

## JAIL TIME

It was a June day New Englanders had spent all of spring hoping for, 75 degrees and only the occasional cotton ball cloud pushed by the wind in a sea of blue.

Mid-morning, in the middle of the week, a placid white ribbon of almost vacant Maine Turnpike unrolled before me. I was headed North from Boston bound for Portland to see my ad agency's favorite client, Maine National Bank.

Like many Massachusetts folks, I tended to stereotype Mainers, their laconic speech, distinctive accents—"Yes" is "ayuh"—and subtle, understated humor. Sometimes you don't get the joke until a few minutes later.

Mainers in my experience were easy going, but as I rolled up to my first toll booth I anticipated some difficulty, though. My smallest bill for this 75 cent toll was a twenty. One can barely imagine the explosion this would have caused on the New Jersey Turnpike.

"I'm really sorry," I said "but this is the smallest I've got."

He took the twenty, glanced at it, then looked at me almost bored. "At'll cover it," he said and counted out my wallet full of change.

My clients at the bank were similar; understated, genuine, wry but respectful. Meetings with them were always enjoyable, and this one today was scheduled with my primary contact at the bank, Tom Elliman. He specialized in efficiency. Fast meetings so we could get off to lunch for a quick beer and storytelling. After ordering, the conversation would usually start with Tom say

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ing, “Did I ever tell you the one about...”. Handsome, single and in his mid thirties, Tom stretched the image of the buttoned-down, pin-striped banker having started his advertising career as the PA announcer at a nearby NASCAR track. He had lots of stories. I met Tom for the first time when I was crossing the finish line in the Bank’s five mile charity run on a sizzling July day a few years earlier. He was the guy enjoying his job dousing all the overheated runners, especially the female ones, with a welcomed garden hose shower. He had created, and was judging his own impromptu wet t-shirt contest.

After lunch on this perfect day I planned to stop on the way back at Ogunquit’s vast, soft beach to run a few miles and top it off with some invigorating and very brief body surfing in Maine’s bracing Atlantic.

Nothing could interrupt these pleasant thoughts more unkindly than the stabbing blue strobe lights that exploded in my rear view mirror.

The trooper driving his cruiser added a touch of siren screech further plunging my reverie from bliss to fracture.

The siren did its job, triggering my adrenaline reaction, and I was filled with panic as I pulled into the break-down lane, the cruiser only inches behind my trunk. Reflecting now on the beginning of this new journey I wonder, why do they have to scare you so? Why did he have to scare me?

I ransacked through a mental checklist of proper behavior. Stay calm. Stay calm? Get calm. You’re dressed in a suit and tie. You look respectable. Be respectful. Be quiet. Be docile and cooperative. Roll the window down. Smile? No! Don’t smile. It’s not neutral. Be neutral, expressionless. Prepare the driver’s license. Get the registration. Oh no! Where’s the registration? Panic. Got to find the registration. Shaking fingers fumbling through the dashboard over

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stuffed with service receipts and random documents. Thank goodness, there it is right where it's supposed to be, resting quietly, never expecting this disturbance.

Only seconds had passed, but I had expected the trooper to be at my window to start that onerous procedure. "Do you know how fast you were going?" he would ask. My honest answer would have been, "I have no idea, officer. My mind was body surfing off Ogunquit."

But he did not appear at my window. Where was he? I looked back at him in my rear-view. He was sitting in his driver's seat talking, apparently on his radio. Looked to be in his mid thirties about the same age as me. He was in no hurry.

As I waited, my panic receded into confusion. I had some time to think. How fast was I going? I wasn't passing anyone. I was simply moving at the speed of traffic, probably just under 70. Hard to believe he would pull me over for that.

I looked again. Still no movement. Surely he was discovering that he had the wrong car. His lips were still moving. Was he calling in reinforcements? Was I being mistaken for a drug dealer? Now I was very conscious that way too much time had elapsed.

My inspection sticker was unexpired. My registration was fine. But my state of mind wasn't. Panic was just below the surface. What was wrong with me? What had I done that warranted the strobe lights, the siren and now this long conversation.

It was almost a relief when he appeared at my window, tie perfectly straight, not a wrinkle on his all beige uniform, creases of his shirt sharp enough to cut your finger. Shiny silver, star shaped badge. While I couldn't see them out the window, I imagined those state trooper trademarks; the glossy, polished brown boots and the holstered side arm, stage two of the intimidation perhaps.

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Just as I anticipated he asked for my driver's license and registration. Oddly, there were no questions about how fast I might have been going. Once he had the administrative items, he commanded, "Lock your car, bring your keys and get in the passenger side of my vehicle."

These were words I was not expecting, and they did not register. This was wholly outside the standard pulled-over-by-a-state-trooper-on-the-interstate protocol. I was so startled, he had to repeat the words before I could understand.

With questions abounding I did as I was ordered, going way back on my checklist to "docile and cooperative," to which I would now add confused, agitated and afraid.

I settled myself on the passenger seat of his cruiser bewildered with fear closing in.

As he climbed in his side, he made sure that I saw his brown leather holster strapped to his right thigh. Once settled in he removed his round brimmed hat, placed it on the back seat then looked directly into my eyes and began. "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to have an attorney."

My behavior checklist went out the window along with my few remaining fragments of calm.

"Wait!" I shouted. "Stop. Those are my Miranda rights. That means you're trying to arrest me. This must be a case of mistaken identity. What have I done? You have to tell me what I've done."

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“Just calm down,” he demanded. “I’m not tryin’ to arrest you. I AM arrestin’ you. Everything’ll be explained when we get to the station. In the meantime, just sit quiet so I don’t have to cuff you.”

Afraid of him, the distinct aroma of his state trooper leather, and fearful that I might unknowingly utter something that would incriminate me further, I stayed mute. Lights flashing, siren blazing, he sped his cruiser out into turnpike traffic, then exited for York, the nearest town, leaving my car a mile or so behind abandoned in the breakdown lane.

When we arrived at the station, the trooper circled to a back entrance, coasted to the bottom of a down ramp and stopped at a thick cement door. He triggered a remote device opening this vault like door, and drove into a secure receiving area, ablaze in floodlights. The door thudded shut behind us. Was this the ultra secure receiving procedure for dangerous criminals like me?

Once inside a team of Maine State Police deftly began—continued actually—this Kafkaesque process that it appeared would end with my stay in a jail cell.

But first, there was the wait. I was guided to a bare holding room, just four walls and a locked door, and ordered to take my place, in solitary, on the wooden bench along the back wall. Was I too dangerous to mix with the rest of the jail population?

The room had beige cement brick walls interrupted with random, foretelling fingerprints of grey/black, smears of something, grease perhaps and graffiti scratched in pencil and various colors of pen. It smelled like a bathroom on the turnpike without the urinals.

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They left me alone to wallow in my questions. I searched my memory for what terrible thing I must have done in Maine at some point in my life that would justify this treatment. There was nothing. What behavior would be best for me? Demand that I be allowed a lawyer? Insist that I either be charged with something or released? And I needed to call Tom to tell him I'd be late, or not at all. I decided that I should try to get calm, be docile and cooperative. The model prisoner; certainly not the convict they must have mistaken me for. I wondered what might happen next.

A few moments later I was escorted to another room. It became apparent that this was where I would have my fingerprints taken. *Oh my*, I thought. *They really are going to put me in a cell.*

But first, back to my holding room to sit some more.

Next a different trooper, taller, sunken cheeks, jut jawed and unsmiling entered my personal Hell. "Stand up!" he growled.

Then, "Very slowly and carefully," he began, "no fast hand movements—remove your belt, give it to me, then remove your tie and give that to me."

Heart still beating too fast, hands shaking, fingers still stained black, I followed instructions.

"Now. Sit back down, undo your shoelaces and give them to me one at a time."

Finally, I ventured to speak. I wanted to scream that this was completely ridiculous. Instead I asked, "I'm wondering if you might tell me why I'm doing all this?"

Standing there, holding my various items of clothing, he offered a rather bizarre image, more butler than trooper, but still imperious.

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“No prisoners are allowed in their cells with anything they could use to damage themselves,” he replied and, taking with him these weapons of self-destruction, left me alone again.

They made it clear that I was moving up the path to a jail cell, and let me sit with that, alone in my fetid holding room, for a long time. But as I sat quietly, calm and, with it, rational thinking returned. Nothing was adding up, and my fear was being replaced by curiosity.

I wondered how they could leave me with my shirt, socks and pants if they were so concerned about self-inflicted damage. It seemed that I could more easily hang myself in my cell with my shirt or pants than with my shoelaces.

But beyond that surely, the Maine State Police had better things to do than arrest the likes of me. And they would have to tell me some time soon why I was being treated like a criminal.

Finally, my familiar arresting trooper re-appeared to do some explaining. “You were doin’ 68 in a 65 zone,” he said. “That might seem like nothin’ to you, but here’s the rub. You got an unpaid speedin’ ticket from five years back. Looks like you just been ignorin’ that one, maybe? Huh?” He paused. I wasn’t sure if I should answer, try to defend myself.

Before I could, he continued, “Cap’n and I are decidin’ on what we want to do with you. Got a lotta options.”

With that he turned to leave; then stopped suddenly, pivoted, and said, “You’re just another Massachusetts scofflaw. When you go back home,” he lifted his chin up, looked down his nose “tell all your scofflaw friends that THIS is what happens when we catch up with ‘em.”

So, there it was. I was one of those most wanted Maine lawbreakers, the Massachusetts Scofflaw. But, really, to pull me over for going three miles per hour over the speed limit? He must have

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seen my Massachusetts plate and taken a chance. That would explain why he sat so long in his cruiser before the arrest. He must have been waiting while his cohorts back at the barracks

combed the long list of unpaid speeding tickets hoping to find a match with my plates. He probably heard something like, “Bingo, Billy. Bring ‘im in.” I could only imagine his glee at this opportunity for payback, intimidation, domination, and just plain fun—the cat toying with his captured mouse, and, best of all, one from Massachusetts.

Seeing the situation through this new lens, I looked down at my laceless shoes and felt the empty loops around my waist. They were playing with me. I imagined what fun they must be having in the back room.

“By damn, don’t you just love it when we get one of these Massholes? Ok, Bill, you got the Miranda rights, so I get to do the fingerprints. Then you get to do the shoelaces and belt thing. Then we just let ‘im sit with his fear.”

Their trap was sprung, they had their prey and they could and would have their way with me. But, for me, the edge was off, since I thought I had caught on to their game.

Their next act was an almost comical good cop/bad cop routine as they entered my room, together this time, looking like twins in their matching pressed khaki and leather boots.

The good cop had the opening line. “Your fine’s been set at \$500. That’ll clear up your violation today and the old one. Pay it now, and you can avoid the lock-up.”

Bad cop: “But no credit cards. It’s gotta be cash. You got the cash?”

“Oh, gosh, no,” I said. “I never carry that much cash.”

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Good cop: “If you don’t have the cash, there’s a bail bondsman in town” (woman actually, who I’m sure made a handsome living off this scam) but...”

Bad cop: “Shelly don’t open this early—especially for scofflaws. And you’re incarcerated anyway so somebody else’ll have to get the cash for you. Looks like you’ll be spending some time with us here.

Good cop: “but before we lock you up, you can make one phone call.”

Of course. My last phone call. I sensed that we were getting towards the end of their script, but I still had to play the role of the cornered, defenseless, scared Masshole, which, under the circumstances, was not that hard to do. And while I’d had much else to worry about, I finally had the opening to call my client.

They escorted me to a desk. One trooper sat in the power position. I sat opposite him. He pushed the phone towards me, and I dialed my client in Portland.

“Good morning (brightly), Maine National. How can I help you?”

A simple greeting, but so ironic.

“Tom Elliman please.”

Fortunately, he answered his phone.

“Hey Tom. Jim here.”

“Uh. Oh. Was wondering where you were. This can’t be good.”

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“Tom, I’m gonna be late for the meeting. I’m, aaah, in a bit of bind here, and I really need you to help me out.”

I paused to be careful. I had to get the message to him while playing the proper role with my observing trooper.

Tom said, “Yeah? What can I do? What’s goin’ on?”

“Well, I’m in jail down here in York...”

He interrupted. “What?” Then, as I expected, he laughed. “You’re in fuckin’ jail!? In York!? I always knew you couldn’t be trusted. How the hell did this happen?”

“The Maine State Police caught me speeding on the turnpike.”

Interrupting again.

“Oh my god. How fast were you going?”

“68 in a 65 zone.” I was worried about reporting this ridiculous fact and glanced up at the trooper checking for his reaction. His eyelids looked heavy, halfway down. *How many times had he heard this very call?*

“Seriously? 68? And they pulled you over for that?”

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“Well, that’s just the beginning. I also have an unpaid speeding ticket going back a few years, so I’m a scofflaw. They’re holding me until I pay a \$500 fine, and they won’t take my credit card. It’s gotta be cash. So, I’m hoping you can drive down here with the cash, so they’ll release me.”

“Damn. Unbelievable.“ He pondered this for what seemed like a very long time.

“Good thing I work for a bank,” he said. “I don’t just happen to have a spare 500 on me.”

He went on. “Boy those guys...they just love to get scofflaws. Especially from Massachusetts. They’re fuckin’ famous for that.”

“Yeah. Tell me about it.”

“Ok. It might take me awhile, but I’ll be there.” Then he laughed again. “I can spend the time we were supposed to be meeting to drive down there and save your sorry ass.”

Playing to my trooper I said, “Really, there’s nothing funny about this, so I hope you can hurry.”

“Got it. But really. I’m not sure it’s in my job description to bail my agency’s ass outa jail.”

More laughter. “You are so gonna owe me for this one.”

The troopers decided, after some conversation, not to put me in a cell after all and escorted me back to my holding room instead. I wondered if it ever was a real possibility.

About 90 minutes later Tom arrived. He was one of those Mainers that didn’t have the accent, but he could turn it on when needed, and I overheard him speaking fluent Maine with the troopers as he completed the extortion.

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A few minutes later the door to the rest of my life opened. Tom entered, a smile covering his face.

“Damn. I’m so glad you’re here,” I said, and whispered, “but no matter what, do NOT start laughing.”

“Laughing? I’ve been laughing to myself all the way down,” he said, “but, honestly I was very careful not to go over 65, even though I’ve got Maine plates.”

My butler trooper reappeared with shoelaces, belt and tie. He tossed them on the bench next to me, turned smartly and left us alone.

Tom looked at them puzzled, then looked at me.

“Jaysus! For real!?”

“Yeah. They didn’t want me to hang myself in my cell. They’ve really been toying with me, man. I have to keep looking scared, and you have to look serious. Ok?”

“Yeah. Ok. Got it.”

After I finished dressing, the trooper took us to what looked like a check out desk. I signed documents admitting to my felonious behavior and acknowledgements that the Maine State Police had taken good care of my dangerous items of clothing and returned them to me in their original condition along with my license and registration.

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They handed Tom a receipt for the paid ransom. A few minutes later, I breathed in the fresh air of freedom, and we headed back to my car still parked in the northbound emergency lane of the turnpike.

Tom pulled up behind my car, not nearly as close as the cruiser had been.

“Ok, man. Here we are,” he said.

“Yup. Can’t thank you enough for doin’ this.”

“I’m gonna have so much fun thinking about what I get for pay back. A couple free ads maybe? A month’s refund of the agency fee. And that’s just hush money for me.”

“Ok, ok, stop,” I said. “How ‘bout I buy you lunch today?”

“Well, now, there’s a good idea,” he said. Then he turned to me and flashed that big NASCAR smile. “The best part is, to make it back in time for lunch, we’ll have to drive really fast.”

