

SERVING TIME

WHEN A GUY IS GIVEN A LIFE SENTENCE AND SENT TO PRISON, ONE WOULD NATURALLY ASSUME THAT HE HAS BEEN DEPRIVED OF ALL AUTHORITY AND THE ABILITY TO HAVE ANY REAL CONTROL OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES AROUND HIM. HOWEVER, THERE IS ONE INTERESTING ASPECT IN LIFE THAT HE SUBCONSCIOUSLY BRIDLES AND REGULATES TO HIS OWN PREFERENCE; TIME. UNLIKE OTHER INMATES, WHO HAVE RELEASE DATES & WANT TIME TO FLY BY, A LIFER IS WANTING TIME TO GO SLOW. NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE HE ENJOYS PRISON LIFE, BUT SIMPLY BECAUSE HE HAS THIS ISSUE AGAINST DYING.

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS TIME ANYWAY? WELL, IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, MY KINDERGARTEN TEACHER EXPLAINED IT LIKE THIS: TIME IS THE INDEFINITE CONTINUATION OF THE PROGRESS OF EXISTENCE. OKAY, THAT SEEMS SIMPLE ENOUGH. NEVERTHELESS, IT STILL NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME HOW TIME HAS THE ABILITY TO GO SLOW FOR ONE GUY AND FAST FOR ANOTHER AT THE SAME TIME. THE ONLY PROBLEM INVOLVED IS WHEN A LIFER KEEPS TRYING TO HOLD BACK THE PROCESS OF TIME. HERE'S A GOOD EXAMPLE: LETS SAY YOU WERE TO MEET A LIFER WHO WAS SENT TO PRISON WHEN HE WAS 32 AND HAS SPENT 15 YEARS BEHIND THE BARS. IF YOU WERE TO ASK HIM HOW OLD HE FELT, I GUARANTEE YOU HE WOULD SAY 33 OR 34. IT AS THOUGH HE HAS MASTERED THE SCIENCE OF CONTROLLING TIME.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE OCCASION FINALLY ARRIVES WHEN TIME IS NO LONGER WILLING TO BE HELD BACK. THIS EVENT IS BETTER KNOWN AS: WHEN TIME CATCHES UP WITH YOU. IN MY STUDIES REGARDING THIS SUBJECT, I HAVE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT TIME DOESN'T CHOOSE A PARTICULAR AGE OR EVENT IN OUR LIVES TO WHICH IT DECIDES TO SUDDENLY OVERTAKE US AND LEAVE US FEELING LIKE SOME OLD COOT WITH ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE AND THE OTHER ON A BANANA PEEL. RATHER, IT SLOWLY AND NONCHALANTLY BEGINS TO REVEAL ITSELF IN OUR COMMON EVERYDAY AFFAIRS.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT A FEW EXAMPLES, FROM A PRISONERS POINT OF VIEW, AT THE REALIZATION OF:
YOU KNOW TIME IS CATCHING UP WITH YOU...

1. WHEN YOU GO TO THE BARBER TO GET A BUZZ AND NOTICE HE BEGINS WITH THE BACK HALF OF YOUR HEAD FIRST. THEN, JUST WHEN YOU THINK HE'S GOING TO START ON THE FRONT HALF, HE PULLS THE CAPE FROM AROUND YOU AND SAYS, "OKAY, I'M DONE."
2. WHEN IN THE MIDST OF SOME CASUAL CONVERSATION, A FELLOW INMATE MENTIONS HIS AGE AND YOU REALIZE YOU'RE OLD ENOUGH TO BE HIS FATHER. THEN, YOU CONTINUE CALCULATING AND REALIZE YOU'RE ALSO OLD ENOUGH TO BE HIS GRANDFATHER.
3. WHEN YOU COME ACROSS AN OLD CANTEEN RECEIPT AT THE BOTTOM OF YOUR LOCKER THAT READS: 1 COKE, 1 DORITOS, 1 SNICKERS AND 1 TUBE OF COLGATE TOOTHPASTE. THEN, YOU PULL THE MOST RECENT ONE OUT OF YOUR POCKET AND IT READS: 1 V8 DRINK, 1 BAG OF TRAIL MIX, 1 CHEWY FRUIT & NUT BAR AND 1 TUBE OF EFFERGRIP DENTURE ADHESIVE.

4. WHEN YOU HAVE TO START KEEPING A COPY OF YOUR COMBINATION LOCK NUMBER HIDDEN IN AN INCONSPICUOUS PLACE, BECAUSE YOU OCCASIONALLY FORGET YOUR COMBINATION. THEN, YOU ALSO FORGET THE INCONSPICUOUS PLACE YOU HID IT.
5. WHEN UPON NOTICING A FEMALE OFFICER IN THE CONTROL ROOM, YOU EASE ON OVER TO THE INTERCOM TO DO A LITTLE BIT OF FLIRTATIOUS TALKING TO HER. THEN, INSTEAD OF YELLING TO GO AWAY AND LEAVE HER ALONE, SHE ASKS, "MAY I HELP YOU?"
6. WHEN YOU'RE STANDING OUTSIDE THE DORM WITH SOME OTHER GUYS AND SOMEONE SAYS, "HEY OLD-TIMER, WHAT TIME IS IT?" THEN, AFTER LOOKING AROUND, YOU NOTICE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WEARING A WATCH AND REALIZE HE'S TALKING TO YOU.
7. WHEN YOU AND A BUDDY ARE LOOKING THROUGH YOUR FOLDERS OF LEGAL WORK, AND WHEN HE SEES YOUR ORIGINAL MUG SHOT HE ASKS, "IS THAT YOU?"

SO NOW WE HAVE SOME IDEAS OF WHEN TIME IS CATCHING UP WITH US. HOWEVER, THE IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS TO NOT ALLOW THE PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF LIFE TO SLOW US DOWN IN THIS PSYCHOLOGICAL RACE WE ARE ENGAGED IN. LET ME JUST CLOSE WITH A STATEMENT MADE BY ONE OF MY INFORMANTS WHO IS OVER 85 YEARS OLD AND HAS BEEN IN PRISON FOR OVER 40 YEARS, "TIME WILL ONLY OVERTAKE US IF WE ALLOW IT TO."

MAZE