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Keeping My Eyes on the Road

Jerry Zezima

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Keeping My Eyes on the Road

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Monday January 8, 2024

By Jerry Zezima

I have never been a visionary — or even, since I have two eyes, a double visionary — but I recently read a newspaper report about driver's licenses and saw clearly that getting an eye exam is a good way to stay out of jail.

According to the story, drivers in New York, where I live, could face a license suspension the first time they are stopped by police if they don't comply with a COVID-19-related measure that allowed some residents — like yours truly — to defer their required vision test during the pandemic.

If drivers are stopped a second time, they could face a misdemeanor of aggravated unlicensed operation, which carries a penalty of \$200 to \$300 and up to 30 days in jail.

So I drove, very carefully and without the aid of eyeglasses, to see my optometrist, Dr. Howard Weinberg, who is the reason I am not incarcerated.

"You have to help me, doc," I pleaded. "I don't want to go back to prison."

"You were in prison before?" Dr. Weinberg spluttered.

"Yes," I confessed. "Several years ago, I was in Rikers Island."

"For what?" he wanted to know.

"For about six hours," I replied. "I was talking to young detainees about writing."

"They let you out?" the doctor asked.

"They had to," I said. "I was a bad influence. But it was a rewarding experience."

"I'm surprised there wasn't a reward for you," Dr. Weinberg said.

"It wouldn't have been worth much," I said. "But I need to take an eye exam to keep from being thrown in the slammer."

"You're not the first person who has made an appointment for this," said the doctor, who is on the state's approved-provider registry.

"I'd rather come here than go to the department of motor vehicles," I said.

"With your luck, you'd be arrested on the way over," he said.

Another potential scofflaw — my wife, Sue — recently went to Dr. Weinberg's office for an eye exam, the results of which (she passed) were sent to the DMV.

"Now she won't end up in jail," he said.

"If she did, it would be a death sentence for me," I said. "I'd starve."

"Let's make sure that doesn't happen," said the veteran optometrist, who sat me in a chair, told me to cover each eye with the corresponding hand and read as many letters as I could on a chart 20 feet away.

"I can't see anything," I told him.

"You're not supposed to cover both eyes," he said helpfully.

I uncovered my left eye and read the first line flawlessly: "D A O F."

"Keep going," Dr. Weinberg instructed.

"E G N D H," I said, reading from the second line. Then I read the third line: "F Z B D E."

"How about the next line?" he asked.

"O F L," I started. "I can't make out the next letter. It looks like a Volkswagen Beetle."

"At least you don't have to drive it," said Dr. Weinberg, who then tested my right eye, with which I did a bit better.

After that, he put a huge contraption in front of my face and asked me which lines on the chart looked clearer with different lenses.

"Now I see a Lamborghini," I joked.

"Your taste in cars is getting more expensive," Dr. Weinberg noted.

When the exam was over, he said, "You have 20/40 vision in your left eye and 20/30 in your right eye. You don't need glasses for driving, so you passed the test."

"Will you send the results to the DMV?" I asked.

"Yes," he promised.

"Good," I said. "Now I won't go to jail."

"Not for this," Dr. Weinberg said. "But if you end up back in Rikers Island, don't blame me."

— Jerry Zezima

Jerry Zezima writes a humor column for Tribune News Service, which distributes it to newspapers nationwide and abroad. He is also the author of seven books, *Leave It to Boomer*, *The Empty Nest Chronicles*, *Grandfather Knows Best*, *Nini and Poppie's Excellent Adventures*, *Every Day Is Saturday*, *One for the Ageless* and his latest, *The Good Humor Man: Tales of Life, Laughter and, for Dessert, Ice Cream*, all of which are "crimes against literature." He has won eight awards from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists for his humorous writing.