

Guilty Conscience

Dorothy Rosby

Be honest. Have you ever tapped your brakes when you saw a highway patrolman parked by the road--even though you WEREN'T speeding? Me too! It's my Guilty-Conscience-Even-Though-I-Haven't-Done-Anything-Wrong-Yet Syndrome, the nagging sense that if they're looking at me like that, I either messed up or I was just about to. I think it stems from a childhood when that was often the case.

I've had the feeling a lot lately, most recently when I had to go through random drug testing at my other job. In case you haven't had the . . . uh . . . opportunity yourself, let me tell you how it works. Your supervisor tells you that you must get yourself to the testing site within a specified amount of time and not a minute more, giving whole new meaning to the term "gotta go." The nice, but highly professional drug testing people go through a series of steps all in order to ensure that your . . . uh . . . specimen isn't tampered with. I don't mean to be judgmental, but it seems to me you'd have to be pretty desperate to tamper with a specimen.

Accurate as the process apparently is, I still got that Guilty-Conscience-Even-Though-I-Haven't-Done-Anything-Wrong-Yet feeling. I wondered if it's true what they say about poppy seed muffins causing false positives. And if so, when was the last time I ate one? Or what if my multi-vitamin contains a banned substance? I'll put an end to the suspense right now and tell you that apparently it doesn't, because I still have a job.

I was fingerprinted a couple weeks ago too, further adding to my Guilty-Conscience-Even-Though-blah-blah-blah Syndrome. No, I was NOT arrested! And I'm hurt that you would even think that. It was actually part of a background check I needed to volunteer for an organization my son belongs to. And in case you're wondering, I passed. But I was nervous! I kept wondering if there might be something in my past I've forgotten about--a bank robbery or grand theft--though you'd think I'd remember that.

Getting screened at the airport is another time when I feel instant guilt. I go through the screening line wondering if, without thinking, I somehow slipped a butter knife into my purse after breakfast. Or what if I absentmindedly utter the word "bomb" and get pulled out of line for interrogation. I'm not sure why I would do that. Months go by without me ever having reason to say "bomb," though not without me bombing. But that's another story.

But standing there in the line at the airport, I have to choke back the word. You know how you would never be tempted to stick your tongue to a frozen flag pole if no one ever told you not to. Maybe you aren't anyway, but it's the same idea. Fortunately, I have never succumbed to either temptation, maybe because I've learned to keep my distance from frosty flag poles. And I've started saying "bomb, bomb, bomb" repeatedly in the car on the way to the airport, just to get it out of my system.

Guilty-Conscience-Even-Though-I-Haven't-Done-Anything-Wrong-Yet Syndrome is part of modern life, thanks to the miscreants and reprobates who hijack airplanes and drive company vehicles after ingesting illegal substances. You know that old saying: One bad apple spoils the cider for everyone. Or something like that.

Confident, self-righteous types tell us we have nothing to fear from these sorts of screenings if we haven't done anything wrong. And that is true, but I bet they check their speedometer when they drive by a highway patrolman.

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