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Book Title: "Sixty Things To Do When You Turn Sixty"

Go Directly To Jail

By

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No one should celebrate their sixtieth birthday without, at least once, being arrested and thrown in the tank with the local riff raff. As a Boomer you may have experienced this phenomenon, especially if you were one of the more outspoken of our generation regarding the politics of the Vietnam War, or if in youthful exuberance you partied a bit too much one evening. However, jail takes on a whole new meaning when you are arrested at age 54 as I was a couple of years ago! And though I wouldn't have believed it at the time, I learned a few valuable lessons I might never have learned otherwise.

There I was, thrown in the holding tank with a young woman coming down off heroin. I needed to urinate because it had been hours since I was arrested, but the toilet seat was covered in other people's urine and feces, and there was no toilet paper anyway. Plus there was no privacy. The guards could watch everything and they were all men. I just couldn't do it.

So I looked for a distraction. With a sigh of relief I noticed the phone on the wall and thought I could try once more to reach my attorney or my children. I had already been stripped of my clothing. They took everything, even my bra since it has underwire, a potential prison weapon. I was dressed in typical navy blue jail clothes and plastic sandals. No pockets, no belt, no bra. When I looked at the phone I wondered how I would make a call without my calling card or a credit card. And these days I just used my cell phone anyway so I never bothered with a calling card anymore. But the instructions on the wall were pretty specific. Either you paid the guards in advance for your call or you called collect. They already took my purse and cell phone, so collect was my only other option. The phone instructions also indicated that you had to keep your call short and that the line was often busy. My luck as you can imagine was running pretty poorly this day, and sure enough I could not get a collect call out of the place.

Starting to feel desperate and frightened, I decided it was better to accept my fate and get a grip on reality. After all I was not going anywhere real soon! So I went over and sat next to the young heroin addict. She was perspiring profusely and crying. She was beautiful though. She had long, dark, thick and wavy hair, and an angelic face with a porcelain complexion. She had a sack lunch in her lap. Apparently she had arrived at lunch time, so she got food. Not me. I missed the dinner bell too that night.

We got to talking and a little magic began to happen. I felt better somehow, having a companion to talk with. Although she was in the throes of heroin withdrawal, we talked about our situations a bit. We both had children and worried about them tonight. I encouraged her to eat and to pray. She told me she lived in a van with her boyfriend and I was stunned. I asked her how she kept her hair so clean if she lived in a van and she told me there are lots of free places in the city where a street person can get

food and showers. Then we sat there quietly, with our eyes shut, and I asked God to take care of us both.

My companion was booked long before I was, so I had to sit alone in the holding cell for hours. When my turn came, I was very relieved. In fact, I started to get curious about the whole thing. This was, after all, a brand new experience. I wondered how long it would take, who else I would meet, what the guards were like. Would my attorney ever come to rescue me? Surely I would get out of this hole before the evening passed. Then I could tell people all about this interesting experience.

I went through questioning by the sergeant in charge of booking new arrests. My picture was taken from a funny little camera in the ceiling, so that you have to roll your eyes up almost to the back of your head for the shot. Later when I saw my picture with the police report, I looked like a serial killer!

Next was fingerprinting and that was really fascinating. I expected an ink pad and paper like when I studied fingerprinting for my seventh grade science project. But this jail is modern, except for the toilets. Now computers take pictures of your fingerprints and I assume the data is whisked away, via the Internet, to the FBI and the CIA.

Third, the sergeant made a list of all of my belongings, noting how much cash I had. Thank God I had cash in my purse. Credit cards do not work in jail. Because I had cash, I could buy myself a toothbrush, toothpaste, a comb and a cup. If you can't buy a cup, you don't have anything to drink out of. I felt privileged to have a cup.

There is more and you might be wondering why I was arrested in the first place. Needless to say, at 54 I didn't expect to be in the middle of a divorce from a local divorce attorney. I did expect that he would fight me tooth and nail but I wasn't totally prepared for the abject hatred he had for me when I decided to file for divorce. As the divorce dragged on my patience wore thin. And one day, I just broke down under the pressure of mounting legal fees, caring for two teenage children, one of whom is autistic, managing a full caseload as a psychologist in private practice, and receiving a diagnosis of cancer. Before I knew what was happening I was cast as the lead in a melodramatic domestic violence scene. And poof! I was arrested for giving my ex-husband's secretary a black eye.

So why is this experience such a turning point in my life? It was an important piece of Karma that needed to be burned off this way. God knew that I wouldn't listen any other way. I am very hard headed. I needed to be humbled. I needed to stop blaming. I needed to stop running everything. I needed to stop using my mind and open my heart instead. So on this first night of my unfortunate incarceration, I let go of FEAR.

The jail in my small town leaves a lot to be desired, but then I don't have other such experiences to compare to. There are male guards who watch you pee and watch you take a shower. No matter your age, you don't get any special treatment. As a newbie, I got the top bunk with a two inch vinyl covered mattress, no pillow and one thin blanket. That meant I had to sleep within six inches of the light that shone in my face all night long. The sink in my cell was broken so that you had to shove a pencil in the handle to keep it from overflowing. I was moved from cell to cell each day so that I was always the newbie and never got the bottom bunk. My last roommate had scabies and screamed all night in her sleep because she had been raped repeatedly as a child. One woman sat next to me at meals and asked for my food since I was so much in shock I

wasn't hungry. And for the three days I was in jail, I had a migraine headache that was so bad, it felt like my head would explode.

On the other hand, I was grateful I had a cup for my Koolaid. But there is more. I learned to open my heart and watched others open theirs to me. These young women made phone calls to check on their children and talk to their mothers. None of them had an attorney to call like I did. When one of the guards decided to bully me, my cellmate quickly intervened and whispered some words of advice on jail protocol so that I wouldn't be slapped into solitary confinement or forced to take a shower in public.

On the day that I was released, the young heroin addict came out of solitary confinement, where she had been kept while she detoxed. She looked as beautiful as the day I had met her, only this time she was not crying. She beamed a beatific smile, gave me a big hug, wished me well and whispered in my ear, "I am going to stay clean this time." I hope so.

OK, so I suppose of the **Sixty Things To Do When You Turn Sixty**, going to jail is not really one of them. But the lessons from this experience should definitely be high on your list to begin your seventh decade of life. Let Go and Let God. All of your education and possessions and accomplishments are an illusion. It's not that you aren't supposed to enjoy the benefits of living on planet Earth. It's just that God created this material world for us to engage in so that we could grow Spiritually, not just climb the corporate ladder. Earth can be harsh and cruel. But your Spirit is a loving, beautiful being. Let It shine through in all that you do. Then divorce and health problems and financial woes and all of the other turmoils we face, don't seem to be so hard to bear.

Once you get this lesson, you are ready to be the Teacher. The world needs wise women and wise men. Our country needs older, wiser, compassionate, warriors to lead the younger ones to a more enlightened way of being. I think that is what turning sixty means . . . to become the Teacher.