



DELINQUENTLY DAMNED

by Jeff Wozer

Humorist and stand-up comic in Denver

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A young
Jeff Wozer
adds something
to the communion
experience.

WE CERTAINLY ARE AN ANGRY LOT.

I just Googled “how to forgive” and received 81,100,000 results. To put this into perspective, a “Rolling Stones” search only produced 31,700,000 results.

I used the Rolling Stones for comparison, because I cannot forgive them for not performing a 50th anniversary tour this year. Jerks.

I’ll eventually warm back up to Mick and the gang. When it comes to others, I’m not the grudge-holding type, accepting author Norman Cousins’ observation that “life is an adventure in forgiveness.”

Maybe it was a subconscious gesture, payback for the nuns always whacking me across my spleen with yellow, wooden yardsticks while hissing in thick Slavic accents,

“Are you some kind of comedian? Go stand in the corner.”

This is not to imply, however, that I share the mental processes of a golden retriever, a species incapable of holding a grudge due to ADD — Anger Deficit Disorder. For instance, since 1989 I have not purchased a single gallon of gas from any service station bearing Exxon’s name due to the Valdez oil spill. Nor have I returned to Mount Rushmore after the crushing disappointment of learning it was man-made.

I do, though, have self-forgiveness issues, unable to unburden myself of unwise choices. My mind, for whatever reason, is locked in playback mode, constantly mulling things I said and did to hurt others, making me a walking monument to speaker Bob Mandel’s contention that “guilt is the mafia of the mind.”

Until recently I never gave much thought to my inability to forgive myself. I always attributed it to Catholic guilt, a resigned penance for terrorizing St. Amelia parishioners at communion in the mid-1970s. Back then altar boys accompanied the priests to the communion line, holding a paten, a gold-colored dish about the size of a saucer, underneath each parishioner’s chin as a safety measure against a dropped communion host. Realizing the paten was metal, I’d rub my feet on the carpeting to build static electricity. As unsuspecting parishioners opened their mouths to receive the Holy Eucharist,

the Catholic Church’s most hallowed sacrament, I’d brush the paten against their chins and zap them.

I don’t know why I did it. Maybe it was a subconscious gesture, payback for the nuns always whacking me across my spleen with yellow, wooden yardsticks while hissing in thick Slavic accents, “Are you some kind of comedian? Go stand in the corner.”

Regardless of my motives, I always felt bad for Monsignor McHugh. He never understood why people jerked their heads back from him when delivering communion, a Eucharistic whiplash of sorts. Or maybe he did. And maybe he used his “insider connections” to summon some type of celestial avengement, forever condemning me to a life of unyielding guilt.

How else to explain my inability to let go, especially in the face of a *Psychology Today* study that claims people tend to forgive more as they age? It’s called the gift of perspective. Older people realize that grievances, whether with themselves or with others, are mere pebbles in the great river of life.

Maybe so, but I’m not feeling it. Could it be that I’m not aging well?

For assistance, I returned to Google’s 81,100,000 results on “how to forgive.” There was a wealth of advice.

One site recommended repeating the following affirma-

tion: “I lovingly forgive myself and release the past.” After saying this four times, I stopped due to a sudden and uncomfortable urge to dress in lavender, listen to Stevie Nicks CDs, and shop for Thomas Kinkadee paintings on eBay.

Another site recommended keeping a journal. Chronicling feelings on paper, it claimed, serves as a good release for negative feelings and stress, promoting self-forgiveness. Being open-minded, I gave it a shot:

Dear Diary:

I strive daily to be green. I ride my bike for errands. I limit my showers to three minutes. I pull apart those plastic six-pack rings that seabirds favor wearing around their necks. To minimize the electricity I use watching TV, I’m taking a speed reading course so I can watch subtitled movies in fast-forward. Yet, despite it all, I feel like a cheap imposter when I realize that every Arbor Day I plant a tree and every Christmas I kill a tree. How dare I call myself a steward of the earth? I’m such a jerk.

I stopped after one entry. Not that I didn’t think it helped. No, I kept putting off writing a second entry because I was only adding to my self-loathing. Maybe, at 50, I’m still not old enough to use the gift of perspective to my advantage. I can wait. For as Mick Jagger once sagely sang, “Time is on my side.”

See, I’ve already forgiven the Stones. ♦