



Observations About Jury Duty

by Bill McConnell

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I woke up in a gutter on the corner of Sunset and Crescent Heights. I'm sure that I didn't plan on waking up with my mouth crunching on a piece of curbstone, which, by the way, broke my lower left most rear molar. I didn't even remember putting my mouth there. I could have sworn I was making out with Mabel Rushton. She has a rough face. I don't mean that she was ugly or anything. She just had stubble on her chin from some steroid treatments she had taken when she was a professional body builder. With a rough face like hers, I guess laying in a gutter with my lips wrapped around a curbstone was an easy enough mistake, especially considering how much I had to drink. I thought it was funny that she shoved me against the wall outside the bar and mentioned something about my wallet. I think that was when I tried to kiss her. I also think that was when she knocked me out and left me for dead in the gutter. Mabel plays hard to get. It's her style.

All I could do was wander home. I didn't even pause at the perfect picture of a scoundrel I must have seemed. My pants hung around my ankles, and every time I took a step I waddled like a penguin on pilgrimage, marching five hundred miles for sex. All I could do was think about my tooth. I wanted to get home faster, so I tried skipping, the motion of which only made my dingus flap in the cold breeze and my tooth ache more with each skipping step. I managed to kick off a shoe and walk the rest of the way home with my pants around one ankle, while the manliest part of me retreated from the cold.

I knew that I needed to call the dentist, but going to the dentist is one of my least favorite things in the world to do. Going to the dentist is almost as bad as being asked to serve jury duty. Then I remembered that I had a jury summons hanging from a magnetic chip clip on my refrigerator door. The serendipitous quality of this moment was unbelievable. I was supposed to report at 8:00am, and it was already after 6:30am. I don't know of anyone who has actually served on a jury, but on my short list of things not to do, jury duty is number two. It comes right between number one, which is dying, and number three, which is sitting in a dentist's chair.

Seventy-five minutes later, I finally washed the smell of the gutter out of my hair. I raided my roommate's stash of Vicodin and washed down three of those pills with a bay breeze. I showed up to the courthouse wearing a suit and tie because the summons specifically said not to wear casual attire. Well, the court officials should have told Trina the transsexual about that rule. She had on an electric blue miniskirt that showed off a package that I swear had UPS tracking number on its side. It didn't really seem to bother the young man next to her. He was chatting her up, getting her number, and then getting on the phone to brag to his buddies about the hot chick he was planning to bang later that afternoon. He even did an imaginary high five.

Coming back to my own problem, I knew it would take a miracle to get out of jury duty, probably something like a mad dash for freedom by the defendant.

Man, it would be so cool if the defendant decided that today he wasn't going on trial, that instead he would take the female bailiff as a hostage and escape from his current bondage. I could see them now. He would take her gun and threaten to harm her if she didn't cooperate. They would steal a squad car and drive to Vegas. On the road to Vegas, he would ask her personal and intimate questions. She would be slightly touched by his emotional openness. They would pull over somewhere, probably the Xyzzyx road on I-15 just south of Baker, and make passionate love alongside the highway.

In Vegas, he would change his name to Ron and get work as a professional poker dealer, and she would change her name to Nancy and work in the cabaret. On weekends they would host Republican parties, during which they would do a sidesplitting impersonation of the Reagan's. Society would eventually forgive his crimes, even after he was rearrested ten years later for running an illegal brothel that donates ten percent of its weekly profits to help save a local children's hospital. I know that this sounds a lot like the movie-of-the-week plot from Sunday night. It's actually the movie-of-the-week plot from last Sunday night.

The judge quickly called us to order and then asked whether any of us felt we weren't good candidates for jury duty. When all of our hands went up, he gave a snort and said, "I can see it's going to be one of those days." Prospective jurors began making excuses, and I imagined the judge as a little boy sitting in a shooting gallery, similar to the one they have in *Frontierland* at Disneyland. The judge eagerly dropped his fifty-cents into the coin slot, grabbed the little make-believe twenty-two rifle in his small but capable hands, and fired at will. Each of our excuses became tiny red lights above our heads.

The judge heard each excuse, shooting each one down without mercy. The arcade sounds were clear as bells: one lady stood up and said *I have to look after my nephew during the day*. Ding! Some elderly man complained that *I have a doctor's appointment this week*. Bang! Some young punk said *I'm a college student, and I have, uh, finals next month, I mean this week*. Boom! This went on and on, until he came to me. I decided to lie and say that I was a schoolteacher. No judge in his right mind would pull a teacher out of classes in the middle of the school year. So I told him that I couldn't be away from my students for an extended period.

This time, there was no ding, or bang, or boom. I saw the judge put down his imaginary popgun and I felt that my miracle was about to happen. Then, as if to mock my prayers, he stood up, and spread his arms, as if a chorus of holy angels were suddenly singing

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hallelujah and asked the following question, "How many of you here are school teachers?" I saw four other hands rise into the air, and I knew then that I was busted. The Judge said, "All of you come forward. Your job is one of the few jobs that still will pay a salary for serving jury duty. You've just been assigned."

Paid?! No one gets paid by their employer for jury duty. This was utter crap. I should have said I was a cop or a lawyer and taken advantage of that whole legal brotherhood. Man, I'm an idiot. What fool in his right mind would say he is a schoolteacher?

I should have told him the truth, that I was out of my mind with pain and delirious from the Vicodin. I think Arnold the Governor is right when he says that they need to cut teachers' salaries, because any job that pays for jury duty is paying way too much. Then I wondered what it takes to become a teacher? Maybe the other four teachers could tell me? I asked, but they all just passed me notes while the attorneys and the judge finished selecting the jury panel. The notes were all pretty much the same: *Thanks a lot jerk face. You just had to mention you were a teacher. Hey idiot, didn't you know judges love teachers?* The last note said something rude about my mother and a horse.

The case lasted about three weeks too long, and my toothache had metamorphosed into an abscess. Then the judge had decided to sequester us, which killed my chances at seeing a dentist, because the defendant was a well-known actor. I liked his movies, but he was obviously guilty.

The prosecution showed that he had gotten sauced, driven home, caused one heck of an accident, fled the scene, and then dumped his vehicle somewhere and reported it stolen. He even reported it to his insurance company who gave him a check for twenty grand. So he was on trial for insurance fraud, which made me think that maybe this really was a movie-of-the-week plot turned sour. I kind of respected him though. Here he was, in a really bad situation. He knew he was screwed, but he still had found an angle through which he could make a buck. If he got out of this one, I was going to buy him a beer.

The rest of the panelists voted me in as foreman. So I asked for an immediate count. Eight people went straight to guilty, three were undecided, and I abstained because of my newfound respect for the guy's ingenuity. We immediately started arguing about the evidence. The key to this case was the cab driver who gave the defendant a ride home from a movie set. He testified the guy was drunk at the time he gave him a ride. The defense said that this was due to some sort of parking lot party that had occurred at studio after filming the final scenes of his new movie. The defense also argued that his car was stolen from a parking garage.

It was a good enough excuse for me. I even thought it was worthy of an acquittal. But this one righteous stickler sitting next to me told me I was crazy for believing this story, because actors never

tell the truth when they are on trial. That they pay for expensive lawyers to confuse juries. That they are just acting on the stand to exert their stardom on everyday people who might be easily impressed. Maybe he was right, because it was certainly working on me, but I wasn't going to let this jurist run my jury. They voted me in as the foreman, and I'd burn in hell before someone started a coup on my watch.

I told the stickler that he wasn't a reliable jurist. I told him he was just bitter because he wasn't a well-known, wealthy actor. Furthermore, I told him that if I ever saw him at a casting call that he'd wind up in some gutter with his pants dragging around his ankles and crying because he had broken a tooth. I sent a message to the judge and told him Juror #3 was being obtuse and ranting about how the rich always get off and never receive proper justice. The judge reviewed my argument and replaced Juror #3 with a sweet old lady with gray curls and purple eye shadow, who privately told me during a lunch break that she could never convict anyone of anything because it would weigh too heavily on her conscience.

Well, we began to review the evidence for the umpteenth time when the news of the Michael Jackson trial came in on someone's cell phone. We all felt that MJ had been unfairly harangued by the Santa Barbara district attorney. So we looked at the facts of that case, based on what we had all heard. We all agreed that anyone who could moonwalk, wear one glove, and put out the *Thriller* album was not guilty of any crime at all, especially child molestation. So we voted and decided MJ was not guilty. Using this logic we posited that if one celebrity is on trial, and that celebrity is found not guilty, then our celebrity on trial must also be not guilty. I took our decision to the judge, who seemed completely flabbergasted, as was the prosecuting attorney, at a not guilty decision for our defendant.

After the case, the media wanted to ask us a bunch of questions about how we came to our conclusion, but I just told them to stuff it, that we wouldn't be made into animals, and they could just wait another three months for the book to come out. I also told them that all dentists should rot in hell, especially Dr. Ray Weaver of Hollywood Family Dentistry, who happened to have a billboard hanging right outside my window.

When the media asked me what I meant, I showed them my tooth. They gasped and said this dentist was going down, that they would investigate this heinous treatment of one man's oral health and stigmatize this dangerous menace into confession. The actor's lawyer even offered to represent me, guaranteeing me a few hundred thousand in the settlement. All in all, I have to say that I now have a newfound respect for the jury system. It really does work, especially when twelve people from varying walks of life are able to find common ground upon which they can all stand unanimously.