

Julie McDonald Commentary: Wake Me Up When It's Time for the Jury - The Chronicle: Opinion

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I never considered myself hyperactive until I sat on a jury in Lewis County Superior Court last week.

Having been called in the past as part of a jury pool, I arrived prepared: I brought my laptop so I could continue the herculean task of sorting through 2,500 photos I shot during a 10-day trip to Israel. More than 60 people sat in the room, reading the jury instruction booklet and watching a movie about the judicial system and role of jurors. Then we waited. And waited. And waited.

Usually when I arrive, I receive a badge with a high number, making it less likely I'll be picked for the jury. This time my number was 12. The clerk gave a handful of jurors — those with badges between 60 and 64 — permission to leave.

Then we were called into the courtroom to answer questions posed by the attorneys. After about 45 minutes, they selected 12 jurors and an alternate. I was one of those.

The good news is that everyone else could leave, although Superior Court Judge Nelson Hunt invited them to stay if they'd like to watch the proceedings, noting that he's never had jurors take him up on the offer.

After the lawyers' opening statements, the court adjourned for lunch. We learned that we couldn't bring laptops or cell phones into the jury room. Oh, my, what a cruel and unusual punishment! I realized just how dependent I've become on that little black handheld device to multitask while killing time. If I'm waiting to see the doctor, standing in Walmart's prescription line or sitting at the Department of Motor Vehicles, I whip out my cell phone, check email, peruse Facebook or read an ebook so my time isn't entirely wasted.

Not so in the jury room, where anyone with a cell phone could possibly log onto the Internet and taint the proceedings by reviewing outside evidence.

So, I read a magazine article about the christening of Prince William and Princess Kate's baby, George. (Wednesday I brought a book.)

The case involved charges of burglary and assault, so I envisioned nasty intruders barging into a house and pummeling innocent homeowners.

Instead, we heard of a domestic dispute that escalated. In a nutshell, an unmarried couple living together fought, the man was arrested and hauled to jail and, to post bail, he asked his mother to go to his house and retrieve his truck, where he kept the title.

At her son's house, she pounded on the door, told the girlfriend she needed her son's truck keys, and tried to step inside. The girlfriend began to slam the door and the mother thrust it hard, then pushed the woman, grabbed the keys from the counter, and left.

On Tuesday, we were dismissed early because a witness couldn't appear until the next day, then on Wednesday we waited 1 1/2 hours but the witness failed to show up until after the prosecution had rested.

Hunt told us that after courtroom rulings, the burglary charge was dismissed and the mother, who pleaded guilty to nonfelonious assault, was sentenced to the one day in jail she had already served.

Before he dismissed us, Hunt asked us not to judge the entire judicial system on our experience, which took "hurry up and wait" to new heights.

I am soooooo glad I didn't serve on the six-week trial of Rick Riffe. I admire the jurors who did — for their service and for rendering long-awaited justice in the 1985 murders of Ed and Minnie Maurin.

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