the bulge in my back pocket seemed to become even more pronounced, to me anyway, and protrude from underneath me, lifting me up into the air so high that it was unmistakable that I was sitting on a large wallet filled with cash. Likewise, my laptop carrying case began to betray me by suggesting a strong likelihood that it contained those goods as well. I was immediately struck by the odds of this guy knowing that I had 12 crisp \$100 bills in my wallet that I had been keeping in it just to make me feel prosperous. That happens sometimes when the memories of one's poverty, however brief, is overwhelming. The money was actually to be used for the purchase of a car when I found one. I wanted the money on me so I wouldn't miss out on any time-critical deals I ran across. I would have the money on me, or at least enough of it to get some serious consideration from the seller. This was my way of boycotting Marta, of taking control from the drivers that each tried to make my life a living hell. It was my attempt to regain some form of order back into my life. Now it was being threatened. I was being deprived of the only solution to the problem with Marta that I knew of – taking them completely out of the equation. I had vowed to never patronize Marta ever again as long as I had a car. I didn't care how much gas soared up to, or if Marta started letting people ride for free! A car of my own would simplify my life beyond measure. Somehow, I could not let this happen but I didn't want to die for it. Neither did I want to be shot but I knew that I could not give this guy that money.

Trying not to make any sudden moves, I gave him my complete attention and our eyes locked. I looked intently into his eyes for the least bit of sign that he was only joking because this was not that kind of neighborhood, and besides, it was not even dusk yet. Also, less than a stone's throw away there was an intersection crammed with cars that had stopped for the red light. This could not have been happening, but it was. For a brief microsecond I was totally preoccupied with the possibility of this guy catching me on a day like today, in this neighborhood, at this time of day, with all this money in my pocket. This isn't happening, I kept telling myself. He couldn't have known! With a look of confidence that concealed the terror I was feeling, I managed to say in a very calm voice, "Hey man, don't do this. You don't have to do this man." I was shocked, to say the least, but kept telling him, "Man, don't do this. Man, you don't have to do this. You don't have to do this." The essence of the moment seemed to become surreal and gloomy as I struggled to come to grips with what was happening to me. Time seemed to slow, my breathing grew labored, and my palms became sweaty.

For that instant of time, the two of us were the only people on earth. With my eyes focused on his as though my very life depended on it, I kept repeating myself and walking backwards at the same time. Instinctively, and almost subconsciously, I had dropped my bike and was walking backwards towards the intersection where the signal light was. He started to slowly walk in my direction with his right hand in his sweater pocket, still clutching the pistol he had stuck in my side. At that point I didn't know what caliber it had been and didn't think about it

actually. Before I knew it I was at the intersection and where the cars were beginning to stop for the red light. I briefly felt a moment of relief that we now had an audience but that relief was soon replaced by sheer terror as he stopped across the street from where I was and began looking in both directions and then back at me. Apparently trying to decide whether it was worth it to shoot at me from across the street he removed his gun and brought it out into the open, raising it up in my direction and taking aim at me. I could not believe that this guy was going to risk shooting me in front of all those people who had stopped at the intersection by this time, and because of the attention my loud pleas for help were bringing it was clear to everybody what was happening.

Suddenly my fight or flight survival instincts went into full gear. I felt my life was being seriously threatened and I threw all pride to the wind as I shamelessly and desperately started screaming bloody murder style, running up and down the row of waiting vehicles, clawing at their windows and door handles in an attempt to save my life. The fact that I was helmed in was not lost on me, and if he came across the street I would have very few options to get away. Directly behind me was a ravine that established the bank of a field shrouded with short brush and Kudzu vines. Either way I looked at it he would not have an obscured view of me unless I used a vehicle for protection. He suddenly made a move in my direction as if he was going to come across the street after me. He made several more gestures towards me as though he was having second thoughts about continuing in his, by now, reckless, and extremely risky pursuit of me. During all this time I was frantically trying to get someone to help me, or at least acknowledge my presence. The cars at the intersection that I was hurriedly and persistently visiting, and revisiting, were occupied with only black folk, who lived in the area. When the light changed to green, and they all started to drive away from the intersection in spite of the melodramatic show I had given them, I begin to get even more desperate and decided to get right out in the roadway to stop the oncoming cars. Some of the cars still continue to plow their way pass me as if what they had been witnessing was all an elaborate show designed to get someone to stop so that they would become the victim of the robbery instead of me pretending to be getting robbed. I didn't really have time to entertain the absurdity of it all but stayed my ground until I finally got a car to stop in front of me.

By this time the would-be robber had decided to give up on me and had turned and walked in the direction of my bike. He then used it as a getaway vehicle to make his escape. However, he had started peddling off in the direction of traffic the vehicles I was trying to alert were traveling. I then began to plead with the driver of the car to follow him so I could see where he was going but the driver refused. I then tried to get him to give me a ride down the hill I would have normally taken but he still refused. I told him he didn't have to stop. I only wanted to know where the guy was going so I would know where he ditched my bike. I could see him trying to make sense of it all, and wrestling with the idea of a robbery being committed in broad daylight at a busy intersection. It didn't make sense, and I knew it didn't make sense, yet it was happening, and it was happening to me. The driver decided that he had gotten involved as far as he was going to and told me that the guy was gone now and that it was safe for me to go on my way. I begged to differ and said that if he left me that guy might come back to get me and I could be all alone by then. Yes, I needed comforting and I did not want to be left alone. He told me that I should call the cops and report it but I argued the point, maintaining that by the time

the cops came I could be dead. Privately, I knew I couldn't call the cops because I had a warrant out for my arrest because of the DUI conviction I had gotten back in 1996, and was still pending. Calling the cops was out of the question for me because if I had I'm sure they would have ran my name through their computers just like the cops up in Seattle had done when I once reported my car stolen. Sure, they were all business about filling out the police report and seemed genuinely concerned, and were very professional about it. However, as they prepared to leave they asked me very politely if I would stand up for them and turn around. I knew what was coming, and I was right. They put the cuffs on me so fast it made my head spin. They then informed me of my outstanding warrant and promptly carried me away to the county jail. I was not about to allow that to happen to me again.

After I saw it was useless to get assistance from anybody else, I summoned my courage, bided farewell, and started walking into the mouth of the subdivision, looking back and careful not to allow him to sneak up on me or helm me in. For good measure, I took a few shortcuts to defeat the snake-like design of the sub-division surface streets by applying the shortest distance between two points rule – the straight line. Unnerved and rattled, I decided to give this woman I was sweet on a call as I boldly trespassed across the property of a number of the residents. I felt that I would stand a better chance of not being shot by them as I would the guy who tried to rob me. I couldn't help but feel disappointed that no one would help me in my time of need. They all acted like I wasn't even worth their time, and ignored my cries like I was the little boy crying wolf. The thought of what they could have witnessed if that guy had come across the street after me was the only way I could get satisfaction from their callous and desensitized behavior. Obviously the thought of them acting that way because I was a black man occurred to me but I never thought that things had come to that. After all, it wasn't like I was crying bloody murder in the middle of the night in a neighborhood that people were afraid to live with the curtains drawn. I was in the middle of a very busy street with cars traveling in both directions, and in an intersection where both vehicles from both sides of the street had stopped for the red light. Anybody in their right mind, and with the least bit of discernment could tell that my pleas for help for sincere. For crying out loud, black men don't go through such extraordinary measures, risking life and limb, just to be picked out of a line-up for robbery by a dozen people. Well, most don't. I can't speak for the guy who tried to rob me because it would appear that it was exactly what he was trying to do. I guess, now that I think about it, maybe they were justified in their actions. Hell, I guess I could have been apart of some hair-brained, desperately contrived, fool-hearted attempt to rob the first person that left the safety of their vehicle in order to come to the aid of someone that appeared to be in need of help. Yeah, probably happens all the time. (LOL)

As I spoke to my sweetheart, it helped to ease my nerves and my voice grew calm again. I never mentioned to her just what I had recently endured. I can remember wiping the sweat from my brow while talking to her, panting with excitement, and thinking how hearing her voice had immediately comforted me. Here I was walking through folks yards and not being the least bit concerned about the repercussions or their objections. She had a way of soothing my mind anyway, and I never tired of hearing her voice. Talking to her would always bring back to my memory how I would get all caught up in the loveliness of her face, being pulled in to the warmth of her eyes and living in them. I could not take my eyes off of her eyes, and it would

feel so natural, like the way a baby's eyes are locked on to its mother's eyes, making every attempt to follow them regardless of the position of its head. I digress, but suffice it to say that speaking with her was as right as rain. I continued walking the short distance to my house as though nothing had ever happened. When I got home I said goodnight to my sweetheart and immediately fell on my knees and started thanking God for seeing me through that terrifying ordeal. In spite of my reaction to it, I somehow felt that the Lord was watching over me, and he was. But by the grace of God I was not traumatized by those events and went about my business and never made a big deal out of it. I don't think I've told five people about what really happened that day. In most cases I have only mentioned the attempted robbery itself, and not the details. As much of a testimony it is to the goodness of God, his grace, and how God is in control, this entry of the entire ordeal is the only one that has been forthcoming. I guess I found it too incredible myself, and too disappointing regarding the behavior of my race. I include it now for your encouragement and strengthening. I guess the morale of this story is that most times we can only depend on God, regardless of how much we may want to depend on others. May the grace of God be with you all.