

Jury Duty, Why Me?



A few years ago, that dreaded jury duty notice arrived in the mail. Many of you have received these notices and I would guess that like me, you really wanted nothing to do with the request to serve. Those horror stories all have to be true, because we had heard them for years.

When my notice first came, I thought I would be ineligible because I had changed my residence from one county to another county. Therefore, I thought I'll just avoid the dreaded task by sending in my change of address. Much to my surprise the court system forwarded my address change and in a few days I received another notice at my new address.

My new notice sent me to one of the courthouses in Lake County. The selected date was in early spring. Rather than putting it off and delaying the task of serving, I filled the card out with all the pertinent information about family, occupation, age, etc. I was to be at the court house early Monday morning.

Monday morning arrived quickly and I was nervous about getting to the courthouse on time. I was driving during rush hour and needed a parking space. The notice had inserted a parking permit for certain areas within the city. Like all golf superintendents, getting up early and getting to the courthouse was the easy part.

Upon arriving, everyone is checked through security and directed to the location of the rather large waiting room where each of us was giving a number. After waiting patiently for about a half hour, a judge came in to make a speech. He said we would only be needed at most a week. If we were not called the first day we would only have to phone daily to see if we would be needed another day. He was a very humorous man, interesting and very dedicated to his service within the system.

After he left, we were then told we could take a break. This must be the dreaded waiting time I had heard about.

To my surprise, while talking to other potential jurors, I discovered that we all came with the same opinion of this duty – not so much that it was a dreaded task, but a meaningful acknowledgement and privilege as part of our responsibility of being an American Citizen. How many of us think how great our country is and what we can do to help keep it that way?

Now after only a half hour or so – my number is called. I am assigned to go to a court room, where the judge, a few lawyers, the defendant, and some police officers are waiting. Now, things are finally starting to get really exciting. I am thinking to myself, should I be nervous. They call twelve numbers – mine is not called. The lawyers interview four potential jurors at a time. They ask various questions, including their employment, if they have ever been a victim of a crime, and other related questions that may pertain to the defendant. The lawyers then go up to the judge and decide if one or more of the group will be selected.

More numbers are called, including mine. I was selected to serve on the jury, but as an alternate in case there was an illness or other excused absence by one of the original jurors. An alternate sits through the entire trial, the same as the other jurors. We chatted together during the recesses. One of selected jurors happened to be a golf member at a private club. That made things a little more interesting for me – we always had plenty to talk about when the discussions were not involving the trial at hand. On the final day, I was dismissed because none of the jurors dropped out.



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To shorten the story a bit, the trial went well. I was actually saddened that I did not get to give my opinion on the outcome. After two and a half days of listening to the lawyers' questions and statements, back and forth, I actually thought I had something worthwhile to articulate. I really had the desire to be a part of the complete process. Unfortunately, I had to wait until the next day to find out the verdict. Just as I had anticipated, the defendant was found guilty as charged. This was not one of the trials of our ex governors – and that I'm sure you could figure out by the length of the trial.

Now here is the real story. Maybe you have thought of ways to get out of serving as a juror. But from my perspective this is first not only your duty, it is also a very fulfilling and important service that you can do for yourself as well as your fellow citizens. You might just enjoy the time spent and feel a sense of satisfaction that I did. So, next time when that notices arrives in the mail, smile—you can look forward to a rewarding time. -OC

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