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* SERVING TIME *

When a man is given a life sentence and sent to prison, one would naturally assume that he has been rent 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 the other prisoners who have release dates and 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, the last I heard, 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 individual, 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. For instance, let's say you were to meet a prisoner who had been arrested when he was 30 years old, and had spent 20 years in prison. Upon asking him how old did he feel, I can almost promise you he would give an answer somewhere between 31 and 35. It's 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.

So let's take a look at a few examples -- from a prisoner's point of view -- of this realization of: "You Know Time Is Catching Up With You When. . ."

1.) You go to the barber to get a buzz, and you notice he starts with the BACK half of your head first. Then, just when you think he's going to start doing the front half, he pulls the cape away and says, "Okay, I'm done."

2.) In the midst of some casual conversation, a fellow prisoner 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.) You come across some ancient canteen receipt at the very 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 that reads: 1 bottle of water, 1 bag of trail mix, 1 chewy fruit and nut bar, and one tube of Effergrip denture adhesive.

4.) 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.) Upon noticing a female guard in the control room, you ease on over to the intercom to do a little bit of flirtatious talking with her. Then, instead of yelling at you to go away and leave her alone, she asks, "May I help you, sir?"

6.) You're standing outside with the crowd, 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.) You and a buddy are looking through your folders of legal work, and when he sees your original mug shot asks, "Is THAT YOU ?"

So now YOU 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 you 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."