

PUBLIC LIVES

Circling in an '87 Honda, It's the Parking Pal

By JAN HOFFMAN

AS the cries and curses of thousands of freshly ticketed double-parkers fill the air, victims of the city's new Operation Move Along, it might comfort them to know there is one man who not only feels their pain but has dedicated his life to combating it.

Meet Louis Camporeale, 39, a mild-mannered computer analyst from Gravesend, Brooklyn. He prefers to think of himself as a "parking advocate," and he looks absolutely grateful when you call him by the superhero name of his alter ego: the Parking Pal.

"This is my calling," he says. "I feel fortunate I was able to find something that gives me great passion, energy and satisfaction."

Who knew?

Mr. Pal's credo, splashed across the many parking-related aids he has developed, is "Know Your Rights — Avoid Parking Tickets." He is sweetly earnest and thoroughly humorless about the topic — "What exactly is a crosswalk? People ask me that a lot" — and has written a book and newsletters probing the deep mysteries of parking in New York City and the regulation thereof. He has created a Web site, of course, and a parking suspension calendar and a manual called "How to Take a Photo for the P.V.B." (that's Parking Violations Bureau, for the blissfully ignorant among you).

He even sells laminated placards citing the subsection of the city traffic rules allowing limited parking at a broken or missing meter. DO NOT ISSUE SUMMONS, warns the Parking Pal.

In 1997, the National Mail Order Association named the Parking Pal one of the Top 500 Unique and Interesting Products in the country.

In the wake of the city's crack-down last week against double-parkers in many commercial and residential neighborhoods, Public Lives caught up with Mr. Pal in the Manhattan studios of the cable station Metro Guide, where he was preparing his weekly spot for "New York Now."

Any tips for double-parkers to wiggle out of a ticket, Mr. Parking Pal, sir?

He looks genuinely mournful. This is, after all, a man who claims to have beaten back 80 percent of the 50 parking tickets he has ever received and who believes there is such a thing as good parking karma.

"No. Double-parking is never legal," he says, with a defeated sigh. At first glance, Mr. Pal, who is slightly built and of modest height, doesn't seem to radiate magnetism. But spe-



Jack Manning/The New York Times

Louis Camporeale says he has found his calling as a parking advocate.

cial knowledge can be charismatic. Carol Miller, the radio personality, who towers above him, rushes to his side, announcing that she has read his book, the New York City Motorists' Parking Survival Guide. "I was fascinated by the parking meter versus 15-foot fire hydrant zone conundrum!" she says breathily.

MR. PAL gives a grave nod. "In a dispute, the meter takes precedence, but you need to take a photograph."

The Parking Pal came by his avocation like any driver trying to park in midtown during the holidays: he circled and circled forever, trying different avenues and side streets. The elder son of a chef at the family's Italian restaurant and a designer of bridal headwear, Lou Camporeale studied psychology and journalism, got a master's in management, did some sports marketing, computer work for a bank, and then pursued paralegal studies.

While doing legal research in 1994, Mr. Camporeale read cases about people who had defended themselves against parking tickets. "This was just fascinating," he says, "because this was the very experience I had had!" (The book includes many such examples, including one he calls "the defining moment of my career as a parking advocate," in which he emerged from a pastry shop after a romantic dessert with a girlfriend and found a ticket on his windshield. "Don't worry," he told the distraught young woman. "I have experience with this!") A month later, the concept of the Parking Pal was born.

Mr. Camporeale, who tools around in an '87 Honda Civic, hopes to be making a profit from his alter ego any minute now.

We chat about the zen of parking.

Yes, he says, some people have that gift. "I was always fortunate to have good spaces." On a summer night, he was with friends who were haplessly searching Sheepshead Bay. "I said, 'Just go right up there.' And someone pulled right out of a spot. My friends were real surprised, and I said, 'Hey. You're driving with the Parking Pal.'"

On the psychology of parking: "People are obsessed with door-to-door service. But I say, if you park around the corner, what's the big deal? The problem is, parking doesn't become a consideration until you reach your destination, and then it becomes a crisis."

Don't be a driver; be a motorist. "Think strategically!" he says. Sometimes it's not a bad idea to take the subway.

So, Parking Pal, you've been circling forever. Have you found your life's parking space yet?

He actually blushes. There is a girlfriend of three months. "Her name is Joy and it describes her to a T," he says. "We have a fantastic relationship. She lives in Tudor City, which is great, because on the weekend there's all kinds of parking."

One final, nagging question: The endorsing foreword in your book is written by a Dr. Brian Berliner. Who is he? A Ph.D. in parking?

The Parking Pal brightens. "He's my chiropractor. But he was a professional valet parker for years."