

**The Case for Going to Jail and How to Do It:**  
**Guides to the Schuyler County and Chemung County Jails**  
**for Seneca Lake Defenders**

version 1.0.1, December 4, 2014

*dedicated to Susan Walker, who went first*

Foreword by Sandra Steingraber

Participants in the ongoing We Are Seneca Lake civil disobedience campaign have two big decisions to make. The first is whether to risk arrest directly or provide support to those risking arrest—by serving as a driver, photographer, and so on—during actions that involve non-violent civil disobedience. The second, for those who are arrested, is whether or not to do jail time. (Either way, because our charges are classified as violations rather than crimes, no one, including those who accept incarceration, receives a criminal record.)

All roles are equally vital. None are more heroic than others. That said, for those who are able and willing, there is much political and personal value in extending one's civil disobedience witness into jail. Accepting a jail sentence demonstrates seriousness of intent, shows respect for the law, opens a bigger space in the public conversation for all-important media stories, and prevents one from becoming ensnared in protracted legal battles whose outcome has little connection to our eyes-on-the-prize goal of halting gas storage at Seneca Lake.

As a personal experience, enduring what [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) called, “the ordeals of jail” deepens one's commitment to our campaign, fosters patience and bravery, and reveals a side of American life—the world of incarceration—that is otherwise hidden from view. Most of all: there is great satisfaction in aligning one's actions with one's values. Those of us who have chosen jail sentences—by refusing to pay the county a fine for the privilege of arresting us—have discovered joy behind our bars and a sense of being at peace with oneself.

And, finally, because jail is one of the few places in the world without to-do lists, email, text messages, Internet access—or even clocks—the incarcerated civil disobedient is given a gift of time: time to read, write, sketch, meditate, reflect, and otherwise draw on one's own inner resources. In spite of its loud, unpleasant conditions, it's possible to approach a jail sentence as a week-long retreat.

During my most recent incarceration, I read four novels, one history book, the daily newspaper, three fashion magazines, MLK's [“Letter from a Birmingham Jail,”](#) and half the Old Testament.

I drafted three essays, had at least two important personal insights, and listened to countless amazing stories told by other inmates.

I had many opportunities to show kindness to people who desperately needed kindness.

I learned how to make a pair of dice out of a slice of bread.

I learned about the transformational power of beauty simply by watching the sun illuminate the steel fixtures of my cell when it arrived each afternoon through the west-facing windows at the far end of my cellblock.

I became more fearless.

Together with my fellow inmate Colleen Boland, I also co-authored a guidebook about how to survive a week in the Chemung County Jail—which is where women arrested in Schuyler County are sent. (There is no women's jail in Schuyler County.) Dwain Wilder has done the same for Schuyler County Jail.

The most recent version of this guidebook will be at <http://www.wearesenecalake.com/jail-guides/>

As general guidelines that apply to men and women both:

**Length of sentence:** A trespass violation carries a maximum 15-day sentence. If you are so charged, you automatically receive 5 days off for good behavior. Additionally, the day of your arrest counts as one day. Hence, your actual sentence is 9 days. However, the final day is only one minute long, as you will be released at 12:01 a.m.

Thus, for all practical purposes, your sentence is 8 days long. Thus, as soon as you know your arraignment date and have made the decision to accept a jail sentence, you know that you will be incarcerated immediately thereafter—on a Wednesday evening—and will be released at one minute after midnight on Thursday (which is to say, the midnight between Wednesday and Thursday). If Thursday happens to be a national holiday, you will be released a day early, as were Colleen and I. Fortuitously, in 2014, Christmas and New Year's Day are both on Thursdays.

**Privacy:** You will have your own individual cell with a sink and a toilet in it.

**Medical concerns:** While medications are given in jail—and you can bring prescriptions and meds along with you—all medications (including contact lens solution and inhalers) must pass through the medical department before they are dispensed, and this process can sometimes take a couple of days. **No one with a life-threatening medical condition that depends on receiving daily medications on an unflinching schedule should choose jail.**

**Eye glasses and reading glasses:** You can bring these in with you. Keep them in your pocket when you go to the courthouse.

**Dietary restrictions:** Special diets are offered only for medical reasons or religious reasons, and you need to bring letters from a physician or faith leader to verify. In theory, accommodations are offered for food allergies, but in practice, these are sometimes ignored. If you are vegetarian or vegan by choice, you simply won't be eating much.

**TB tests:** According to New York State law, all new inmates are given a TB test and are confined to their cells for 72 hours until it can be read. In practical terms, if you go to jail on Wednesday night, you will be given a TB test on Thursday, and you will be released from your cell and allowed out in the common area on Monday. In other words, most of your week will be spent in keep-lock. During that time, you are allowed out of your cell to take a daily shower and make a phone call.

**Advance preparation for jail is helpful but not necessary:** Jail is a holding tank that is designed for people who did not make plans to be there. Colleen, Dwain, and I wrote these tour guides to the jails in an attempt to answer every anticipated question from the most detail-oriented, need-to-be-prepared individual that we could imagine. But know this: even if you read no further and make a spontaneous decision in front of the judge to plead guilty and respectfully refuse to pay your fine, you will be okay in jail. Really. People there will help you learn the ropes and most of them will do so with kindness and respect. You will never inhabit another environment where simple acts of kindness and reciprocity go such a long way.

## **Guide to the Chemung County Jail—for Women**

by Colleen Boland and Sandra Steingraber

(written while incarcerated with lots of assistance from the other women of cellblock 5C)

November 25, 2014

The Chemung County Jail is a harsh, unpleasant environment, and the food is terrible. But it is not a dangerous place. We have been treated respectfully by both the guards and our fellow inmates. The women in our cellblock have been in and out of many different jails—in Tompkins, Tioga, Steuben, Broome, and Yates Counties. They tell us that Chemung is the worst. In helping us develop these guidelines, they assure us that they also apply to all the other area jails. “If you can do time in Chemung, you can do time anywhere!”

### Will I have my own cell?

Yes. It's about 6 by 7 feet with a narrow bed, a sink, a toilet, and two shelves. The floor is concrete. There are three beige painted walls. The fourth wall of your cell is entirely made of bars and looks out at two walkways. The first one is for inmates to use. The

second walkway—which is separated from the first by another row of bars—is for the correction officers and hall runners (who deliver meals) to use.

There are windows on the far side of the second walkway, but the glass is opaque and does not offer a view outside. However, the windows do allow the sun to shine through.

There are six cells in a cellblock.

No one is allowed into your cell except for you.

### What about privacy?

There is a surprising amount of privacy. The C.O.s (correction officers) make rounds every half hour but announce their arrival and ask if everyone “is decent” before walking through. If you are sitting on the toilet or getting ready to take a shower, you can signal them to wait. You can also put your towel on your lap while sitting on the toilet. (You wear a t-shirt under your jumpsuit, so you aren’t shirtless while sitting on the toilet, in any case.)

You share a single shower with the other five inmates in the cellblock, but each day you are given a half-hour to take a shower by yourself.

(It’s a really good shower: stainless steel shower stall and lots of hot water under high pressure.)

In short, no one sees you naked in the cellblock. And you don’t see anyone else naked.

### Can I bring my own clothes to jail?

No. All clothes are provided including underwear and sports bras. Your street clothes will stay in a bag until you are released.

(By contrast, in Yates County Jail, you can wear your own underwear and sports bra as long as they are white.)

On arrival, you will be given two orange jumpsuits, one sleep shirt, four pairs of socks, four t-shirts, one sweatshirt, a pair of slip-on shoes, and four pairs of underpants and bras—at least some of which will be hilariously sized. Laundry will be done once, so you won’t run out of clean things.

### Is it cold in jail?

We've been comfortably warm. (Sometimes too warm.) And you can wear a sweatshirt under your jumpsuit if you are chilly.

### Can I bring books and magazines to jail?

No. But you can mail paperback books or magazines to yourself a day before you go in or ask others to send reading material. They should do it right away though, as it takes several days for mail to be processed and checked for contraband.

### What should I do to prepare for jail?

Read the [Chemung County Jail website](#).

Medical care in the Chemung County Jail is lackadaisical, and budget cuts have created an understaffed medical department. You can bring in prescription drugs, contact lens solution, and inhalers, but they need to be cleared through medical first, and this can take time. **You should not consider jail if your life or well-being depends on not skipping dosages of regular medications**, such as for high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, or mood stabilization. You should not consider jail if you have life-threatening food allergies.

There is no coffee in the Chemung County Jail. Consider weaning yourself from coffee before you go in. (We didn't. We just slogged through caffeine withdrawal symptoms along with all the other addicts.)

If you wear contact lenses: take with you to the courthouse on the day of your sentencing a pair of glasses, a contact lens case, and a sealed bottle of contact lens solution. You will have to give everything to the booking officer—including your contacts lenses. You will be relying on your glasses until your contacts, case, and solution are cleared. This can take a few days.

Don't wear jewelry to the courthouse. Wedding bands are the only jewelry allowed in jail.

Consider writing important phone numbers on the inside of your upper arm with a waterproof marker (e.g. family members, friends, legal advisor). The numbers will be readable for at least a few days until you can get a pencil or pen and a piece of paper.

Before leaving the courthouse, hand off your purse or bag to someone you trust. You will not need your wallet or your cell phone in jail.

### Should I bring money to jail?

All the cash that you bring in with you will be collected and applied to your commissary account. (You'll get the change back in the form of a check.) You won't need any more than \$20 for this. Since commissary items arrive on the day you are being released, you will find you are using money to buy shampoo and snacks for the other inmates on your cellblock. This is a good practice as many inmates are indigent and you will find they have shared with you what little they have—including pencils and sheets of paper.

So, it's nice to bring some cash to buy things for the other inmates who are going to be very helpful to you. By the time you leave, you will want to pay many favors forward.

### What will happen after I am sentenced?

You will be driven in a squad car from the Town of Reading courthouse into the Schuyler County jail for booking. A booking officer will take your physical and mental history and assess if you are a suicide risk. You will be fingerprinted (this is all done digitally) and photographed. You will change out of street clothes and into a jumpsuit and may spend some time in a holding cell while transportation is arranged to Chemung County.

There is no phone in the holding cell, but don't worry. You will have access to one once you reach Chemung.

Before you leave Schuyler for Chemung, you will be "hooked up," which means ankle manacles and handcuffs that are attached to a chain around your waist.

Here is a trick: when ankle cuffs are going on, flex your foot and curl your toes upwards. This will increase the diameter of your ankle and make the cuffs less tight when you are walking.

When you walk with ankle manacles on, take your time. Shuffling works best.

You will then be helped into the back of a squad car and driven to Elmira, which takes about 40 minutes.

Once handed over to Chemung County Jail officials, you go through a second booking. You are allowed to make a phone call from the holding tank. This is a free phone call.

You will be given a handbook of rules for inmates. Read it!

Ask the booking officer if he will give you a pencil to take up to your cell. Ours did.

You will be given a laundry basket with clean clothes, bedding, toothbrush, toothpaste, a cup, and a bar of soap.

All this takes time. We finally ended up in our cells at about 1:30 a.m.

## What is a typical day in the Chemung County Jail?

Breakfast is at 5 a.m. The food will be handed to you through the bars. You are expected to eat quickly. Then you can go back to sleep. By 7 a.m., everyone has to be up and dressed with beds made. Sweatshirts must be worn inside the jumpsuit. Once your bed is made, you cannot get back under the covers until 10 p.m. at night.

After 7 a.m., you can take naps whenever you like, but you have to sleep on top of your covers and your face cannot be covered with your towel or an article of clothing

Lunch is around noon and dinner at 5:30. You eat alone in your cell. Again, you are expected to eat quickly.

On the first day, you will be taken up to medical for your TB test. If you have a headache for lack of coffee (!), you can ask for ibuprofen.

For most of your stay—at least the first 5 days—you will be classified as CKL (classified key-lock), which means you have to stay in your cell except for a half hour in the afternoon when you will be let out by yourself to take a shower and make phone calls. The pay phone is located at the end of the cellblock by the shower.

The other inmates will be curious about you and will bring you books, paper, and pencils if you ask.

The water from your sink tastes skanky, so ask the other inmates to fill your cup with water from the sink at the end of the cellblock. For some reason, it tastes better.

Ice chips are delivered three times a day. You will look forward to this.

It's good to drink LOTS of water. The food and inactivity is constipating, and the air is dry.

The C.O.s walk through every half hour. Some are friendly. Some are gruff. Their shifts change at 6 a.m., 2 p.m., and 10 p.m. During every shift change, all inmates have to return to their cells for lock-up. Then follows a "count," in which the new C.O. on duty walks through and takes a count of everyone. Sometimes, there is a "stand for count" order, which means you actually have to get off your bunk and stand up by the bars while the C.O. walks through.

Make friends with your hall runner. She can sharpen your pencil and bring books to you from the jail library.

A copy of the *Elmira Star Gazette* comes into the cellblock every day, and those confined to their cells have first dibs. (Don't do the crossword or the Sudoku until everyone has had a chance to read the paper.)

Basically, if you are CKL, that's your routine.

You can count the hours by listening for the church chimes.

Once you are classified and released from CKL, which is likely to happen on Monday, then you can spend most of your hours outside your cell. Which means you can walk up and down the narrow walkway and sit at the little tables that are welded to the bars. You can take a shower when you want, make 15-minute phone calls, play cards with other inmates, or just take delight in knowing you are not confined to a cell. You can also go outside for a daily hour of recreation if you like. That takes place between 6:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Say YES to rec! It's totally worth doing! The fresh air and sunlight will lift your spirits, and the exercise will help deal with the backaches and hip problems you might get from too many hours on a hard bunk.

If it's cold outside, you will be given a coat for rec.

Almost all the women out on rec walk endless circuits around the asphalt yard and converse with each other. Sort of like open skate in an ice rink, minus the skates. The other option is shooting hoops with a basketball.

### How do you sleep in jail?

The lights are on all night—albeit dimmed—but you can fold up a clean t-shirt or towel to use as a blindfold. You are not allowed to cover your entire head or put your head under your covers.

If you don't get a pillow, request one right away using the inmate request forms that are by the phone. Meanwhile, use a stack of folded t-shirts inside your pillowcase to stand in for a pillow.

You can make earplugs out of toilet paper.

The television gets turned off at 10 p.m. and goes back on again sometime after 8 a.m.

### What about visitors?

The visitation schedule is Monday/Wednesday/Friday from 2:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. (See [Chemung County Jail website](#) for details.) You get one visit on each of those days, but up to two visitors can come at a time. Only one of the two visitors can be a child, and the child must have a birth certificate to get in. (A passport won't do.) You are limited to two hour-long visits per week.



A visit lasts for an hour. It's best to arrange these in advance, so that you don't end up with competing friends who want to visit you. Colleen Boland, Doug Couchon, and Margie Rodgers all live in Elmira and will happily visit any We Are Seneca Lake Defender incarcerated in Chemung who might not otherwise have someone available to pay a visit.

Note that visitors cannot bring you anything, nor can you give them anything.

When you are finished with your visit, you will be strip-searched—this is the only time strip searches happen—which involves bending over and spreading buttocks. There are no cavity searches, however. The guard is female, and she stands on the opposite end of the room. No one touches you during a strip search. Our experience is that the strip search is mostly a formality, and the guards are as respectful and understanding as possible.

Visits with attorneys are done outside of regular visiting hours. During attorney visits, you can pass papers back and forth, which is how Sandra got her handwritten jailhouse essays out to the world.

#### How do you make phone calls from the cellblock?

The recipient of your phone call must use a credit card to deposit money in an account. This should be arranged in advance. (See [Chemung County Jail website](#) for details.)

Each phone call can be no longer than 15 minutes.

Remember, before going to jail, write the phone numbers of anyone that you might want to call while in jail on the skin on the inside of your upper arm. You will thus always have those numbers with you while standing at the phone.

#### How's the food?

Awful. Really awful. Lots of grayish baloney, greenish hot dogs, and white bread. The best meal is breakfast.

Sandra has basically lived on two cartons of milk per day and one serving of cereal in the morning.

But you are only going to be here for a week. Just drink a lot of water and consider it a seven-day cleanse.

Also, if you give your food away to other inmates, you will make friends. (“Anyone want my goulash?”)

### What are the other inmates like?

Most women in the Chemung County Jail are there because of probation violations and drug charges. Some are going through drug and alcohol withdrawal. Almost all are single mothers, and almost all are impoverished. Some have long-standing grudges against fellow inmates, but, since you have nothing to do with these disputes, they will treat you with kindness and curiosity. They will respect and understand your decision to fight the gas storage project.

There is a lot of cross-talk between cells, some of it loud. Some women also shout down the heating vents in order to communicate with inmates in different cellblocks, although this is a violation of the rules.

The violent and non-compliant inmates, both male and female, are dressed in black and white stripes rather than orange and are housed separately. They are not in your cellblock. You will see them only in the visitors' room or in the hallway while they are being escorted from one part of the jail to another.

### Any other tips for survival?

When a C.O. is escorting you to rec, to the visitors' room, or to medical, you will be expected to walk in front of him or her and stay to the right side. While waiting for a door to be unlocked, you stand with your back against the wall. A C.O. never wants you to stand behind them or beside them. Never, ever touch a C.O., even out of empathy.

Don't save food in your cell for later—not even cartons of milk, salt and pepper, or the ubiquitous Kool-aid packets. They will be considered contraband if discovered in a cell search. Other inmates will squirrel things away for later consumption, but you should make sure all food and condiments go back out with your tray. You don't want to lose good behavior days over a packet of ketchup.

Make sure your sweatshirt is UNDER your jumpsuit, not over.

Remember that once your bed is made at 7 a.m., you can't get back under the covers until after the 10 p.m. count.

Do not go into another inmate's cell for any reason.

Stay active. Every time you hear the church bells chime the hour, hop off your bunk and jog in place, do push-ups against the bars, go for some yoga poses, swing your arms and legs.

Turned upside down, your laundry basket makes a good writing table, a stool for sitting, or a bedside night table.

Ask friends to send you mail on the first day of your incarceration only. As it is, you won't be getting that mail, which is all opened and read, until your sentence is almost done, and all the undelivered mail will just get returned.

## **Guide to the Schuyler County Jail—for Men**

by Dwain Wilder

November 15, 2014

A period of time spent in jail in the service of a well-chosen cause can be such a personal blessing and opportunity. Let me tell you a bit about how I recently spent some time in the Schuyler Jail, which has a reputation of being a small-town, sleepy, fairly well-appointed facility. I decided rather early on that, if arrested, I would simply plead guilty. And, because I consider non-violent actions of civil disobedience to be my duty as a citizen, I would not pay the fines for doing my duty. So, I would go to jail.

I enlisted several friends to help me pull this off. Each one had a specific task to do, keeping my affairs in order for up to my full jail time (not presuming that I would get time off for good behavior). Getting this arranged in advance meant that I could fully devote myself to the matter of simply being a jailbird with no distracting worries about whether my finances and household were falling apart.

So, having done that, I turned my time in jail into an intensive meditation retreat, doing meditation (*zazen*) as fully as possible. The wonderful thing about jail is that time disappears. You know the name of the day, but your activity does not have the character of that day. Monday is not Monday, nor is it *not* Monday. Wonderful freedom in that. At no time did I not feel completely free and at ease while in jail, for all I had to do was sit in meditation, be convivial with my fellow jailbirds and the guards, and do as I was told.

But meditation might not be everyone's choice of how to use their time in jail. The opportunities are greater, though, than might first meet the eye. Let's look at a few of them, from the general to the specific:

- Being willing to stand for what you believe is true and right, even to the point of going to jail for exercising that right contributes to a grand American tradition, keeping it alive and present in the public mind.
- It contributes mightily to the spirit of protesters still out on the blockades, the bystanders and of people of the region who might be greatly torn about what is to become of their region, their homes, their safety and the integrity of their legacy of this land they love to their descendants.

- It makes a bold statement to the government that we will not be intimidated by the seeming power of law and regulations when these do not result in justice and upholding the rights of people and of nature.
- It is an opportunity to dwell on your choice to engage this struggle, and write about it, take notes on your experience of jail. These are important writings, of historical significance. Whether you conceive of yourself participating in a literary tradition or not, your thoughts, recordings and letters join the ranks of Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Jr. and others who have labored through the privations of jail time for the sake of humanity.
- You might exercise some artistic talent. Fellow jailbirds will offer you pen and paper for you to write, sketch, compose, line out music. Use the backs of forms the jail hands out, the backs of letters sent you, scrounge paper. You never know where an opportunity will come from: The only writing I did while in jail came on the jail's handball court, using a piece of sidewalk chalk used to renew the court's boundaries and divisions. I asked the guard if I could write a poem on the court back wall. So a piece of pink haiku exists, at least did for awhile, in Schuyler County Jail.
- It is an opportunity to witness more immediately, by befriending fellow inmates. So many of them are grateful for a kind friend who can really listen. Even the guards, some of them, will welcome your company. My experience was that all those I encountered in jail knew why I was there, and accorded me every courtesy, generosity and kindness. Even respect, when that was called for. And, of course, that calls compassion out of one in response. These people are hungry and ready for friends.

## **PREPARATION**

Preparing adequately can make a profound difference in the quality of your stay there and your release.

In the days ahead of your incarceration, create a personal support network of friends and family. Let your medical emergency contact and medical power of attorney know what you are going to do. Give them the phone number of the jail administrator, Sergeant Perry: (607) 535-8228

Notify your primary care physician.

Find someone you trust with your passwords and access to your computer to handle your daily mail download.

If you pay bills and/or receive monthly pension or social security payments, familiarize your support person with the details of the websites where they can check account balances and pay bills. Ask them to record payments and confirmation numbers, etc., in your checkbook or computer-based checkbook software (Quicken, etc.). Provide them with your passwords to these websites.

If you live alone, arrange for someone to come in daily or as necessary to water plants, do pet care, turn lights on and off to simulate night-time residence, check door locks. If you have children or care for other people, arrange for backup care-taking, school-related things such as transportation and homework support.

You'll also need transportation support. Arrange to be driven to court on the day of your sentencing, and arrange for someone to drive you home upon your release. Most likely you will be discharged at 12:01 a.m. If your driver lives far away, have in your wallet the names and phone numbers of two or three people who live near the jail who can pick you up when you are discharged. This is vital, as your court appearance clothing may not be appropriate for weather conditions on the night of your release and insufficient for a late-night stroll through Watkins Glen. Ideally, for backup, more than two people should know when you will be discharged and stand ready to pick you up.

Get advance information about the jail and talk to the jail administrator in the days before you are incarcerated.

Visit the [Schuyler County Jail's website](#) for accurate information on visiting hours, details on phone call and Jail Commissary arrangements. Visit the [Schuyler County prisoners' handbook website](#) for accurate information about the mailing address for the jail and receiving mail. (Your mail will be opened and inspected for contraband. The Correction Officers (C.O.s) told me the mail is not read, redacted, etc., but that contradicts what the website says.)

Call the Schuyler County Sheriff's Office (607-535-8222) and ask for the jail administrator, Sergeant Perry; his direct phone number is (607) 535-8228. It is helpful to proactively set up a pattern of non-violent and transparent communications with all Corrections Officers at the jail, and this is an excellent opportunity to begin that. From my experience, setting the grounds ahead of time for expectations of non-violent behavior will be respected, in my experience. It also puts him on notice that his jail is a matter of public concern and vigil.

Identify yourself, give contact info and inform Sergeant Perry of your expected date of admission to the jail, expected charges, and sentence. Discuss any questions about the information from the two websites. Discuss any dietary restrictions, allergies, health issues, special diet requirements such as vegetarian, vegan, kosher vegetarian, etc. If you are a vegan or vegetarian, be aware that these choices will be honored only if they are based on religious faith. Be prepared to state your religious preference and provide the name of your minister or spiritual teacher. This jail has a history of being very cooperative about dietary matters. Meals, which are prepared by two part-time cooks and the jail trustee inmate, do not entirely consist of processed food—although fresh vegetables are scarce. The correction officers eat these meals too, which sets a high bar for their cooks!

If you require medications, let the sheriff know. He told me that I could bring them in prescription bottles. As soon as the nurse verifies that the contents match the label, a medication schedule will be set up based on the prescription label. Letting him know this ahead of time, and emphasizing any meds that are vital, will help him prepare.

If you intend to take any extraordinary steps, such as fasting or juice-only fasting, inform the sergeant so that he can take necessary steps to insure your safety. If you plan to take these steps by way of protesting your experience with the judiciary, sheriff or police, say so in a non-violent and forthcoming manner, without ill will toward the jail staff who are not the real target of your action (if that is true).

Media may wish to interview you. These visits are not counted against your allowed personal visits, and may be held at your mutual convenience.

Make sure that you prepare for medications and extra clothing. Ask your doctor to mail you, separately, two copies of your medications and any special health issues on office stationery or computer printout. Do not open these envelopes, to avoid any grounds for claims that you have tampered with them.

You can bring medications in their pharmacy-labeled bottles. Do not bring more than you will need during the full extent of your expected sentence. Your medications will be inspected by the jail nurse, who will generate a medication schedule for you, within 24 hours of your incarceration. If you take split pills, bring them whole so they can be readily identifiable. You might want to bring a pill splitter with you; I did.

Put your medications and sealed letters from your doctor in a small box, seal it and write your full name prominently on the top.

As for clothing, you are entitled to bring the following: 1 pullover sweatshirt (with no buttons, zippers or strings), 4 t-shirts, 4 pair of underwear, 4 pair of socks.

As back up, prepare a bag of all clothing, medications and sealed medication/health issues list and give it to a friend who will present them to the jail for you, in case the things you brought with you were mishandled, lost, discarded, etc. **THERE IS A 24-HOUR WINDOW PROVIDED FOR OUTSIDERS TO BRING YOUR CLOTHING AND MEDS.**

You can also prepare for visitors in advance. Your legal advisor can visit you, but you must declare at the time of admission that you have legal counsel and provide a name. These visits are unrestricted and are not counted against your personal visit time. Likewise, spiritual teacher, minister, pastor visits are unrestricted. A visit by two or three people counts as a single visit. A visitor who leaves sometime within the visit may influence the remaining hours of visitation in your favor

Give the Seneca Lake Defenders Jailbird Wrangler/Mom (currently Jan Quarles) a list of people vital to your well-being. If these visits can be coordinated beforehand, organizers

can use the opportunity to get word out about your condition and likewise inform you of ongoing news from Seneca Lake. Seeing family and friends is a great morale boost.

Write the name and number of your legal advisor on the inside of your upper arm. You may also wish to write key phone numbers of family and friends on your arm. If you use a Sharpie, these phone numbers should last several days and through several showers—long enough to transfer onto paper once you obtain a writing instrument in jail.

## **SENTENCING**

The Reading Town Court is held on Wednesday evenings. You will be incarcerated immediately thereafter. No matter how late, your day of incarceration will be counted as a full day against your sentence. The practice is to give one day off for good behavior for every two days served. So, for a fifteen-day sentence, you should serve 10 days. But in practice, the day of your arrest counts as a day of incarceration, which reduces your actual jail time to nine days. Best of all, the ninth and final day is only one minute long. Thus, the lived reality of a 15-day sentence is 8 days—from the Wednesday of your court appearance to 12:01 a.m. of the following Thursday.

*Do not enter the court with a cell phone!* This will contain the phone numbers of your friends and contacts and will be subject to inspection by any government agency. Leave your phone with the person who will be picking you up after your release.

Likewise, hand off your car and house keys, credit cards, excess cash and jewelry. Do carry a few quarters and a map of pay phones in Watkins Glen, in case of dire necessity when discharged in the middle of the night. (See below.)

If the weather is cold, wear warm clothing and comfortable walking shoes to court. *These are the clothes you will be discharged in, most probably in the dead of night at one minute after midnight.*

## **ADMISSION TO JAIL**

You will be taken directly into jail custody from the courthouse.

Carry your bag of clothes and meds with you, along with your wallet containing ID, health insurance information, and a card with the phone numbers of those you can call upon your discharge.

You will be photographed, fingerprinted and issued your orange uniforms.

You will be asked if you have legal counsel. Provide the name and number of your legal advisor. You will be asked your religion and religious minister, teacher, etc. This may be a precondition for your being able to have visits from your spiritual guide, which are not restricted to number, time or date.

## **DAILY LIFE**

Some prisons and jails seem to have the philosophy that you are incarcerated in order to be punished, and in those places you can expect anything from surly attitudes and a generally rotten environment that results from that, all the way up to denial of privileges granted you under the institution's regulations. Other institutions have the philosophy that incarceration itself is the sum total of your punishment, and these deal with their prisoners with decency, respect and even courtesy, even when a prisoner displays bad behavior (tolerated within limits!).

Fortunately, the Schuyler County jail seems to be of this latter philosophy. Here is a brief summary of what I experienced during my sentence spanning Nov. 5 through Nov. 13, 2014:

The food in jail is a mixture of prepared food on-site and processed, canned food. Not very many fresh vegetables, not very much high fiber content. To avoid constipation remember to drink lots of water, especially if you are over 60 years old. Ask me how I know this....

Most correction officers were humane, engaged, even affable people. There was one "strictly by the book" officer, who barked a couple of direct orders at me. There was one real horse's neck who threw away the envelopes of my mail so I couldn't note the return addresses (though he did retrieve them from the trash when I appealed to him). One supportive guard was openly incensed that I had been jailed on "a bullshit sentence." The trustee inmate felt comfortable enough around the guards to openly confer with me, and even thanked me for what I'd done even though communicating with other inmates is against the rules for trustee inmate.

Life is simple inside. Your watch is taken from you, and there are no clocks. The routine is strict but not burdensome. (You will be given a copy of "Inmate Informational Handbook," spelling out the regulations, commissary privileges, visitation, etc. Read it!)

Time literally disappears, except for the rhythms of the daily schedule and reference to time and day displayed on TV shows. All times listed in the "Inmates Information Handbook" section on the section on "DAILY SCHEDULE" are given in "military format," or 24-hour clock. So, all times are in a 4-digit form. Anything after 12:59 p.m. (one minute before 1:00 p.m.) are referred to by adding 1200 to the civilian time. So 1:00 p.m. is referred to as 1300. Noon is 1200. Midnight is 2400. 1:00 a.m. is 0100.

Expect to be in keep-lock for up to five days of "classification." This is done to test you for TB, to find out whether you will try to harm yourself, to access how you socialize with other inmates and the C.O.s, and to weed out troublemakers. During the first five days, you are locked in your cell continuously, except possibly to shower. Your cell's clear floor space is about 2 feet by 6 feet.



After you are re-classified, you will be permitted out of your cell and can enjoy the run of the cellblock for much of the day. Each cellblock has three or four cells as well as a common area, and you are free to socialize with your fellow jailbirds, within the regulations. DO NOT go into another inmate's cell; doing so can have serious consequences.

The only genuinely disturbing aspect of jail for me personally was the ever-present TV. Inmates have the remote control for the TV on each cellblock, and there is sort of an impromptu democracy/pecking order established about what channel is on at any time. The most popular shows are very violent and very loud. I am not used to TV shows, so this was a distinctly vile burden on me, until I at last made peace with the situation.

The jail commissary is available to you after your "Classification" is complete. Only people outside the facility may deposit money to your commissary account, not inmates. This can be done at the Cobra Cashier machine located in the jail lobby (available 24/7) or through via [GovPayNet](#) by using Pay Location Code 5310. In either case, you will need the following information:

- Inmate's First and Last Name
- Date of inmate's birth
- Name of judge (as of this writing: Judge Raymond H. Berry)

Commissary orders can be placed on Sunday only, and are delivered by the following Friday. So, if you are incarcerated on Wednesday and are due to be released the following Thursday, forget about commissary for yourself! This is a time to repay other inmates for their various kindnesses. At the commissary, you can order pens, paper, envelopes, and stamps, along with food, snacks, and instant coffee. The commissary is your only access to writing materials.

A copacetic inmate gave me one of his writing instruments. These are like a version of the inner works of a ballpoint pen: short, too flexible to be used comfortably, and unreliable. The pen available to me required that I coax the ink down to the tip with a vigorous wrist-snapping motion every two or three words. It was vile instrument of handwriting torture. (Remember that scene in Disney's "Alice in Wonderland" where the Queen of Hearts was attempting to play croquette with an uncooperative flamingo as mallet? You got it!)

As for visits: We are trying to find a way to make sure you see people of your preference, whenever possible. Tell Jan Quarles, our Jailbird Wrangler/Mom, the names of family and friends you would like to see. Also tell Jan the names of the WeAreSenecaLake people whom you'd like to see. Ask friends to coordinate with Jan to make sure they don't either preempt your few visits or travel to the jail when it is known your allowed visits have already occurred.

As for phones: I have no direct information on use of phone, as I refused all offers from friends to establish a phone account for me and relied on visits instead. But your fellow

inmates will know all about the phone system and can help you. This is what I learned while helping another inmate establish a phone account: Someone on the outside must deposit money in an inmate's phone account by calling (866) 230-7761. When I dialed this number, I was guided through a menu system designed to make a payment. I was referred to [ConnectNetwork](#), where I could set up an account for an inmate. I was also referred to [Jail Call Services](#), another website where one can establish funds for an inmate's use. Note that all phone calls have to be initiated by the inmate and are collect calls to phone numbers approved during the phone account set-up. The person called must accept the collect call. If the number called is a cell phone, possible additional fees apply. The minimum phone account is \$25. There is a \$4 setup fee for each deposit of funds, so it is more economical to make one large deposit, which generates only one fee, rather than a series of small deposits. There is a per-call surcharge in addition to a per-minute rate. In short, jail phones are an expensive mess!

Mail is delivered in the afternoon. Anyone writing to you should write their return address on the letter or card they send you, as you may not be able to keep a written record of your correspondents' return addresses on the envelopes.

Unless you are incarcerated long enough to get a delivery of stamps, paper, envelopes and pens from the Commissary, you will not have an opportunity to send mail.

My advice is to establish a personal program of intentional activity, rather than simply sitting on your bed and going with the flow. Serving time in jail for a cause you believe in is a powerful way to witness, and you are participating in an honored tradition stretching back in American history all the way to [Henry David Thoreau](#), who went to jail rather than pay taxes while the U.S. was waging its first war of aggression, the Mexican War.

It is possible to use this time away from your familiar life in a productive, even satisfying way. How you do that, of course, depends on your own personal resources. If you like to meditate, this is a perfect opportunity to set up an organized meditation retreat for yourself. If you like to write, you will be dependent on the kindness of your fellow inmates to loan you one of their ballpoint pens and writing paper. Offering to put some money onto their phone account will be a way to repay them, and almost every prisoner would be ready to tell you how to do that. (You might be able to get your writing out to be published by giving it to your legal advisor, if you've named one as your legal counsel during the admission process.)

If you get a chance to visit the jail's library, by all means do. I went reluctantly, after being offered a few thrillers by kind fellow prisoners, but I found a copy of *The Gulag Archipelago*, by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn that kept me busy. You never know what's going to turn up.

**DISCHARGE**

You will be officially notified in writing of an 8:30 a.m. release time and date. In fact, though, you will be released one minute into the stated date of your stated discharge date (12:01 a.m.). BE PEPAED FOR THIS. If you take evening medications, refuse any that make you sleepy.

Organize and pack all your clothing before lights out. Organize and pack into the plastic box your jailbird supplies were given you, as much as possible. You should reserve your sheet and roll of toilet paper until the last moments.

You will be called at about 11:00 p.m. (2300), 15 minutes after lights-out at 10:45 p.m. (2245). Request that the cellblock lights be turned on so you can complete your packing. Make sure not to leave any personal belongings behind, and that everything you were given by the jail is packed into the plastic box they were originally packed in.

You will be placed in a holding cell until 12:01 a.m. And then, the door opens, and you are free.

Be sure someone is available nearby to take you in for the night, unless your ride home is locally available and your home is nearby.

Plan for the retrieval of your cell phone, keys and other valuables. If all else fails, have a few quarters in your wallet, and the phone number of a few friends in your wallet. Here is a [map of all pay phones](#) in Watkins Glen.

The hotel staff at the [Harbor Hotel](#) (at the Watkins Glen Marina) are courteous and will allow you to use the desk phone if you are stranded.