



**Mike
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Should granny be in the slammer?

Of all the inmates of America's federal prisons, there can't be any who are less menacing than Dorothy Eber, a 64-year-old granny from Villa Park.

Since early February, Mrs. Eber has been doing a 2-year stretch in a maximum-security prison in Lexington, Ky. It's almost certain she will serve every day of her sentence.

And what crime did she commit? Well, she didn't shoot, stab, rape, rob or poison anyone. Nor did she peddle drugs. She didn't loot a savings and loan association or cheat on her income tax. And she wasn't a judge or politician on the take.

Mrs. Eber is an anachronism, which the dictionary defines as something or someone existing at the wrong time in history.

What makes her an anachronism is that she is a 1960s-style peacenik, a protester, a person with a social conscience. And in the eye-on-the-bottom-line 1980s, that makes her as rare as a wood tennis racket.

She was not formally charged with being an anachronism, since being one isn't against the law. But that's what landed her in prison.

For most of her life, she was a wife, a mother (4 children) and a grandmother (11).

But when her kids were grown, she became involved in volunteer do-gooder projects.

And when her husband died, she took a bigger step. She decided that she didn't want her grandchildren growing up in a world that might disappear in a big mushroom cloud.

She became an anti-war, anti-nuclear activist and protester.

There are still a few of them around. They aren't as rare as the bald eagle. But they aren't as numerous as crooked S&L executives.

When she got into her protests, she was arrested a few times for flopping down in front of defense contractor plants.

But then she went big-time, at least by today's protest standards.

She and several others went through a fence into a nuclear missile site in Missouri. They did it four times.

They planted some flowers, then sat right down on the concrete lid that covered a missile and prayed.

They were arrested, which they expected. And they were charged with trespassing on property, which they couldn't deny. And they were found guilty, which they also expected.

But what Grandma Eber, her children and grandchildren didn't anticipate was the severity of her sentence.

The penalty for trespassing is six months. She was found guilty on four counts. That meant the judge could have let her serve all four sentences at the same time. Instead, he strung them out and that came to two years.

The government and the judge did offer her a deal. She could promise to never do it again and get probation. But she said her conscience and beliefs wouldn't permit that compromise. So she took the full load.

Now she's in the federal pokey, working the night shift in the prison hospital as a nurse's aide and doing a little scrubbing and cleaning.

Meanwhile, her family, friends and some clergymen are urging anyone who will listen to write to congressmen, senators and the president, trying to get Grandma Eber sprung. One of them contacted me for help.

But I have to admit that I have mixed feelings.

On the one hand, I am a softy when it comes to tiny, white-haired, do-gooder grannies. And although I don't sit on missile lids myself, I'm against wars in general, and nuclear wars emphatically.

On the other hand, I also believe in the Gandhi-King tradition of civil disobedience. If you knowingly break the law, even for a noble purpose, you have to expect to pay the penalty.

But on the third hand (for the sake of discussion such as this, two hands aren't enough), I can't help but think that this is a silly waste of precious prison space.

Every day, judges open the exit doors for head busters, porch climbers, window creepers and various fiends, because they have to make room for the next batch. President Bush says he wants to spend \$1 billion, at \$44,000 a cell, just to make room for surplus criminals.

So from a practical point of view, I don't see much sense in keeping Granny Eber locked up for two years, when there are so many drug dealers, embezzlers, swindlers and other riffraff far more deserving of her cot.

Or look at it this way. In his creepy days, John Mack beat a woman with a hammer, stabbed her, slashed her throat and left her for dead. And he served only 27 months.

Of course, Mack had the good fortune to be a shirt-tail in-law of House Speaker Jim Wright, who used his clout to spring Mack. Wright not only got him out, he put Mack on his staff and made him the most influential aide on Capitol Hill.

In Mack's behalf, it should be said that the woman was a perfect stranger, so his attempt to kill her wasn't personal.

But if Mack had to do only 27 months for an atrocity, should a do-gooder granny have to serve only 3 months less for trespassing?

So I leave it to you. If you think she deserves two years, forget it. But if you think that some deserving drug peddler could use her little corner of the slammer, drop a card to President Bush.

I'm neutral. But keep one thing in mind. If WWII had broken out while Granny Eber was sitting on that missile lid, it would have been her, uh, bottom.