



The media warned us. Voting is going to be a long, difficult experience. The newscasters warned us that some risks could be involved. I wonder if I am risking my life and wasting hours at the polls. I wonder if it really matter?

My conscience annoys me with its message. “Of course it matters. You live in America. You have freedom and you also have responsibility. Think of the people living under dictators who would give anything to vote, to choose, to have a voice.”

My alarm rings a little earlier than usual. Oh, it would feel good to catch another 40 winks. It would probably be safer and by far less of a hassle. Being realistic, my candidate doesn't have a chance in hell. My vote really won't matter. I know the race is evenly matched but our country is going to the dogs and there is nothing I can do to stop it. I roll over and pull the covers more snugly around me.

My darn conscience! Why can't I turn it off? Why doesn't it at least have a snooze button? It keeps nagging me, haunting me, harassing me. It's easier to get up than contend with that conscience. I'll get up, enjoy a cup of coffee, check my email, and not be rushed for once. That will shut up my conscience.

Let's see now. What are my plans for the day? Okay. I will wear the dark blue pants with my new blouse. That will be dressy enough for everything I have to do and casual enough to not look like a geek. Why am I rushing? I can have a leisurely morning and breakfast for once.

My husband announces he will be ready to leave for the polls in ten minutes. I'm not going I think but I hurry to blow dry my hair and put on my make up anyway. Oh, okay, I guess I may as well go with him and vote. I hope we won't be killed by terrorists out to sabotage this election. I hope we won't have to stand in line for hours. Well, if we do, I'm going home. The election is fixed; it's rigged; my vote really does not matter.

We arrive at our poll at the neighborhood community center, park without much difficulty, and take our place in line. There are at least 60 people ahead of us. I am not going to stand and wait here all day, I reiterate to myself. It's ten of seven. These poll workers don't know what they are doing. If this line hasn't moved by seven thirty I'm going home. That's it.

People are happily greeting each other and chatting in line. Their voices jar me from my self involved thoughts. I see many of my neighbors. People are smiling, happy, friendly, as usual. Look at Ellen. She came in her pjs. This isn't the way they said it would be on TV. There's Joellen Jones serving coffee. “Hey Ralph, how you doing? For me? Sure thanks. How did you remember I like it light with sugar?”

It's ten after seven and I'm all checked in. I'm just waiting for my booth. I sure hope I can pull the lever hard enough or mark the ballot clear enough to be counted. Oh, what am I thinking? It won't matter anyway. Wrong! It does matter. I know it. So do all my friends and neighbors. It's time I wake up, smell the coffee, carefully fill out my ballot, and thank my God that I can do all these things.

It's my turn. I step into my cubicle and open my ballot. It looks pretty straight forward. I read. It's the same as the one I downloaded. I easily fill it out. But the media, they told me I would be tricked; I wouldn't know what to do.

It looks pretty straight forward and I easily fill it out. I take it to the ballot box manned by Cliff. He lives across the street and often returns my trash can to its designated location after it has been emptied. Cliff shows me how to slide my ballot into the box correctly and gives me a sticker that says "I Voted." I stick it on my new blouse and proudly puff out my chest. I'm beginning to feel good, really good.

"What time is it?" I ask Dale when we are back home.

"Seven-twenty" he replies. "How about a cup of coffee before I leave for work?"

"Sure."

We sit at the table, sip our coffee, and comment on the friends and neighbors we just saw.

"Did you know Ralph is now working for the state?" he asks.

"What's his job there?" I reply.

"Environmental services."

"Did you see Julie? How does she look?" I ask.

"Looks like she's eating real well. Getting a little chunky" Dale says.

"Oh, don't you know, she's pregnant" I report to him.

We both discuss the friends and neighbors we encountered and how easy and efficient the process was before Dale leaves for work.

I don't have to leave for work for another half hour. I turn on the TV. I hear of long, unmoving lines, fiascos everywhere. I hear of fixed elections, ballots not counting, how much each candidate spent, war, poverty, joblessness, gloom, gloom, gloom.

My hand spontaneously reaches up and touches the little sticker on my blouse that says "I Voted." My thoughts drift back over the last hour. Do I believe what I hear on TV or

what I experienced? My heart, my conscience whispers in my ear. “The system works. You are part of it. You chose to stand up and be counted. Your vote counts.”

I wake up early Wednesday morning and listen to the election results. I smile from ear to ear because I realize I live in a society that has the freedom to choose its leaders, its course. I realize my vote does count. I realize that I have contributed to the future of my children and grandchildren. This is not because my chosen candidate won or lost, but because my opinion was recorded, noted, and heard in the process. I made a difference and I am proud of it.

Maybe there are as many terrorists behind microphones and cameras as there are flying jets, throwing grenades, and behind the wheels of car bombs. I must be careful to what I listen to – I must listen to my conscience. I must trust more what I see and know, than what I hear.