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A Banquet of Consequences

by Miriam Silver

The barrister for the prosecution made a powerful case against the man in the dock, the defence council defended his client at great length, promising to prove his innocence. The hundreds of words used by them took us to the lunch break. We, the jury were directed to the jurors' room and warned we must not discuss the case with anyone outside the court.

I had met the other eleven jurors briefly during the selection and regulation giving process. It was my first experience of jury service and I was overwhelmed by the serious atmosphere in the court, which to me felt quite threatening. During lunch we kept our conversation general agreeing we had to hear much more before we could begin to consider our verdict.

The defence barrister began by stating that he was confident his evidence and witnesses would prove that the man standing in the Dock could not have committed this terrible crime because they had proof of his whereabouts for the time in question. Also the prisoner's daughter testified to visiting her mother soon after the alleged murder time and did not see her father until after he returned, which was at least ten or fifteen minutes later. The scene, which greeted him, his wife on the floor in a pool of blood, caused him to become totally confused and bewildered.

The prosecution presented proof that the prisoner was seen by a neighbour at midday coming out of the house and could therefore have killed his wife and returned to work afterwards. Also that his daughter's call to him could have placed him anywhere. The defence challenged every statement. With this, thankfully the Judge brought the days hearing to an end telling us to return the next day not before adding all that we had heard previously regarding restrictions.

After two full days of being regaled with testimonies, proof and evidence from both the prosecution and the defence, and when we were virtually drowning in words, the lawyers finished their closing speeches and the judge explained again about discussion outside the court and to ignore all media coverage adding that we should reach a unanimous verdict.

These days spent in the court made me realise that some time or another everyone must sit down to a banquet of consequences, this pertinent thought I applied to the man in the dock and to me. I became increasingly aware of my responsibilities, a man's guilt or innocence depended on how we interpreted the counsels conflicting words, which was all we now have in order to reach a verdict.

It took us two days before we reached a unanimous decision of Not Guilty. The judge dismissed the jury, thanking us for our patience and conscientious attention throughout the last weeks.

He also gave us a lifetime exclusion from jury service because we had served on a murder trial. Such a relief, never again to feel such a responsibility .