

Thomas Fuchs
My Jury Story

One night I opened my mailbox and found the dreaded red envelope from the County telling me my number had come up for jury duty. Like most people, I really wanted to avoid serving... until I saw the defendant. That happened six weeks later when I and about thirty other prospective jurors were led into a courtroom and seated in the spectator section. Then twelve of us—not including me—were told to take seats in the jury box.

It was while this was all being sorted out that I got my first look at the defendant, sitting at a table with his lawyer. Definitely my type. Handsome Asian guy. Jet black hair. Young looking but not a kid. Mid-twenties. Angular face. Something his lawyer said made him smile.

There was an easy self-assurance in that smile, as though he understood that little inconveniences like being on trial were just something that had to be tolerated. What was he up for? Was he a gang member? Had he pulled a knife on someone? Shot someone? His name, I would eventually find out, was something I can't pronounce, let alone spell, something Thai. Part of it sounded to me like "Jerry", and that is how I think of him.

The people who had been called into the jury box were now subjected to questions by Jerry's lawyer and the DA and sometimes by the judge. The idea is to weed out anyone either side doesn't want. I've been through this a couple of times. Some people say they don't trust the police and think they lie; others say the police and the courts should be tougher. I'm sure a lot of people believe what they say, but I'll bet a lot are like me, trying to come up with something that will get them rejected. I've tried a few things myself in the past but this time was different. This time I was beginning to think of what I should say to insure that I was included.

My curiosity about Jerry and what he was supposed to have done grew as the questioning went on. The lawyers asked the prospective jurors how they felt about gays, and do you believe in so-called victimless crime, and, more specifically, how do you feel about prostitution? This was getting ever more intriguing. Was Jerry a hustler? Do they still bust people for that?

No one admitted to disliking gays. One woman was excused when she said she hated prostitution, that her marriage broke up because her husband was seeing what she quaintly termed "ladies of the night." None of the others felt quite that strongly about the subject. One man was excused when he said he was a Libertarian and thought it was fine for people to pay for sex. He went on to volunteer that he also thought all drugs should be legalized. This seemed to vastly irritate the judge, who lectured us about how we all have to obey laws whether we agree with them or not. Really? I found myself thinking about laws they used to have against gay people. Which brought me back to wondering what it was Jerry was supposed to have done. I really hoped I would get a chance to play a role in all this.

Each time someone was excused, I thought I might have a chance, but each time someone else from our group was called into the box so that by the time I finally did get a chance, I had a pretty good idea what and what not to say. No, I didn't have anything against gays—was it apparent to them that I am a deeply committed homosexual? I lied and said "yes"

when they asked if I thought prostitution was a bad thing. In fact, I agree with the Libertarian about this. If people want to pay for sex, why not?