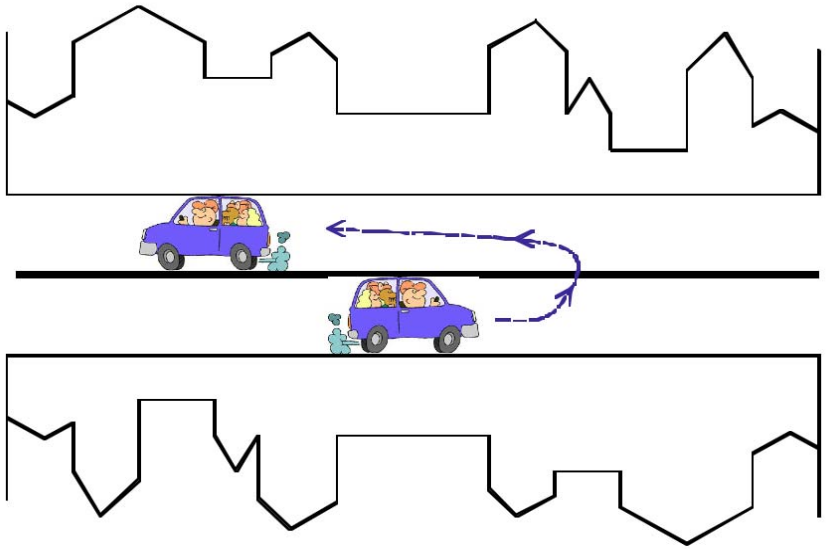
Norton Rabbit Gets a Ticket

© 2006 by Tina Rasnow

This is Norton Rabbit. He is a good rabbit, but sometimes he makes mistakes that get him into trouble.

Norton walks to work most days. Sometimes he drives his car to work through the business district of his town. The business district can be a place where the shops are downtown.

One day Norton was driving to work, and he realized that he forgot something at home. Without thinking first, he turned his car around in the middle of the street to go back home. This is called a U-turn. It looks like this:



The traffic laws in his home state of California do not allow a U-turn in the middle of the street in a business district. A police officer saw Norton Rabbit make the U-turn. The officer put on her flashing light.

Norton Rabbit looked in his rear view mirror. “Oh no!” he exclaimed. He slowed down his car and pulled safely to the side of the road.

The officer approached Norton Rabbit’s car. Norton kept his paws on the top of the steering wheel where the police officer could see them, so they looked like this:

The officer asked Norton Rabbit to lower his window, which he did. She said to Norton, “I need to see your driver’s license, car registration, and proof of car insurance.”

“My license is in my wallet in my pocket, and my car registration and proof of insurance are in the glove box of the car,” Norton replied, as he reached slowly for his license first, and then his other papers to hand to the officer.

The officer looked over the paperwork that Norton had handed to her. She noticed that Norton had a valid driver’s license, current registration, and that he had insurance to cover the costs of an accident if he caused one. This is required for anyone who owns a car or drives in California. If Norton did not have current car registration or insurance, he would have gotten in worse trouble.

“What did I do wrong?” Norton asked.

“You made an illegal U-turn,” explained the officer.

Norton replied, “But there was no sign saying I could not make a U-turn!”

“There does not need to be a sign!” said the officer. “The law does not allow you to make a U-turn in a business district except at an intersection.”

An intersection looks like this:

“But how was I to know that?” asked Norton Rabbit.

“If you are driving a car you are supposed to know the traffic laws,” said the officer. “You could have gotten a copy of the laws for free at your local Department of Motor Vehicles, or DMV, where you first got your license.”

She then took out her ticket book and wrote Norton a ticket.

She asked him to sign the ticket.

“But I don’t think that I should get a ticket!” Norton protested.

“It does not matter,” said the officer. “By signing the ticket you are not saying that you did something wrong. You are only agreeing to come to court later so I do not have to arrest you now.”

Norton read the ticket and saw that this was true, so he signed his name. The officer gave Norton a yellow copy of the ticket.

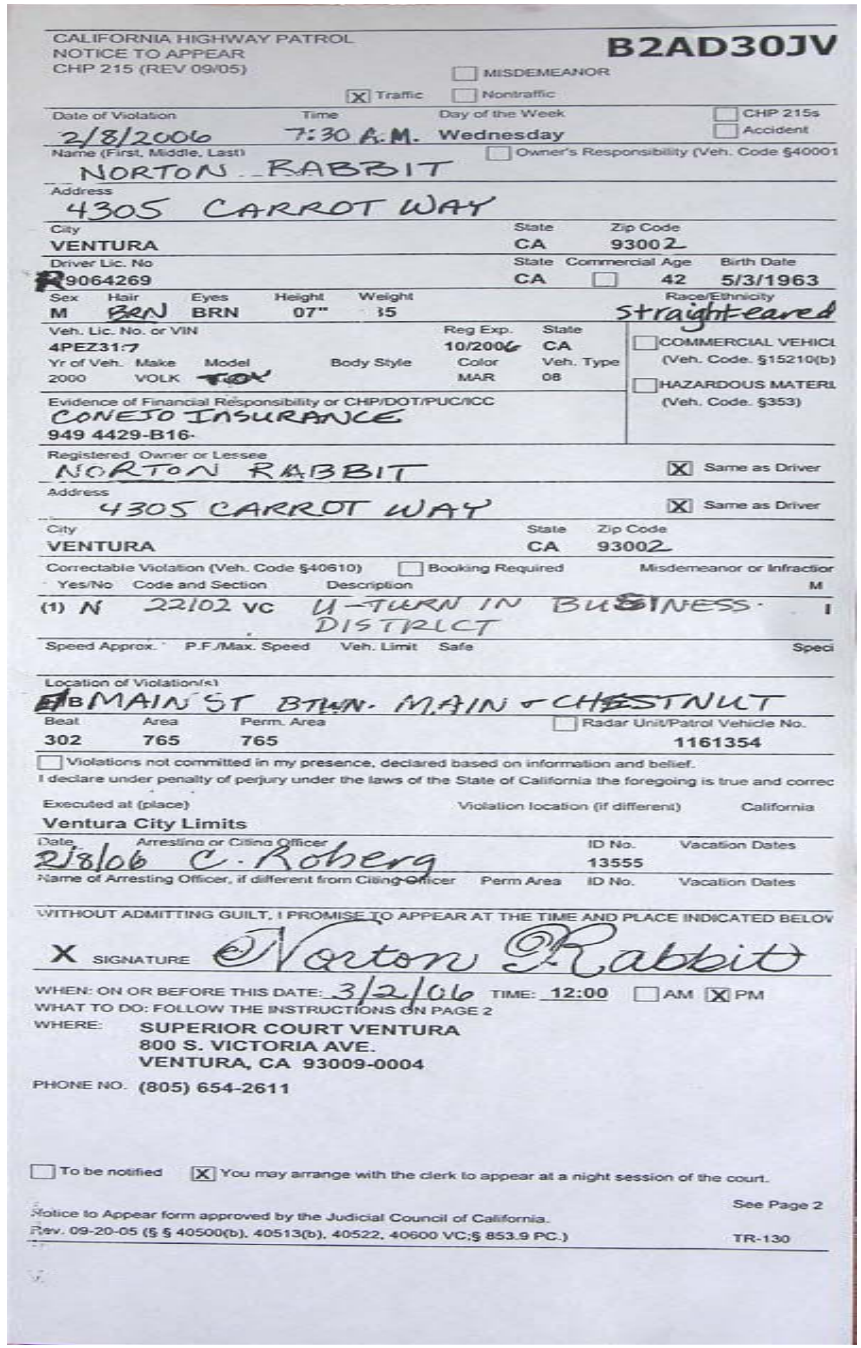
The ticket had a date on it that told Norton when he was to come to court. The date was written all in numbers. Norton was confused. For some people the first number is for the month like this:

3/2/06
(meaning March 2, 2006)

For others the first number is the day of the month, like this:

3/2/06
(meaning the 3rd of February, 2006)

Which one was it?



CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL
NOTICE TO APPEAR
CHP 215 (REV 09/05)

B2AD30JV

☐ MISDEMEANOR
☒ Traffic ☐ Nontraffic

Date of Violation: 2/8/2006 | Time: 7:30 A.M. | Day of the Week: Wednesday | ☐ CHP 215s ☐ Accident

Name (First, Middle, Last): NORTON RABBIT | ☐ Owner's Responsibility (Veh. Code §40001

Address: 4305 CARROT WAY

City: VENTURA | State: CA | Zip Code: 93002

Driver Lic. No: R9064269 | State: CA | ☐ Commercial | Age: 42 | Birth Date: 5/3/1963

Sex: M | Hair: BRN | Eyes: BRN | Height: 07" | Weight: 15 | Race/Ethnicity: Straight-eared

Veh. Lic. No. or VIN: 4PEZ317 | Reg Exp.: 10/2006 | State: CA | ☐ COMMERCIAL VEHICL (Veh. Code. §15210(b))

Yr of Veh.: 2000 | Make: VOLK | Model: TOY | Body Style | Color: MAR | Veh. Type: 08 | ☐ HAZARDOUS MATERI (Veh. Code. §353)

Evidence of Financial Responsibility or CHP/DOT/PUC/ICC: CONEJO INSURANCE 949 4429-B16

Registered Owner or Lessee: NORTON RABBIT | ☒ Same as Driver

Address: 4305 CARROT WAY | ☒ Same as Driver

City: VENTURA | State: CA | Zip Code: 93002

Correctable Violation (Veh. Code §40610) | ☐ Booking Required | Misdemeanor or Infraction

Yes/No	Code and Section	Description	M
(1) N	22102 VC	U-TURN IN BUSINESS DISTRICT	I

Speed Approx. | P.F./Max. Speed | Veh. Limit | Safe | Speci

Location of Violation(s): 1B MAIN ST BTWN. MAIN & CHESTNUT

Beat: 302 | Area: 765 | Perm. Area: 765 | ☐ Radar Unit/Patrol Vehicle No.: 1161354

☐ Violations not committed in my presence, declared based on information and belief.
I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California the foregoing is true and correc

Executed at (place): Ventura City Limits | Violation location (if different) | California

Date: 2/8/06 | Arresting or Citing Officer: C. Roberg | ID No.: 13555 | Vacation Dates

Name of Arresting Officer, if different from Citing Officer | Perm Area | ID No. | Vacation Dates

WITHOUT ADMITTING GUILT, I PROMISE TO APPEAR AT THE TIME AND PLACE INDICATED BELOV

X SIGNATURE: Norton Rabbit

WHEN: ON OR BEFORE THIS DATE: 3/2/06 TIME: 12:00 ☐ AM ☒ PM
WHAT TO DO: FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS ON PAGE 2
WHERE: SUPERIOR COURT VENTURA
800 S. VICTORIA AVE.
VENTURA, CA 93009-0004
PHONE NO. (805) 654-2611

☐ To be notified ☒ You may arrange with the clerk to appear at a night session of the court.

See Page 2

Notice to Appear form approved by the Judicial Council of California.
Rev. 09-20-05 (§ § 40500(b), 40513(b), 40522, 40600 VC;§ 853.9 PC.)

TR-130

“How do I know whether this number refers to the month or the day?” Norton asked the officer, pointing to the first number.

“The first number in the date is for the month and the second number is for the day of the month,” replied the officer. “That is how we write the date in the United States, even though people in most other countries usually write it the other way, with the day before the month.”

The officer drove away. Norton continued on his way to work.

A few weeks later Norton Rabbit got in the mail a “courtesy notice” from the court. Norton was lucky to get a courtesy notice. Sometimes no notice is sent. Even if no notice was sent, Norton would still have to appear in court on the date on his ticket. The courtesy notice that Norton received reminded him of his court date. It had a case number on it, and told him how to pay for the ticket if he did not want to come to court.

REMOVE STUB AT RIGHT AND RETURN YOUR PAYMENT IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED.

CREDIT CARD PAYMENTS

1. VISA / MASTERCARD ACCEPTED. A SERVICE FEE WILL BE ADDED TO YOUR AMOUNT DUE.

PAYMENT STUB - RETURN WITH YOUR REMITTANCE

Norton Rabbit
4305 Carrot Way
Ventura, CA 93002

2006518768 C589866 02/21/2006
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF VENTURA
P.O. Box 6489
VENTURA CA 93006-6489

Pay by check or money order made payable to the Superior Court. Your cancelled check will be your receipt. **Mail this stub with your full payment and any proof of corrections in the enclosed envelope, or bring it to the court. If already paid, please disregard this notice.** 02/27/2006

GENERAL TRAFFIC INFORMATION

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF VENTURA

VENTURA:
800 S. VICTORIA AVE
VENTURA, CA. 93009
(805) 654-2611

EAST COUNTY:
3855-F ALAMO STREET
SIMI VALLEY, CA. 93065
(805) 582-8080

FAILURE TO CLEAR THIS CITATION WILL RESULT IN A HOLD ON YOUR DRIVER'S LICENSE, A $300 CIVIL ASSESSMENT AND/OR REFERRAL TO THE STATE FRANCHISE TAX BOARD FOR COLLECTION.

COURTESY NOTICE

TRAFFIC OFFICE HOURS 8:00 AM TO 5:00 PM CLOSED HOLIDAYS

ISSUED TO: NORTON RABBIT

	CASE NO:	CITATION NO:	ADDED DATE:
CTSY	2006518768	C589866	02/21/2006

Due Date:03/06/2006 You must do one of the following:
1. PAY $148.00
2. PAY $172.00 to attend traffic school, send money in enclosed envelope. (This fee does not include cost of traffic school).

Note that you may attend traffic school to dismiss a citation once every 18 months, from violation date to violation date. You are responsible for verifying your eligibility.

In addition to the options above, you can appear at the clerk's counter by noon to have your case calendared for court. The Ventura Department calendars cases Monday - Friday. The Simi Department calendars cases Monday - Wednesday.

If eligible, to request monthly payments, appear at clerk's counter Monday - Friday. Bring your corrections, if any. Monthly payments will not be allowed with traffic school requests or mandatory appearances. For your convenience you can pay your citation at the Oxnard DMV, Monday - Friday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. (Lunch: 12:30 - 1:30 p.m.) or at the Juvenile Courthouse. Telephone service is not available at the Oxnard DMV.

TRAFFIC CITATION INFORMATION (805) 654-2611

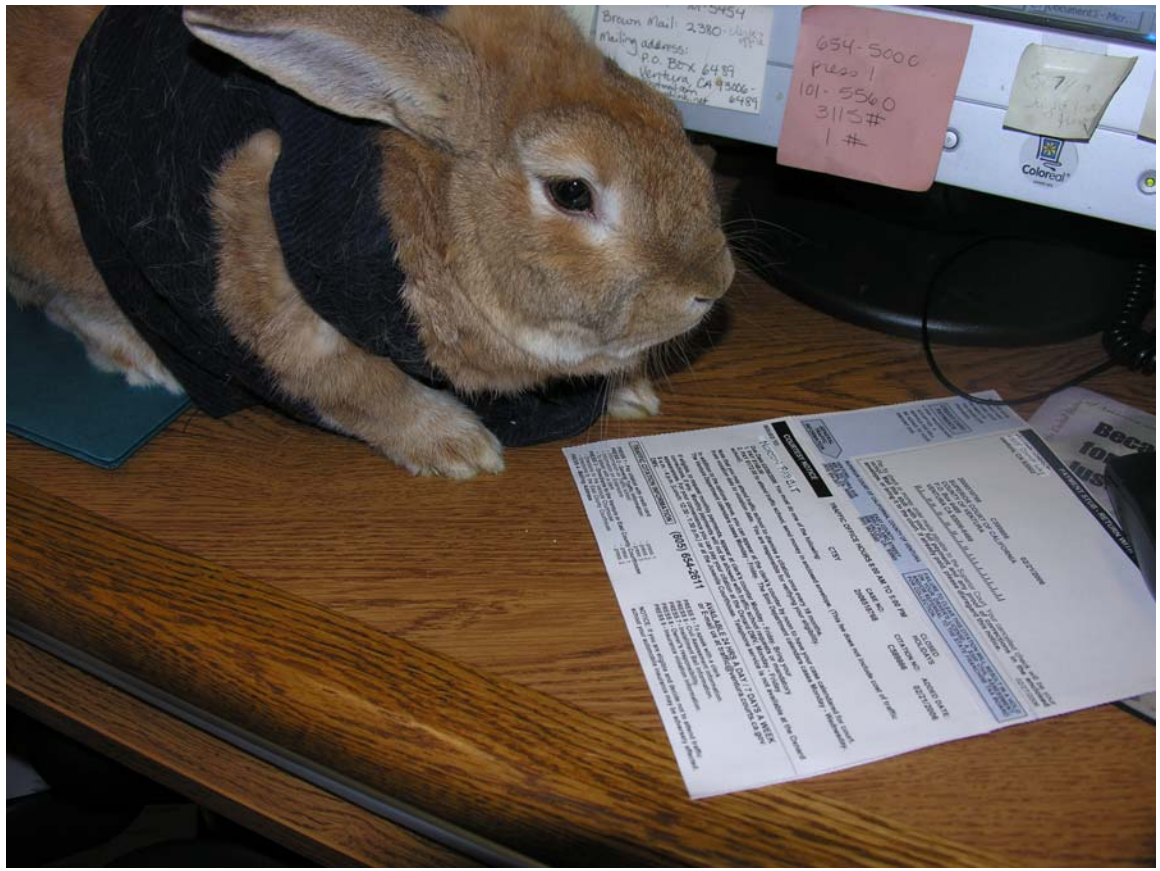
AVAILABLE 24 HRS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK
or E-mail us at traffic@ventura.courts.ca.gov

PRESS 1 - Pay citation with credit card
PRESS 2 - General Traffic Information:
- Information on Traffic school - press 1
- Information on Extensions - press 2
- To speak with a clerk - press 3
PRESS 3 - Directions to the Ventura or East County Courthouse
- Directions to the Ventura Courthouse - press 1
- Directions to the East County Courthouse - press 2
PRESS 4 - Mailing Address

PRESS 5 - To speak with a clerk
PRESS 6 - Civil Assessment information.
PRESS 7 - Installment Bail information.
PRESS 8 - Owner's responsibility.
PRESS 9 - Insurance violation information.

NOTICE: If you are eligible and decide not to attend traffic school your automobile insurance may be adversely affected.

The notice told Norton about the choices he had for how to pay the ticket without coming to court. It also told how he could go to traffic school so the ticket would not show on his driving record. Norton did not want to pay the ticket. He thought he should not have to pay since he did not mean to break the law. He just did not know about the law.



Norton went to the court on his scheduled date.

He walked into the clerk’s office.

“How do you want to plead?” asked the clerk.

“What do you mean?” asked Norton.

“Do you plead ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty’?” explained the clerk.

“I plead ‘not guilty’,” Norton replied. “I want to tell the judge why I should not have to pay the ticket,” he continued, “I didn’t know I was doing anything wrong!”

“O.K., then we will schedule you for a trial in 40 days,” said the clerk. “Go to courtroom 10 at 1:30 p.m. on April 11 so you can talk to the judge.”

Norton Rabbit returned to the court on April 11. He came a little early so he would have time to park his car and get through the security line without being late for his trial.

When he arrived at courtroom 10 he found it full. There were many others waiting to tell the judge why they should not have to pay their tickets. The bailiff called for everyone to be quiet. She then played a short video on the T.V. to explain what would happen in traffic court.

At the end of the video, the bailiff asked everyone who planned to speak to the judge about their case to stand and raise their right hand.
“Do you solemnly affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?” she asked. This is called taking an oath. It means that those speaking to the judge promise to tell the truth, and if they lie, they can be punished.

Norton answered “Yes,” along with the others in the courtroom.

A few minutes later, as the judge came into the courtroom, the bailiff shouted, “All rise! Come to order! Court is now in session. The Honorable Liana Swann, Judge Presiding.”

While Norton was standing the judge came in wearing a black robe and took her seat. “You may be seated,” the bailiff ordered. Norton sat back down.

The judge called the cases one by one. Each case took only a few minutes.

Norton Rabbit was very nervous. He was not sure what to say.

When his case was called, Norton stepped forward and stood at the table below the judge.

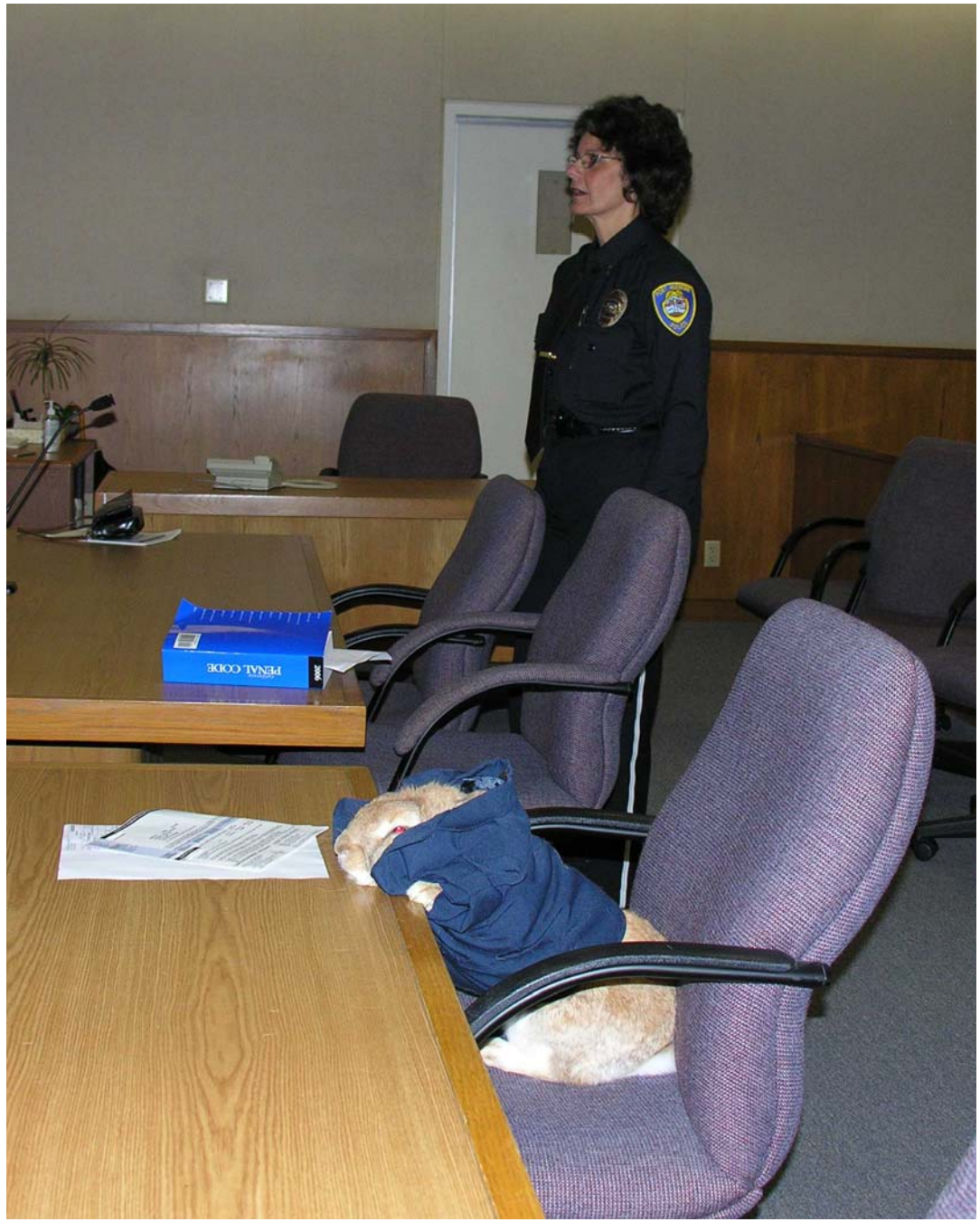
The police officer who gave him the ticket stood at the other table.

“State your names for the record,” said the judge.

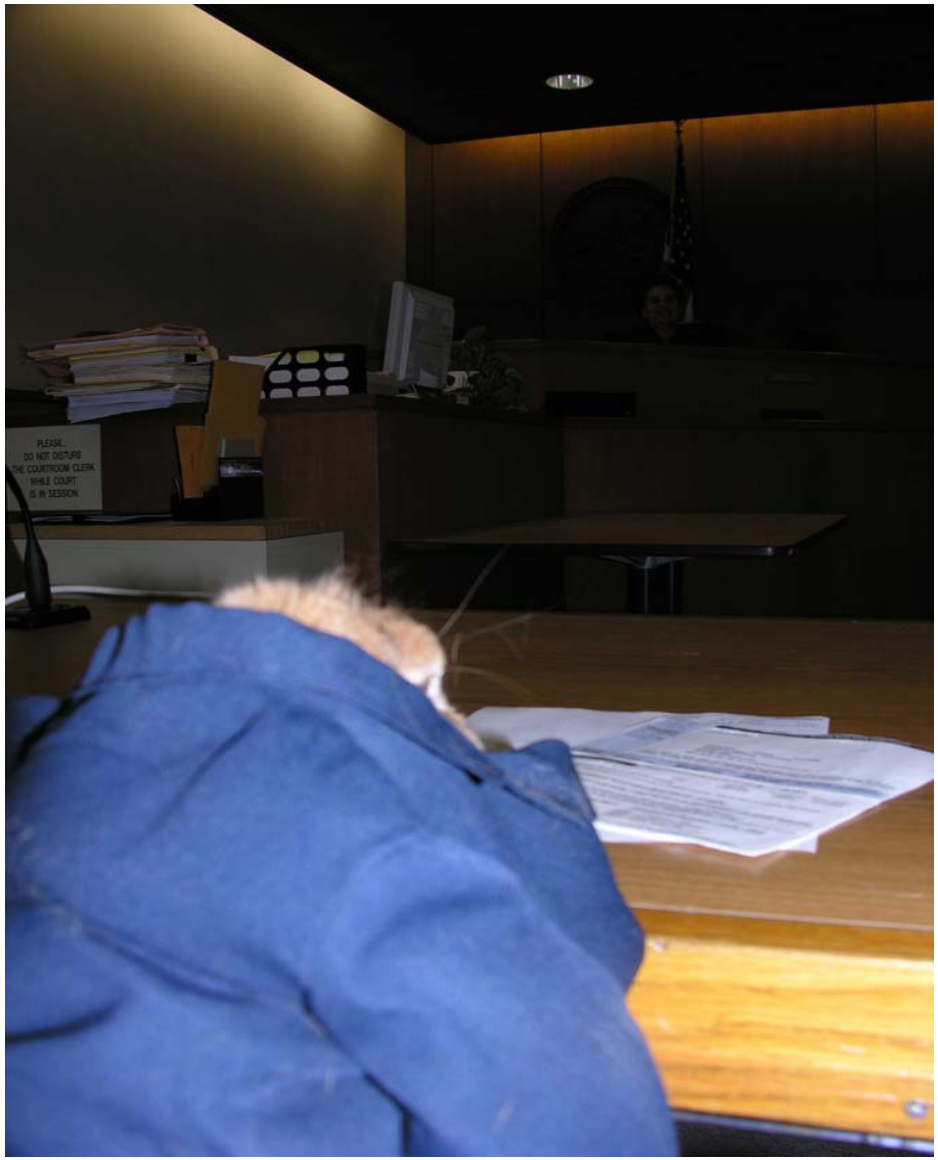
“Officer Carol Roberg” replied the police officer. “Norton Rabbit,” squeaked Norton.

Norton’s knees started to shake.

The judge began, “Officer Roberg, please tell the court what happened.”



The officer said she saw Norton Rabbit make a U-turn. She explained how it was in the middle of a busy street where businesses were on both sides. She said, “Your Honor, I cited Norton Rabbit for violating Section 22102 of the California Vehicle Code for making a U-turn in the middle of a road in a business district.”



Judge Swann turned to Norton Rabbit and asked if he had anything to say.

“Yes, Your Honor,” Norton replied. “I did make the U-turn but I did not know it was against the law. How was I supposed to know? There was no sign saying I could not make a U-turn.”

Judge Swann said, “We are all expected to follow the law. Not knowing the law is no excuse for breaking it.” She continued, “Our laws include the Vehicle Code which sets the rules for driving. If you are driving a car you must know the rules and obey them.”

Judge Swann reached for a book that said “Vehicle Code.” She read, “Section 22102 of the Vehicle Code states: ‘No person in a business district shall make a U-turn except at an intersection . . .”

“But how do I find out about the rules or laws?” asked Norton Rabbit.

“You can read them on the Internet, or in the public library, or in a Law Library. You can get them at the DMV, or go to a court self-help center where they can show you the laws and how to read them,” replied the Judge.

“Had I read the law before coming to court, I would have pled “guilty” and not taken the court’s and my own time to fight this ticket,” Norton said sadly.

“Is there anything I can do to make sure this ticket does not hurt my driving record?” he asked hopefully.

“Well,” Judge Swann replied, “I can let you go to traffic school. You will have to pay for the ticket, and pay extra to go to traffic school, but it will keep the ticket off your driving record. This will help to keep your car insurance rates from going up.”

The judge continued, “You know, you didn’t need to see me to go to traffic school. You could have done that in the clerk’s office without taking time in the courtroom, but I will let you go to traffic school if you want. Do you want to go to traffic school?”

Yes, please," Norton Rabbit replied, "And thank you, Your Honor."

Judge Swann called the next case as the bailiff handed Norton Rabbit a paper that told him how much he had to pay. It also told him how to get a list of traffic schools he could go to.

The ticket cost a lot of money. Norton Rabbit had missed a whole day of work to go to court. He was sorry he hadn’t read the law before he came to court.

He promised himself he would be a more careful driver, and should he get a ticket again, he would find a self-help center or library where he could read the law before going to the court and asking for a trial date.

The author gratefully acknowledges the help and support of the following persons and organizations for making this book possible:

The administration and staff of the Ventura County Superior Court for allowing Norton to visit the court

Carol Roberg, Director of the Oxnard Rescue Mission, and Chaplain of the Port Hueneme Police Department for “giving Norton a ticket”

Liana Swann Johnsson for agreeing to “be a judge” for a day and even be photographed

The volunteers and staff of the Ventura Court’s Self-Help Legal Access Center

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