

# Seeing Red

## Oscar's Story

**H**ere is how traffic signals impacted Oscar, an average American and an average motorist, and those whose lives he touched on a typical day.

Oscar was driving home after a long day of too many projects, too many impossible deadlines, and a short-tempered boss. Despite the global recession, his company was working on a multi-million dollar proposal that might salvage his career. He expected to be up most of the night, redoing the proposal.

He took the Glenstone Avenue exit and stopped at the first traffic signal. The red lights on Glenstone seemed to last forever. Finally, the light turned green. As he reached the second signal, it too turned red. Oscar's irritation rose with every wasted second. All he wanted to do was get home, pour himself a stiff drink and start working on the proposal. There was no traffic on the cross street, but he still waited endlessly. He stopped again at signal number four. Oscar gripped the steering wheel white knuckled—he was ready to snap. Thirteen signals later, he arrived home.

**The five-mile drive had taken him 27 minutes.**

Oscar slammed the door to his mid-sized sedan and stalked into kitchen through the garage. He made a beeline for the Scotch bottle.

"How was your day, baby?" asked his wife, Theresa.

"Leave me alone. Can't you see I'm worn out?" he snapped.

Theresa lowered her head. Her cheeks flamed red.

"I need to be treated with respect, Oscar."

She was right, but Oscar was not in any mood to discuss his shortcomings.

He took the bottle of Scotch and shut himself in his study.

Theresa narrowed her eyes and clenched her fists.

"I deserve better," she thought.

Their son Joey raced in, letting the door slam behind him.

"Can I go play at the McGee's, Mom?"

Normally she would have ruffled his hair and said,

"Of course," but anger got the better of her.



"I told you not to slam that door. You are grounded, Joey! Go to your room and do your homework."

She couldn't believe she was yelling at her son but Oscar's ill-humor was infectious.

Joey stomped off to his room. His dog Bubbles ran up to him, sniffing around for a treat.

"Get out of my way," Joey shouted, kicking at the dog.

Bubbles yelped, then bolted downstairs and out the doggie-door. At the bottom of the driveway, he encountered postman Rogers, haggard from an extended route made longer by traffic. Bubbles, reeling from such cruel treatment from his best friend, nipped at the postman and the bite drew blood. The postman rushed to the hospital and didn't finish his route.

Meanwhile, Randy the butcher, only two houses down, didn't receive his mail containing the large check he so desperately needed. The next morning, Randy worried sick over his cash flow, suffered a heart attack while driving to work on Glenstone Ave. Oscar was stuck in the ensuing traffic jam for hours and was unable to deliver the proposal on time. Oscar, our average American motorist, was fired.

**Who is the culprit in this web of hyperboles?**

**The common traffic signal.**

The aging technology responsible for directing our traffic plagues our communities with pollution, wasted time, and the threat of otherwise avoidable vehicular collisions. While an admitted exaggeration, Oscar's experience reflects the potentially dire consequences of improperly implemented traffic signals. ■