

## My Mother, the Scofflaw

So, my Mother is a scofflaw, one who openly flouts laws of society, according to the state of South Carolina, in official mail sent to our home, complete with a court date with the judge, which she did not attend. Many articles on the subject indicate that some scofflaws move on up, or rather down, the ladder to become a felon, eventually, but that did not happen with my Mother, she peaked at just the scoffing. I was shocked to learn about the scofflaw designation, for my Mom is a meek and gentle person, given to arts and crafts, knitting, NPR. She's a librarian for God's sake.

Her descent into scofflawery began when we moved from one side of town to the other, about 2 miles in distance. Amid all the hub-bub of building and moving she diligently filled out the forms for address changes to all the businesses and organizations she dealt with and left a forwarding mail request at the Post Office. All of this is important. A few months later she was driving in another county and was pulled over for having an expired license and registration. Sometimes officers will warn you of the expiration but not this time. My father was bummed at the ticket, more at himself for failing to register, something that hadn't ever happened. He wrote it off to the upheaval of moving and the disorder that accompanies such. Mom booked it down to the PO and purchased a \$50 money order and dropped it into the mail, the recommended path to deal with the fine, unless you wanted to drive to the court and challenge it. She did not.

So, fast forward about six months, Mom is driving with my sister in another county when they pass a DMV that appears to have little activity and since my sister needs to renew her DL, they stop and do so. While waiting on my sister Mom checks her own DL and discovers that hers expires in about two months, so she goes to the window to renew hers as well. The DMV agent gladly complies with her request and pulls up her info on the computer, but then makes a frowny face, glances at her in sort of a re-evaluative way and informs her that her DL has been suspended, for quite some time, in fact. Noting Mom's genuinely shocked appearance, she leaned forward and whispered that she's supposed to inform the police officer across the hall about her but if she promised to leave now and let my sister drive home she'd forget about it. It would be the only act of compassion she would see in this ordeal.

Now, Dad is frantic. He, too, lived a fairly quiet existence and preferred order to chaos, despite him being a college professor, for God's sake. He calls the DMV to find out why the person he lives with is now banned from the highways of our state. "Failure to appear at court or pay fine" is what the helpful DMV person says, perhaps too helpfully. From this public servant Dad learns that the money order did not arrive and since it didn't a warrant was issued for her arrest, not the kind where they come and get you but one where if they run into you, you will be cuffed, fitted to an orange jumpsuit, and then photographed. Gad, Mom. Dad also learned that the registration materials and other correspondence from the court was going to our old address and that DMV specifically orders that mail NOT be forwarded. They cite some vague privacy concerns but dad suspects that it's a good way to raise money. Dad the pessimist with flavors of paranoia. Anyway, now that Mom is officially a scofflaw, the court's feelings are hurt and can only be assuaged by a substantial amount of money and to make sure that it doesn't happen again. A court date is set, and a judge is identified to adjudicate the crime. Meanwhile, Dad is driving Mom to all of her appointments and errands, a task that weighs heavy on him, for he is not a shopper. Mom develops a sixth sense for the Po-Po, sliding down in the seat when on the road, noting

their passing through our neighborhood as she hides behind window curtains, wondering if they are stalking her.

Dad, however, is not satisfied to merely walk into a court setting and take it on the chin, plus he is getting tired of the chauffeuring which will last three months into the summer. He calls the courthouse to speak with the judge, however, he can only get to the judge's secretary, a 78 year old darling who has served the court for over 45 years, so she says three minutes into the conversation. An institution within an institution. When Dad spills out the story and underscores the rather bizarre practice of not forwarding mail, Ms Bailey the soon to be octogenarian, gently points out that she, in the last 45, has seen it all and even though Dad makes a compelling story it isn't good enough to get to the judge prior to the court date. So, it looks like Mom is going to get grilled. But then the story turns. Mom suddenly discovers, loudly, while looking for her lip balm in her purse, tucked into a seldom used pocket, the missing receipt for the money order. Now she has evidence, the smoking gun stuff. Dad immediately calls Ms Bailey, the lady who has heard it all. Ms Bailey is delighted to hear the news about the miracle receipt and schedules a meeting with the judge the next day.

Dad dresses in his finest college togs and heads to the distant court but as he is pulling out of the driveway he glances at the Lincoln roses Mom has beside the walkway. An idea sparkles. When Dad arrives at the courthouse he passes through the metal detector and they inspect his pocket contents and the vase of roses.

"Who the roses for?" the otherwise disinterested guard asks.

"Ms. Bailey." Dad replies.

"Good move." The guard observes.

Dad is nervous so he hits the restroom off the hall, placing the roses on the sink. Two state patrolmen enter, large men especially in their assault vests.

"Who the roses for?" the largest asks.

"Ms Bailey."

"Good move." The other officer replies.

Once in the anteroom to the judge's chambers, Dad presents the flowers to Ms Bailey who really doesn't look a day over 60. Her eyes mist as she thanks him for the gift. The judge suddenly bursts into the room and fixes Dad with a stare.

"You the scofflaw?"

"No sir, the husband of."

Judge nods as if he fully understands and then glances at the vase of Lincoln roses.

"You bring those?"

"Yes sir."

"Good move."

In the judge's chambers, Dad, in a seat much lower than the judge's, tells the story of moving, not forwarding, money order, etc. The judge examines, carefully, the MO receipt. After a couple of pointed questions, the judge leans forward and asks the critical question.

"So, how has your wife been getting around these last two months?"

"I've been driving her."

"Shopping, hair appointments, work?"

Dad nods with just the right amount of anguish on his face.

"Hell, that's payment enough!" the judge roars and ushers Dad from the office with a clap on the back.

So, there you have it. Mom got the pardon, Dad dropped out of driving, and life went on. When they moved again 20 years later, the very first thing they did was drive to the DMV. And that was a very good move.