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Journal of Prisoners on Prisons
Surviving in the under world of prisons is just that - an ART in survival. Forced to exist in surroundings foreign to the very organic nature within us, as women we struggle to erase the fear by shutting down our emotions. The dialectic that ensues over the course of incarceration is voiced in tears and sung in blood.

The way of woman’s compassion, the cultivation of her complete field of communication, be it eye contact, body language, hand gestures, fragrance, gait, style, through listening to the breathing of the heart - the caress of a soft word - all of this is negated inside the walls of confinement. Commands are barked across lines between them and us. If you can’t learn to shut down, you will not survive.

Enduring the extremes of sensory deprivation is a startling regression for any twentieth century person, but particularly for women. The deprivation threatens our very essence. Where patterns of every imaginable colour and texture outside of prison enrich the eye’s span both indoors and out, the prison baseness of stone and steel remains ungraced. Grey days and black nights are the colours of precisioned function - the colours of punishment.

The only sequence is dislocation. Pipe-thick bars easily pierce stone and concrete; the flush of fifty toilets re-enforces rudimentary evacuations; the grinding of metal on metal, railing steel gates grate and screech into the locking frame embedded in concrete, just a few feet from your head. No feather pillows. Rigid lumps of fire-proofed matting assault our sleep.

The fragrance of flowers, of incense, of jasmine tea, the scent of your lover’s skin - all are displaced with the odour of disinfectant, of mould, of foul-smelling water and stale food, of dusty paper and institutional soap which permeates your nostrils. No longer the taste of freshly home-cooked meals and real buttered, fresh bread. Now, it is bologna, sausages over-frozen to cardboard, food fried in lard and fish flakes that look and taste like shredded napkins, canned apples and gravy mixes obscene in their fake colouring.

Adding to these insults are the monthly line-ups for basic needs such as Tampax when the guard yells out, "Regular or Super"? More insidious are the male guards who snicker as women are paraded past them hand-cuffed and shackled, often bleeding from self-inflicted wounds. We don’t see it. We don’t hear it. We don’t taste it. We don’t smell it. We don’t feel it.

The absence of aesthetic pleasures debilitates sensitivities and threatens death. The slightest awareness of beauty brings an assuage in form - breath. In this world of decay and corruption, we find beauty where we can and we make beauty to live.
Relief within prison is found only in the physical and creative arts and through the true friendships made with others imprisoned. Ours is a cloistered world, one where every minute of our day and night is calculated and where we are forced to conform to inane rules and regulations and where we are counted over and over and over again, keys smashing our senses as doors crash behind us locking us in coffin-like cages and cells. Nearly every night we hear muffled crying and almost as often a shrill scream from a nightmare or the strangely quiet slashing of flesh while another throws up. The experience of being locked up with many women, of women strutting proudly in the worst of men's persona, is outlandish. One response provoked is that of women's art.

The creative spirit within the woman's heart is the dominant path to survival. We are dying, and nearly devoid of life, we rush to the art form like shadows catching the body as we round the cornerstone. Dehydrated, waiting for life-fluid form, we reach for the pencil, the knitting needle, the clay, anything which will provide meaning and confirmation to our existence. With the most basic of tools, we fashion beauty and in that beauty, we are empowered and our woman-spirits survive.

The works of art that women accomplish in prison take many forms. Aboriginal women generously share their ancient teachings beading eagles and rosettes and crafting soft leather vests and moccasins. Some women knit and crochet wondrously intricate rainbow patterns into bedspreads, afghans, sweaters and dresses. Here are women who paint and draw, turn teacups and pots on the wheel and compose heart-wrenching and heart-warming poetry and prose. The art of women in prison is inclusive of every sensuous form imaginable including the meticulous waxing of a tile floor.

Women in prison waste nothing. Every bead, every shred of fabric and leather, every piece of paper and every pen is used or passed on. When a woman leaves prison, she leaves to another prisoner, her clothes, television set, stereo, bought soap and perfume, make-up and music. When women leave prison they take with them the love and respect for their sisters in struggle. They leave behind their tools for survival. The woman left will be reminded that one day it will be her turn to leave and when it comes, she will also pass these valuable tools on.

Society conditions women to value themselves in terms of form and function. But once imprisoned we are denied both. Art in prison is as much therapy as it is an obsession to create something beautiful with which to identify. It is an obsessive path through which we express the pain, the loss, the fear, and the anger that wells up within when we feel we cannot take another minute, never mind another year. The art of creation is an inward retreat which empowers those who find the path. When the Solicitor General proudly announced that yes, in four years we would go home to see our families, and when the $100,000+ per year
men at National Headquarters tell us how their staff practice the humane and rehabilitating execution of their Mission, we are expected to be overjoyed and grateful. Through art, women survive these idiots.

October, 1992

IN AGONY AND THE ECSTASY
my blood
Norma Stafford

my blood leaves me
each month to flow
into the earth becoming
once again the power of
the universe without which
no man can be.
my blood has flowed
through the streets, has been
sucked up and burned in buildings;
it has flowed from behind bushes
pulled from my black body by jungle thorns
in my flight from the slave trader
from treetops I have dripped
yet my death has never occurred.
when riddled or burned my body
is found by my sisters of Sapha’s
genes and they follow me.
erasing the red of my blood
they absorb my cells to
gain strength passed on to them
from the witch hunts and massacres
of me in my innocence that still curse
the men in medical, religious and political places;
those men who try to hide from my swollen tongue
on the days that I was hanged in England;
trying to hide from the charcoaled bones
of my body the times it was burned at the stake;
trying to hide from my body brought up
in the cramped suffocation of water chairs
out of the depths of lakes and ponds
around Salem.
my blood has flowed each and every time
a child has been given life.
at the hand of the rapist
my blood has flowed without mercy
to be scorned and defiled
in the man-made courts of the land.
now, tired of my body being bled dry
I come back from places
that men cannot see
to claim this blood
that is me.
The experience of imprisonment has both humbled and enriched me, albeit through pain and suffering. In commenting on the needs and experiences of women in prison I can only provide my subjective perspective, for though I am a woman who has survived prison, the experiences are deeply personal. We are all unique individuals, those inside the walls and those outside the walls.

However, despite the distinctiveness of our perspectives and experiences I believe we meet in common purpose - and that is to begin the means to end VIOLENCE in our society under law. But first we must understand what it is that we are up against, how violence is nurtured and how it grows - the factors which create violence. And, though prisons may be just one factor legitimizing ongoing violence, they are never-the-less, a factor overlooked. As a woman incarcerated for three years with all women and then for four years with all men, I am in a unique position to comment on these violent places of anguish.

I was incarcerated for seven years, for the killing of my step-mother, an act of extreme violence. I mourn this heinous deed, and if I thought doing more time could undo this horrendous act or would make the world a safer place I would voluntarily return to prison. But I cannot return Anna's life and imprisonment does not lessen the violence in society. I know what enables violence and I'd like to devote the rest of my life to saving women from tragedy. However, while in prison, I was not able to save any woman, or, it seems, to lessen the brutality of imprisonment - "the exercise of the power of consent over another person" (Shafer & Frye 1977:290) - the definition of rape.

I feel it ironic, that while incarcerated for a violent crime, I witnessed and was surrounded by death and violence inflicted both by staff and by prisoners, none of which I was able to stop and in fact, which I was forced to endure. For the last four years of my incarceration I was kept in the Matsqui Prison Hospital alongside male prisoners ill and dying. During my four years there, five men died. I breathed every dying breath with the last two men. Over my seven year imprisonment, I knew twelve women and twelve men who died while in prison or very shortly after release. Nine of these twenty-four deaths were by suicide, seven of these suicides were by women. Five of the seven were Native women.

The most publicized suicide was that of ninety pound MARLENE MOORE, or Shaggy as she liked to be called. I remember her gaunt arrival at Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston, April, 1988. Unsteady on her feet and banging into furniture, she said she had no glasses and couldn't see. Her arms were masses of scar tissue stretched taut over bone and when I looked at her, the pain-filled pools that were her eyes, imprinted on my heart. She wound up in a fight that first day, in the dining room after butting her cigarette into what she thought was a black
ashtray. It turned out to be someone’s black plastic salad bowl. They both went to the segregation. From that day on Shaggy was rarely in regular population. She usually ended up in the hole when she couldn’t wait any longer for the nurses to catheterize her. When she was in so much pain and feeling so shamed, she would act out and often she would slash herself.

On the night of Nov. 24, 1988, four women attempted hanging in segregation. Shaggy coped the only way she knew. She slashed herself unmercifully. P4W’s treatment for her slashing was to build a 7’ X 12’ plexi-glass partition to slide in front of her cage, so she couldn’t throw her blood out at the guards.

These are excerpts of Shaggy’s last note, the end of November, 1988:

...I ain’t doin so good...i’m wetting all over...i feel like shit ....I got 40 days....they had the hoses out....juss becuz I slashed - well this is getting me down pissen all over the place...so after the cops got prepared to hose me down & there all in space suits and crash helmets i said ill walk....we been in here since the beginning of October....i dont no what i’m doing i’m reely fucked up over whats been happenen in here...sorry you guys i dont mean to wet i cant stop bag or no bag i’m reely embarrest ashamed. hurt. i began to hate myself ya no. cuz i think whod want a person like me around you no what i mean....but remember i love and miss all you guys and i’m reely sorry for keep screwing up. i even hung myself...i got a rope bern reely bad around my neck. be cool.

with much love and respect always your buddy shaggie."

One week later, Marlene Moore, was dead. She choked herself to death by hanging off the hospital bed and twisting a sheet around and around her neck. Here is the legitimization of that "treatment":

Kingston Coroner, Dr. Clifford Meyer, commenting at the inquest into Marlene’s death said that, "Prison for Women was not at fault in Ms. Moore’s death - indeed, it was to be commended."

The jury said, "... it was impressed with the care and the resources afforded women in Prison for Women" (Curtis, 1989).

Over the next three years, six more women took their own lives despite the "commendable care and resources offered" them. Pat Bear and Sandy Sayer in 1989, Marie Ledouxe, Careen Daigneault and Johny Neudorf in 1990, and Lorna Jones in 1991. In 1992 another woman was resuscitated after hanging herself in P4W. All she wanted was to be incarcerated 2,500 miles to the west, in her home province of Alberta.

If calculated per 100,000, for the years 1988 to 1991, the annual rate of suicide at P4W would have ranged from 869 to 2,609 per 100,000 women prisoners. Remember - this carnage does not include the

*See letters of Marlene Moore in this issue.*
unknown suicides of women in provincial custody. Compare this with the rate of suicide for other Canadian women. The annual suicide rate per 100,000 women in Canada for the years 1960 until 1985 ranged from three to under eight women (Health & Welfare 1986:31, 82). To be a women imprisoned at P4W can translate to the fact that you would be at least 289 times more likely to kill yourself, as you would be if you were free.

You may think that everything is alright now that P4W is being shut down, but what did it take to do that? Was it the seven suicides or the public outcry? And how many more suicides will occur before September 1994 as the C.S.C. spend every cent to refurbish P4W for the older male prisoners who will occupy it: P4W dollars unavailable for women so that even the most basic of "programs" are denied to them. P4W is now even worse than when I left it - now a double-bunked warehouse and an abattoir. How many suicides will occur in the new P4W in Burnaby, B.C.? There have already been three serious attempts there that I know of at present. And, how many suicides will occur in the five new P4W's now scheduled to be built? Where will the women now incarcerated at P4W go when the aging men imprisoned in Eastern Canada are transferred there? The answer is definitively to even more barbaric places - to provincial jails where slashing is still treated as an "attention-getting" manipulation of authority and where national suicide statistics are unknown.

I used to be suicidal, attempting three times to take my own life, but I have finally recovered through intensive therapy with a woman psychologist. I was raised in a violent home, so violent that even when I was left for dead on the blood-soaked landing of the skating rink, after being raped by a stranger when I was not yet five years old, I was afraid to tell my parents. And I was ashamed to tell anyone else. I was still too ashamed to tell anyone when at eighteen I was drugged at a party and awoke naked, face down and in pain, or at nineteen when I was date-raped by a lawyer, or at twenty-six when I was raped by a politician when I was showing real estate, or at twenty-seven when I applied for a job from a well-respected restaurateur. I masked the fear and the rage with which I lived. I was schooled in violence, and when I committed a violent act, I was punished with violent means by violent people. I know that: VIOLENCE results from the exploitation of POWER imbalances and the SUPPRESSION of the pain of being exploited OFTEN results in more violence which forms the ONGOING CYCLE OF VIOLENCE.

In his 1637 Discourse on Methods, Descartes said that one "must learn to master one's emotions, to keep them subdued" (Gay, 1973). In prison, women are forced to "master" their emotions, and when they do, they slash themselves and hang themselves as Marlene Moore did. Or they go mad as a Toronto woman did, eventually eating her own faeces and menstrual blood before I was finally able, on December 23, 1988 to
contact Member of Parliament, Svend J. Robinson. Svend intervened to save her life. CM had been naked in the hole at P4W in freezing temperatures for nearly three weeks. This was her "treatment" for being a schizophrenic woman in prison.

Treatment/punishment for breaches to power relationships is a reactive function. Those who are in power determine what is an offence and to what extent punishment/treatment will be imposed. You may say that prisoners are violent and need to be controlled for the safety of the staff. However, while twenty-five prison staff lost their lives on duty in the years from 1870 to 1994 in Canada - a period of 124 years, recent data bears out the facts that at least one federal prisoner will commit suicide every twenty-seven days. This is a ratio of 1:67 staff deaths to prisoner suicides.

I calculated a brief comparison of the rate of harm to staff versus the rate of harm to prisoners for the years 1982 until 1988 with statistics taken from the Annual General Reports of the Solicitor General. The rate of harm to staff remained at 1.3 incidents per 100 staff members while the prison population increased 17.7%. Total incidents of harm to prisoners increased 26.9%, while staff actually experienced a decrease in harm of 6.9%. However, the use of force (mace & guns) against the prisoner increased by 133.7%. This data suggests that more force is being used against prisoners than ever before.

No statistics are available to account for violence against women in prison, but we do know that no staff member or prisoner has ever been killed in a women's prison in Canada. None of the twenty-nine men's maximum and medium security penitentiaries can boast that record of prison worker safety. Why then are women held in such extreme maximum security conditions and treated so cruelly? It appears that the mere idea of women decidedly breaking the law threatens the status quo - the image of mom and apple pie. We must be witches. We must be deviant and we must be punished. Like the men, the punishment begins by stripping the identity from the person. We become females, not women. All become "inmates" or "offenders" - the "others" - the process that enables all discrimination which in turn rationalizes annihilation.

"Evil is anyone outside the tribe. Evil works by dehumanizing the other. A perverse, efficient logic works. Identifying others as evil justifies all further evil against them" (Morrow 1991:50).

The dehumanization of the object group using language, is the first order of prison control.

As Camille Paglia (1991:5) stated, "To name is to know; to know is to control". Knowledge of the subject promotes the legal and human "objective" science of imprisonment which has as its stated goal, the "normalization of people so they can take their 'rightful' places in society" (Foucault 1977). But how can you "normalize" people by
locking up "inmates" in cages? The subtle use of institutional language softens the cruel reality: self-abuse for slashing; institution for penitentiary; inmate for prisoner; go home, for go to your cage; treatment for punishment. The most respected prison abolitionist, Claire Culhane, unmasks just one correctional aphorism - the description of "inmates (a like-group) feeding" (how animals eat), rather than stating prisoners (who are people locked up against their will), are eating.

In 1991 in Saskatchewan Penitentiary, two prisoners on their knees from the effects of tear gas died from bullets fired into their backs. This is called legal intervention.

On November 1, 1992, parliament passed Bill C-36 ensuring that more prisoners will be incarcerated for longer periods of time than ever before in Canadian history. It is rationalized that conditions are however, humane, and further that - extensive rehabilitation programs are provided. The 1989-1990 Annual General Report of the Solicitor General claims that only 409 man-years are expended in guarding "inmates". The other 3,193 former guards are now "program deliverers" and though are newly classified under case management, they still wear the uniforms of guards. "Recreational officers" remain prime candidates for the Emergency Response Teams, those infamous groups of black-costumed and hooded men who beat naked and unarmed prisoners as they "resist" cell "extractions".

Similar to corporations and governments who hide their foul deeds of pollution, exploitation and corruption behind their sterile entity logos, using smooth public relations managers, prison regimes hide their foul deeds behind the authority granted to them under the law couched in sophisticated public relations language. The Conservative government chose a top firm, The McLaughlin Group, to sell the Free Trade Agreement, the NAFTA and the GATT, a contract worth $842,000 (Langlois, 1992:15120). The CSC uses the same firm to control what is reported to the media. I don't know how much it costs the C.S.C. to mask the violence of punishment.

It has already been proven that excessive punishment does not change poor behaviour, rather, that it builds deep-seated resentment. The longer a person is prevented from normal socialization, and remains under the extremes of control, the greater is the alienation and estrangement from their society. When an ex-con returns to society and commits another violent act, the public demands to know why the prisoner was released. NO ONE ASKS what happened to that person before they came to prison or how many prison terms they had served and under what conditions. Is it possible that the costs of the prison environment encompass the creation of sociopaths and psychopaths among both the kept and the keepers?

Just as the German Nuremburg Laws of 1935 served to alienate Jewish people from their rights as citizens and legitimize their status as
Gayle K. Horii

others, so too do legal convictions legitimize the beatings, the macings, the "cell extractions" by hooded and armed men, the use of dogs as weapons of terror and the psychological rape of strip-searching - all under the guise of the "good order of the institution". This is NOT the good order of society but many prisoners with histories of beatings in juvenile detention centres, police and RCMP lock-ups, and finally in provincial and federal penitentiaries have been "taught" that violence IS a legitimate response. Additionally, the response of violence is too often associated with "ethnicity".

Corrections Canada will tell you how they respect ethnic values. Their proof is the appointment of the Caucasian daughter of a National Parole Board member to the "Female and Native Offenders" branch. Many questions are begged. How can a privileged Caucasian woman from a career "corrections" family be cognizant of the reality of Native prisoners, men or women? Does this appointment suggest that Native prisoners and prisoners who are female have something in common? Other than both being among the most severely disempowered, there is no other link. Race of the "offender" is itemized in Basic Facts (1991-92:34) however, no such statistic is available with regard to staffing. The "over-representation" of "ethnic" peoples incarcerated is pandemic. Consider the following:

In Hungary, "Gypsies" constitute 2-3% of the general population, but 30% of the prison population and 80% of the closed prison (maximum) population; In New Zealand, Maoris account for 10% of the general population, however 50% of the prison population; In Canada, Aboriginals constitute only 2% of the general population but 16%-60% of the prison population depending upon jurisdiction (Penal Reform International, September 1991. The Alternative Target).

As a principal of a Bedouin school stated in the summer of 1985, "...if it was not enough what they [Israeli state] are doing to us, now they tell us we are an ethnic group" (Nordstrom and Martin 1992:85). Ethnicity is a term used by the dominant hegemonic culture, a colonial and imperialist way of coming to terms with the "others". The oldest inhabitants of Canada, the peoples of the First Nations, are an "ethnic" group over-represented in Canadian prison populations, a group whose "ethnic needs" are among the first to suffer from the axe of budgetary cutbacks.

The reduction of sweat lodge participation is rationalized by the high cost of wood. This is just one reality antithetical to the "ethnic" policies of Corrections Canada. The sweat lodge and the Native Elder participation have become mere romanticizations as Native life skills programs are cancelled or run by non-Native correctional staff. "Ethnic" valuations are cherished myths shoring up the censored canvases of the condemned. The denigration of the First Nations' peoples is violence in
its most insidious form, but it is the structure of imprisonment itself, which enables it to continue. Law is a process by which government structures choice.

Another form of violence, covertly applied, is discrimination against women. Told that university education and private family visiting was available at P4W, I made the impossible choice to serve my time 3,000 miles from my family in B.C. A man in a similar situation would never have had to make that decision. When I found my security level bumped up to comply with P4W policy which effectively blocked my attempts for education and for return to my home province, I was in despair. I felt powerless and stupid because I had no knowledge about prisons or about criminal or prison law. I had made a decision based only on what I was told and decided that I had better educate myself so that any further decisions I may make would be based on, in the least, the best information I could find.

When I arrived at P4W in 1986, we had no hot water or cablevision in the cells. I grieved both. On October 29, 1987, the hot water was finally turned on. It had always been available. Why would men be given access to hot water and not women? Is it due to the belief that women would still keep themselves clean, even if all they had was ice cold water but more insidiously because of the belief that women should be punished more severely than men? At P4W, cablevision was installed in 1988. Men in prison had cablevision for over ten years prior to that. However, men are a control problem and having them quietly watching the tube helps to keep the prison atmosphere pacified. Women are rarely a control problem.

Besides the documented inequality of facilities and programs, socialization and visiting rights, facilities where cell decoration, cooking for oneself, and outdoor facilities provide tennis and golf for men, the discrimination reaches to cover the most basic of conditions for incarcerated women. We must buy shampoo and laundry soap, while men are issued these necessities. We are not issued outdoor clothing while men are. Mind you, women in prison receive little time for fresh air and gym activities compared to the men who have full gyms and yards open to them twelve hours a day except for work days. Why is exercise not considered essential for women? Again, is it just part of the "status quo" control model which still furthers the out-of-date philosophy that participation in sports is not lady-like?

At Prison for Women in 1986, we were permitted one ten-minute phone call per month. In contrast, men incarcerated in B.C. (usually their home province) were permitted up to 100 minutes of phone time per month. This amounts to 10 times the contact allowed women at P4W, many of whom were thousands of miles from their families. After petitioning, phones were installed in 1988. Though THE CHARTER guarantees equality under the law, the infamous abattoir, Prison for
Women stands as a monument and an example of the brutal reality imposed upon the most helpless population in Canada, the population of women imprisoned. And now, the Burnaby P4W and the new regional P4W's will be the new dark monuments to this same lie.

In Burnaby in 1990, a woman who requested a copy of the Exchange of Services agreement was put in the hole and remained there until her release date. The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies' (CAEFS) Newsletter which included writings from other women inside, (including myself), and which gave women instructions on how to obtain their legal rights, was never permitted inside these walls. Censorship, though unlawful, is clearly the policy at the Burnaby P4W. In provincial custody, women have no access to the Correctional Investigator’s office and little knowledge of their legal rights. In women’s prisons only very limited access to law books is available, while in men’s prisons there are often complete law libraries.

The "open custody unit" in the Burnaby P4W which, quote, "mirrors men’s minimum security", is a sham. Just one of the many discrepancies is the visiting where Women at the Burnaby P4W are permitted two one hour visits per week in an enclosed room with no refreshments in a prison which is not served by public transportation. Men in minimum security, may have unlimited all day visits from their children, wives, friends and even the family dog, as long as he is on a leash! Men may have bar-b-q's with their families, go for walks in the forest, or play golf or tennis. The "women" at Burnaby's P4W can roller skate- with each other! The facts are clear - prison authorities simply do not fear women and believe they need not provide women with any "amenities".

Women in prison are juvenilized and our realities trivialized. We are still called "girls" and rarely mothers. Yet it was "estimated that in 1983 alone, approximately 2,700 women admitted to Canadian jails and prisons were separated from their children, affecting at least 5,400 children and an additional 360 newborn infants" (Faith 1991:167-8).

My refusal to be treated like a "girl" resulted in the province of B.C. denying my return seven times. I fasted and overwhelming community support forced the CSC to save my life and return me to B.C. Ironically, only because I was imprisoned in a men's penitentiary did I have the opportunity to attend university classes. Since my release on day parole, I have completed the final requirements for a degree in Anthropology which was conferred in June. Women need education. If I had been in the Burnaby P4W, I would have been training dogs with behaviour problems. I would not even be considered worthy enough to train just any dog, I would be worthy of training only dogs that bite!!.

As far as the treatment of women convicted of crime, most things haven’t changed. The first lawful hanging in Canada was that of a sixteen year old French Canadian girl convicted of robbery. Her execution was carried out by a male convict also sentenced to hanging
but given his life in exchange for this 'duty' no other would do. However, in 1640, this very young woman was not yet a legal person. She had no rights whatsoever, yet had the same punishment imposed upon her. She would have become a person on Oct.20, 1929, nearly three hundred years later. So, in 1640 a woman could be hanged for threatening the status quo, but never achieve any of the protections afforded to that male sphere.

In 1789, following the French Revolution - the Declaration of the Rights of Man became law. Yet, just two years later, Olympe de Gouges, a woman, was guillotined for writing "The Rights of Women" ("les Droits de la Femme") (Beattie, 1986:602). The feminists of Canada remembered this 200 year old lesson and protected the rights of women here. The Equality provision guarantees equality between individuals before and under the law, and the right for equal protection and equal benefit of the law, without discrimination, and specifically precludes discrimination on the basis of sex.

In 1992 in Canada, feminists again stood strong, and along with the majority of Canadians voted down a Constitution that would have erased many individual rights in favour of group rights of the status quo. It is now 1994, and women still receive similar sentences to that of convicted men, but that is where the equality ends for federally sentenced women. How that sentence is carried out on women is far more harsh and the future looks bleakly unchanged. Though the 1990 Task Force Report on Federally Sentenced Women was intended to change the future for incarcerated women in Canada, the successful obfuscation of the powerful potential of these recommendations can be attributed to the power holders who are masters at masking truth from their own biases and distortions, a "kind of intellectual imperialism" (Clammer 1985:15).

Since all other federally sentenced women in B.C. are under the control of provincial authorities, I am the last federally sentenced woman in B.C. who is a federal responsibility. My court action which challenges the status quo and the lawfulness of the discriminating conditions that women in prison must endure, should be heard in Federal Court this year. We have laws that were designed to protect us from violation in all forms. The grand-MOTHER law, the CHARTER of Rights and Freedoms, the fundamental basis of the 1982 Constitution Act, is where I and all women both inside prison and outside prison must look for justice.

However, how can the guarantees in the Charter be realized as long as we maintain the status quo - the structures of severe power imbalances? Christine Boyle at the Dalhousie Law School concluded that it is primarily fear that keeps people from effectively challenging the status quo (Lahey, 1986:viii). But now, in addition to fear, there is poverty. With the cancellation of the Charter Challenge Funding, effective February 27, 1992, any challengers to inequalities perpetrated
by governments or agencies or corporations - the status quo - will be unable to proceed. The new Liberal government has promised reinstatement. However no official policy has yet been issued to that effect. Impoverishment, racism and sexism are all forms of violence.

The irony is that the very system which defines discrimination under law is that which permits its’ lawless life. Without the Court Challenges program the exorbitant costs associated with a major claim make equal justice prohibitive. At the same time as the Charter Challenge Fund was cancelled, the Justice Minister announced the hiring of more teams of lawyers to defend the government against legal challenges by the individual. Our freedoms appear more at threat from the inside than from the outside!

The $4.4 billion dollar Department of National Defense expenditure for helicopters we don’t need (Brewin, 1992:14515), could be transferred to the Charter Challenges program. We also desperately need community boards to keep watch over status quo bodies of power. Rotating boards could review all police and corrections areas, provincial and federal, adult and juvenile, men’s and women’s, ensuring that the law of this land reflects equitable social justice rather than the interests of the powerful, as is the case currently. Now, these bodies investigate themselves. How can the left eye investigate the right eye using only the right eye for vision? The new post-structuralist approach emphasizes the necessity of challenging the questioner and the questions along with the form of inquiry. In Canada, as Ruth Benedict states, "a discourse on forms becomes, confusedly, one on levers" (Geertz 1988:125)!

Recommendations of the Correctional Investigator to right unfair and often brutal practices inside the walls have no force under law. In fact, Bill C-36 expressly states, "Neither the Commissioner nor the Chairperson of the National Parole Board is bound to act on any finding or recommendation made under this section (Part III 179 (3))".

In 1994, the 1977 Correctional Investigator’s office remains effectively impotent and still reports to the Solicitor General. The mere presence of this office effectively presents the assumption that prisoners have a path to reconcile wrongs done to them. The reality of course is simply another falsehood; however, paperwork creates jobs. Inquiring into this sorry state, I completed a five year statistical study of unsolved grievances at the fourth and final level of grieving to discover that the same areas of conflict are unresolved year after year. This fact remained unchanged with over 4,000 grievances reaching this fourth level in 1990, about 1 for every 3 federally incarcerated prisoners. The point is that the CSC knows where the problems lie, they simply have no intention of resolving these ongoing conflicts. There is no law which demands that peaceful solutions be a priority.

Violence results from the inability to resolve conflict in a peaceful manner. The reality for prisoners is that violence in prisons promotes
job security for prison workers. The prison industry is the most secure growth industry in Canada and like the four tombstones, those of Mary Harting 1936, G. Teolis D. 1944, Ada Roy 1894-1941, and D. Dillabough 1919-1966, that lay for decades beneath the gym floor at P4W, the burgeoning prison industry is an obscene monument to the failure of social justice in Canada. Mention must be made about the few fine people in corrections. I respect their courage in attempting to carry out their duties in a humane and fair fashion. However, even they suffer discrimination from their own peer group and their small numbers are unable to effect meaningful change. In some respects their presence only creates the illusion of "humane corrections", that intervention doesn't necessarily mean using force. The members of the Emergency Response Team prove otherwise.

Eighteenth century theorists decided that prisons could reform and reclaim the individual by "removing the offender from the source of contamination" (Beattie, 1986:569). But instead of reforming the prisoner, prisons immediately became mere cesspools of contamination. As Zimbardo's 1971 Stanford University experiment proved - it is not necessarily the prisoner nor the keeper that makes prison the vile place it is, but rather the structure of the prison regime itself. The structure of laws and policies that endows ordinary people with life and death power over others enables an insidious relationship begging corruption, indignities, entrapments and assaults. Few people can handle power without becoming corrupt, and as Lord Acton stated, "Power corropts, absolute power, corrupts absolutely".

Penetrating changes in anthropological representations emanate from the 1960s which spawned a general criticism of traditional authority. What emerged in the social sciences was a renewed focus aimed primarily towards the relations and construction of power and knowledge.

Michel Foucault (1979) asked, "How is power exercised?" Well, in prisons, the answer is: the power matrix - observation, surveillance and classification = knowledge of actor = correction = internalization = reformed person. This is the "scientific rationale behind imprisonment", a doctrine of positivism. However, as Josephine Donovan (1986:28) stated "The Newtonian view provides no means of establishing or legitimizing qualities or values. The rule of the majority is a quantitative judgment which ultimately says nothing about the ethical legitimacy of its position".

Institutions do not stop violence. They perpetrate it by eliminating individual freedoms and responsibilities in favour of the power-holders' status-quo-sponsored morality. Discrimination is a rationalized form of violence. "...in every society an ideological order of power, control, and domination" (Therborn 1980:81) exists by reinforcing the concept of the other, those who do not belong. It is through hierarchal institutions that
the abuse of power is universally and violently perpetrated. And, it is only through consensus-like replacements powered by feminist ideologies and re-education, that the abuses and the violence can be eliminated.

Women could claim equal power now. The formation of a non-partisan, feminist Shadow Cabinet may provide a beginning. How that is actioned is the key to eliminating violence. A theoretical framework for the analysis of social change must be concerned largely with what happens to social structures. But to be truly dynamic it must allow for individual action (Frankenburg 1967:50).

I have discussed violence, the result of the exploitation of power imbalances and how these severe imbalances of power ensure the growth of violence in our society through the legal and/or political authority that is granted to institutions. I have discussed the exercise of the power of consent over another person - the definition of rape.

We maintain within us thousands of years of genetically inherited memories of violence, memory of the horrors of rape recorded as early as 290 B.C. of the Sabine women, to the ongoing rape and murder of women and children in Bosnia and all over the world at this very minute. Rape is a universally accepted weapon of male wars (Brownmiller 1975).

We know of the "seven centuries of witchcraft-related persecution justified on biblical grounds which tortured, drowned, hanged and burned at the stake as many as "nine million defenceless women" (Faith 1991:210). We know of the hundreds of millions of women over the ages sold into slavery and prostitution, who have had their babies ripped from them, who have been and are being tortured and whose genitalia are disfigured or removed entirely. We know of the impoverished misery, the humiliation and the unbearable agony of the lives of the majority of women around this globe, much of it imposed actively upon them by their own families, their doctors, clergymen, teachers and the courts, all enabled by the institutions that give them membership - the cultural hierarchies and the patriarchal structures of the military, the state, the church and the professions, all self-governing bodies which enable ongoing violence and injustice.

Post-modernism has deconstructed macroprocesses so that the understanding of the lines of division can be made clear and so that the significance of change can be visualized, in particular the social consequences flowing from these larger legitimizations of authority. As Foucault states, the "effects of power are not attributable to appropriation but to functions" (O’Brien 1978:513).

Voltaire popularized the phrase "ecrasez l’infame" (crush the infamous thing) -referring to the stranglehold of the church (Hampson 1990). Feminists would argue that the "thing" is the big one - patriarchy. And I, a woman on parole and a post-modernist feminist would add that the big arms of the big thing, patriarchy, are the institutionalized hierarchal
structures. If we are to make our world a safer place we must DIS ARM this big thing - patriarchy.

WOMAN'S HEART

It should be possible to speak of the SUPPLY of prestige, the DEMAND for power and the COST of authority.

- Robbins Burling, 1962
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WOMEN IMPRISONED AROUND THE GLOBE

The smaller numbers of women compared to the numbers of men incarcerated remain remarkable in their global consistency:

Australia 1981 - 304:8959 = 3.3% women
Canada 1986 - 279:12175 = 2.2% women
Canada 1991 - 313:14353 = 2.1% women
Cuba 1989 - 850:30000 = 2.8% women
England & Wales 1981 - 1407:41904 = 3.2% women
United States 1990 - 43845:739101 = 5.6% women

US Racial Composition 1923-Female/ State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Custodial Prisons</th>
<th>Reformatory Prisons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White 35.5%</td>
<td>White 88.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black 64.5%</td>
<td>Black 11.9%</td>
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"Men have consistently been found to commit suicide 2.5-4X as often as women in the general population" (Liebling 1992:35). Suicides of the imprisoned: 1902-1911 - England & Wales Total 95 - 9 women: 86 men = 9.5% women (Liebling 1992:18).

Of those "restrained" in prisons in Great Britain:
1981 - 130:703 = 15.6% women
1982 - 102:898 = 10.2% women
(Smith 1984:19).

Canada

Native women account for 15%-95% of the women's prison population versus 3% of the total female Canadian population (Moffat 1990).
BRAZIL

Statement

The Female Prisoners of the State of Sao Paulo

From the incarcerated women in the State of Sao Paulo

When the Secretariat of Security assumed responsibility for the prison system, we, as incarcerated women, voiced our concerns about possible abuses. We never anticipated, however, such a brutal massacre.

The blood that was spilt will not be in vain. There is great national and international attention being paid to these facts. This gives us hope that measures will be taken.

The Juridic Situation

The Justice System takes a long time to judge cases. This results in the terrible problem of over population within the prisons. It is not rare to see people serving more time than that which would have been served if they had been tried.

Disrespect for Women's Rights

Any women who give birth in prison are separated from their children right after birth. They are denied the right to breast feed, granted by law, and denied the right to bond with their own children.

The most perilous consequence of this policy is that many children born to incarcerated women are given up for adoption without the mother's permission. The system simply takes advantage of their "in limbo" status and legal abandonment.

Rehabilitation

We believe that helping professionals should have daily contact with female inmates inside the pavilion. Just think: some of them never even entered the premises, never assess the women, accompanied their behaviour, don't know about their progress at work, maintain no relations with any workers in the pavilions, whether at work or at school, and are never there to witness the daily lives of female prisoners.

Their duties are to prepare reports based on tests which last from 10 to 20 minutes; tests which determine whether the prisoner is ready or not to be rehabilitated for re-entry into society ....

Requests

* We want rehabilitative work, which enhances our self-esteem and self-worth, and which gives us marketable skills.
* We want the benefit of sentence remittance, our right by law, to be respected, and want the system to define the criteria for keeping count of days worked/days to be deducted from the sentence. The latter varies from prison to prison.
* We also want a higher salary which permits us to help our families. We no longer want piece wages, now calculated in an unjust manner.

20 Conditions Requested by the Women at San Paulo

1 The right to breast feed our children.
2 A daycare inside the prisons, so that we may be with our children during important developmental phases.
3 A separate and adequate visiting situation where we can see children younger than 8 years of age.
4 Special visiting days such as Mother's Day, Children's Day, Christmas and birthdays...
5 Intimate visits, *a right men already possess.
6 Visits with our husbands and our incarcerated partners. This right is already respected in other states in Brazil.
7 Increase visiting hours to the minimum of 6 hours, *as in male prisons.
8 The right to work in forensics (judiciary), to have access to information regarding our processes, *such as happens in male penitentiaries.
9 Allowing the newspaper "Diario Oficial" so that we may read it, *as happens in male penitentiaries.
10 Regular access to telephones, as in prisons in Curitiba and Rio de Janeiro.
11 The permission to have a television in one's cell, a right in most penitentiaries, including the female one in Tatuape.
12 Regarding WORK, under the responsibility of FUNAP; that opportunities be expanded so that there is work for all prisoners; that other types of work be instituted which have a rehabilitative function and which do not depend on payment for work done. The prisons of Tremembe and the office of FUNAP satisfy this criteria and we suggest that this model be followed in other penitentiaries.
13 That steps be taken to regulate and guarantee sentence remittance for working female prisoners, and that it be updated every six months minimum. We also believe that the law should be reformulated to protect workers in the prison schools who are obliged to work on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, who are also not entitled to reductions in their sentences.
14 That measures be taken to resolve the issue of HEALTH in female prisons. "HEALTH", in the Capital's female penitentiary has been closed down for unsanitary reasons, there are no hospitals for female prisoners in many cases, nor cars available for transportation. The lack of hospital facilities is a serious problem for sick inmates and for those who are not ill, for the latter are obliged to live with contagious diseases.
15 We demand the right to routine medical check-ups, to preventative medicine and to beds in the recently inaugurated hospital in the male penitentiary.
16 Help for female AIDS sufferers (medical, psychological and humanitarian).
17 A larger number of lawyers.
18 The right to progressive serving of sentences for first time offenders.
19 Clemency and concession of conditional parole for female AIDS sufferers who are in the final stages of the illness. There needs to be developed a mechanism to facilitate this recourse in a short amount of time, as there are many women who die in prison without having acquired freedom.
20 That an inquiry into the adoption of female inmates' children be opened.

Conclusion

We believe that the democratic process starting in this country should also apply to prisons; we are citizens and want to participate.

We would like permission to start a Female Prisoners' Commission to mediate with officials.

We believe that the democratic process is an effective tool in the prevention of such painful occurrences as those in the House of Detention. The experiences of the Prisoners Commission in Porto Alegre is a positive example showing how problems can be worked out together.

Sao Paulo, November 11th, 1992
My name is Karonji Spears, #W44928. My work assignment is staff barber. I am writing this letter to you regarding my ex-bunker (cell mate) Sonja Stapels, #W46467. I started this letter on December 27, 1993, and since that time, Sonja Stapels has died (January 2, 1994).

The week of Thanksgiving, November 23, 1993, inmate Stapels was moved from "A" yard to B06-11-3L underneath me. From the minute she was moved into my room it was easy to see that she was definitely sick, both physically and mentally. Several of us in Room 11 tried to help her all we could to get settled. During the next week we saw that Sonja was not healthy enough to program, even though the paperwork from "A" yard stated she was cleared for full duty, camp and kitchen cleared. She was entirely too sick to program that way.

We began ... tried to work with our staff to get her over to the infirmary. Our staff and MTAs (Medical Technical Aides) began giving us problems. Sonja was not receptive ... she was afraid...she was full of open, oozing sores (which later were found to be cancer).

We tried to get them to look at her. On Saturday, December 4, 1993, Sonja as sitting in the day room with her pants legs pulled up picking her open sores. I went to our 3rd watch staff and asked if they would turn around and look at her so they could see first hand what she was doing. They "laughed" and would "not" turn around. They told me to wait and talk to C.O. Remy (officer in charge). I told him what Sonja was doing and what was going on with her. The next night he called the MTA to 506 and they looked at Sonja. He confirmed to us that there was something definitely wrong with her and to get her to the sick call. He began the paperwork needed to get her to the psyche and to the doctor.

On December 6, 1993, C.O. Lingard got her an appointment for the doctor. The MTAs sent her back to the unit with instructions to pick up her medication on Wednesday - Motrin, Tylenol and Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion!! By then she had gotten a wheelchair, too. She became weaker and weaker and when a couple of us caught a cold and chest flu, Sonja went from bad to worse! She wouldn't go eat and she was having body aches, fever and severe diarrhea. Her ankles were swollen, her open sores were worse and her breathing was difficult. She was in a tremendous amount of pain, which caused her to toss and turn and moan all the time, especially in her sleep. She was so weak she wouldn't eat at all.

On Friday, December 10, C.O. Lingard made another attempt to get her to the treatment center, but again the MTA returned Sonja back to the unit at 4 p.m. ... the MTA ... went into the bubble and told the staff (who were not our regular staff) something. They all laughed and he
left. I then went up to the staff and asked them if there was anything I should know before I returned her to her room. They laughed again and said, "don’t ask her about the 'bugs in her head and ears.'" I then took her back to her room and put her to bed.

Sonja was extremely sick ... was failing ... in a lot of pain and very weak. I felt bad for her and also a bit concerned for myself and the other roommates, regarding the obvious possibility that she had full blown AIDS and the effect it would have on us. We all had respiratory colds.

On Saturday night December 11, 1993, after the 2200 count, Sonja's breathing was becoming difficult, so we called the staff and the MTA. The sergeant came and said the MTA was busy and Sonja should take 2 Motrin and go to sick call the next day. Well, I laughed (out of disgust), and said, "Well, that's like, "take two aspirin and call me in the morning,'" The sergeant said, "I guess so," and left.

The next morning was December 12. We told C.O. Cee and he called over and I took her to sick call. He asked me if I would explain exactly what was happening with Sonja. I tried. MTA McDaniels was working. When I tried politely to explain to her what Sonja was going through she told me to leave her there and leave! So I did. McDaniels was rude, uncaring, and spent about three minutes with Sonja before sending her off to brunch alone. I took Sonja home from brunch and back to bed.

It was on December 13 that Sonja finally got to the infirmary and stayed. On December 20th at 6:30 a.m. she was taken to Merced County Medical Centre. She died two weeks later on January 2nd at about 4:00 a.m. of pneumonia and complications due to AIDS.

How sad. How sick she must have been, how tired and sore and empty she must have felt. I believe that had it not been for C.O.s Linyard, Remy and Cee, Sonya would have died in her cell!!

During her last two weeks I investigated on my own and learned that she was dying. It motivated me to begin this letter during the week of December 27. I was told on December 31 that she was dying and on respirator and had full blown AIDS and that she’d never make it back from the hospital. The C.O. who told me that was laughing. He was one of the staff that would simply not turn around and look at Sonja on that Saturday night when she was picking her sores. How do you respect a staff that looks at human life that way!!??

Sonja is dead. Now what? How did she spend a 16 month - two year sentence here, get out for three days, go through County, "A" yard, and come over the wall to B06 with no one knowing she was that sick - fall through the cracks and die? Where are the tests, her physical, her blood work, T.B. results, pap smears, the whole medical work up she was supposed to have had? How was she camp cleared, kitchen cleared and cleared for full duty? I saw it. Her illness was obvious to us and we have NO medical training! Then when it was brought to the attention of
the medical staff, why couldn't they see that she needed more than tylenol, motrin and Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion!!? for cancerous sores? Why didn't they keep her overnight for observation? Scared, incompetent, or just apathetic?

Now, last but not least - what do people in room 11 have to be concerned with? T.B., hepatitis, HIV? And has anyone cared to call any of us in for any tests regarding infectious diseases? We've been led to believe she had other complications! I have put in to be retested for all of these, but I wonder isn't this how diseases get spread? Does this institution just ignore the possibility that we could be exposed to T.B., hepatitis, etc.,?

I feel for her family and I'm glad that Sonja is free of pain and at peace, but did she have to die that way, that soon? Maybe CCWF is too big to handle one person???? There's a major problem with medical!!!

Chowchilla Women's Prison
January 1994
Warm greetings to the wonderful people who have taken out time to help us with our struggle. The struggles of the HIV/AIDS incarcerated women at the Central California women’s Facility are many and hard. This prison is a fraud! The public thinks we are children in Chowchilla, just having a gang of fun! The public relations official here, Tobe Wong says that HIV+ women prisoners expect a luxury hotel. Wrong! We, the women of Chowchilla, are struggling day by day just for what everyone else outside the gate-to-hell takes for granted. LIFE!

The conditions here are a nightmare! We are treated as subhumans - the officers (not all, but most) talk to us as if we were dogs. The medical treatment is the biggest joke around. The food is not edible and our mail is tampered with day in and day out. The grievance system is a farce. These are only a few of the horrors of Chowchilla.

Remember the saying, "In order to be a good politician, you have to be a good liar". Sterling O’Ran, the so-called ombudsman of the California Department of Corrections should run for governor. The man lies with a smile! Mr. O’Ran visited Chowchilla and made an outrageous number of empty promises, none of which have come true.

The prison gets $22,000 a year to house one non-HIV infected prisoner. It costs about three times that amount to incarcerate prisoners with HIV and AIDS. Yet, prisoners have to pay for their teeth, glasses, cold medication! Where is all the money going? The pay for slave labour here starts at $.08 per hour and may go as high as $.15 for work that would cost the state millions of dollars if they hired someone from the outside. The system is getting rich while we suffer.

Yes, Chowchilla is a medical hell hole. There’s no doubt about that. We need better medical care, high nutritional diets and a caring, compassionate AIDS doctor. We need early release for all prisoners with AIDS and other terminal illnesses.

The beginning of this year brought tears, smiles, and laughter to the incarcerated women at Chowchilla. Betty Jo Ross was released to her loving mother. It took the efforts of all the incarcerated women here and the outcry, letters and public pressure from the outside. You have our deepest gratitude for all the support you have given to this fight.

The release of Betty Jo Ross was a huge battle to be won. But the war is not over. We hope that you will continue to support us in the days ahead as we fight together for quality health care and a better life for women prisoners.

January 29, 1994
DROPPING LIKE FLIES:
Another Death at Chowchilla
California Women’s Facility
Joann Walker

On February 24th, 1994 at about 11:20 PM, Molly Reyes began to die here at Central California Women’s Facility. Molly began to throw-up blood and some kind of inside body tissue in great amounts. The officer that was working in the building, unit 511 did all he could do to get help for Molly. He did his job and called medical staff. I have been informed that medical staff did not respond for one hour. The officer called five or six places trying all in his power to get Molly Reyes help as soon as he could.

The statement that it took the medical department one hour to respond was given by Molly’s roommates. This is outrageous! The roommates were doing all they could do, they pulled globs of blood and tissue out of her mouth. When medical did respond the inmate (Molly Reyes) was taken to the make shift infirmary. The roommates were informed that Molly was dead at 3:00 A.M. on the 25th of February 1994, which the roommates don’t believe, they feel she died in the room with them.

At 8:00 AM February 25th, 1994, one of Reyes’ roommates that was very close to her called Molly’s family to say how sorry she was. Hold on to your seats! The family had not been informed of their loved one’s death!! This caused the inmate who called much pain. A pain so great that I can not begin to put it on paper.

On top of losing a good friend, and a good room mate the women in building 511 room one were dealt another blow. They had to clean up their dead peer’s blood!! Molly Reyes was 50 years old, what a waste! What awful pain she must have been in, what kind of nightmares will her room mates have? How many more women will have to die for someone to wake-up to the medical horrors that are going on in the name of justice, here at Central California Women’s Facility? Will the next one be a friend of yours, or your daughter, wife, mother, sister, grandmother, your lover? Only time will tell.
I'm sitting up unable to sleep  
It's four a.m. and I feel myself about to weep.  
There's love songs playing, none of which is dedicated to me  
Potential lovers run the other way, for I am going to die of AIDS  
And that's as far as limited minds can see.  
   Not that I'm insensitive to their fear due to lack of education,  
But I wonder if anyone is sensitive that I'm in a sense on Death Row  
also known as "Health Care Isolation".  
   If the shoe were on the other foot, I'd react quite different.  
I'd try to make you laugh and feel cared for,  
Until it was time for you to leave.  
I wouldn't want to look back later with questions in my heart.  
Like...Couldn't I have provided more warmth to your life?  
   It's too late now.  
Now you've gone...I know you'd soon depart.  
Oh well, I'm talking about myself from both sides of the coin.  
It's okay my friend, hey you could of been a friend of mine,  
But you chose to go the other way once you found out,  
What am I dying of?  
   I'm not allowed to leave this place, alone in H.C.U.  
God! I miss human contact, conversing with Ruby, Brenda, Terry,  
Debbie too.  
I wish that there were something that I could be, pre-arranged more people.  
To rid me of this loneliness,  
But alone I must remain.  
   In the day time on occasion I'll see someone from the system.  
They're not timed...no they can stay.  
but when it's another prisoner, 15 minutes and they're sent away.  
When I was just a little girl,  
I used to ask the angels to come and take me away, from the perverts and the beatings.  
And make me be alone.  
   Now history repeats itself, I do the same thing today.  
I'm fighting a losing battle in many aspects of the word.  
Another Alone night awaits me,  
No one to share my feelings with,  
For alone I won't be heard.  
I'll sit in the chair and drink coffee, smoke lots of cigarettes,  
Have some pablum and fruit, and deal with Alone once more.  
Alone mixed with tears and thoughts of needing you.
Why can't someone stay with me between six and nine?
We could watch the video together or talk of happier times.
And I wouldn't have to be Alone with my impending death
invading my mind.

Where has all the compassion gone?
Don't they know that stress is a big killer?
Even healthy people have need of Human touch.
Why is "Not to be alone" asking for too much?
I'm not requesting a visitor to jump under the covers,
Exempting one beautiful safe encounter.
For me there will be no other.

STAY STRONG THEY SAY

Patrice O'Donnell

Stay strong they say, feel the loneliness I feel.
Take it one day at a time, smile, accept the fact you're dying...stay strong they say.

Play hard, pay hard, pay your dues.
Hey! You chose to use...

Stay strong they say.

Society such as it is will pay to put you in the ground.
Where's society's compassion whilst you're still around...

stay strong they say.

Due to anti-social behaviour, housing turned me down
Didn't I already do my time?
To want a little place to live, is that such a crime?
Stay strong they say.

Have you any idea the risk you take, when you share the syringe?
Momentary gratification...H.I.V. the result of the binge...

Stay strong they say.

I know you hear me but you're not listening.
So maybe you'll be next to take my place...in search of meaning.
As it gets harder to hide the pain on your face...

Stay strong they say.

I won't let society put me in an early grave,
As long as there' a breath left in me,
Maybe there's someone I can save...

Stay strong they say.

Watch Me!

* Patrice O'Donnell died December 8, 1990 in Kingston General Hospital where she was taken by ambulance from Prison for Women.

(Reprinted Courtesy of Tightwire Spring, 1991, pp.8-10)
I have been meaning to write this article for a long time now, but it seems I never quite had the time. However, there are things about this "Hell-hole" that must be made public.

I was in a maximum security area in this detention centre. It wasn’t all bad since there were a good bunch of women there which kept me sane. The conditions? Well ... first of all our toilet/shower area was right next to the men’s weight-lifting pit, which had frosting over the plexi-glass for only about 1 1/2 feet. This means that if you peek over you can either have a chance of seeing a poor woman using the toilet or taking a shower.

The temperature in March was very cold, but because the men’s area heated up much faster than ours did, they were usually too hot. The heat, therefore was never turned up and we froze. We were not allowed blankets on the range during the day and the cells were locked up most of the day. When we complained about freezing, one male guard (I’d say about 80% of the guards there are male) said, "Well, when you get pneumonia, we’ll give you some medication, until then shut up!"

Another problem was obtaining sanitary products. Every time we wanted a tampon or a sanitary pad, we had to yell at the top of our lungs for one to a male guard. When they did finally arrive, it would not be what we had asked for - well, pad or tampon, it’s all the same thing to them - isn’t it?

As for the meal times, some women were on diets that required milk - real milk. Most often substitutions of powdered or half-powdered milk were slipped in. When you are allergic to powdered milk, it can be pretty upsetting to need to test your milk before you can drink it.

At the end of our range, there was a door which opened to the men’s unit. At night, this was often left open, so the women would awaken in the morning to find two strange men watching them sleep in their cells. I’m not sure if they slept in pyjamas, but let’s hope so. There was a video camera on us 24 hours a day so our every move was monitored. If you wished to change shirts (remember - cells were locked), you were forced to do so in view of male guards because there were two cameras directed at you which covered both front and back of your body.

One day I returned from court to find that I was on my way to a dry cell. I admit I was guilty of having contraband material but they put me naked with no shoes on in this filthy cell. It had not been cleaned since the last person was pulled out of it. There was urine on the floor and all over the mattress and I was forced to stand in it while the hatch was open for any male guard passing by to leer in. They often made rude comments. I didn’t stay there very long. I figured if they wanted the cash I had that badly, it wasn’t worth standing in urine to keep it, so I gave it up. The cash was put into my account until the police came in.
with a warrant to take possession of it. The next time I came back from court I was informed I was going to segregation again. This time it was for a different reason.

It seemed that a bus load of men had come in that day and they needed the women’s maximum security range, so we (about six of us) were shipped. We were never given a chance to prove ourselves in the minimum security area, even for a probationary period, but instead were caged in the transit area. This is comprised of two cells, one double-bunked. In one cell was a picnic table which was too small to accommodate all six of us at one time. We were, therefore, forced to eat on the floor. The day room was about eight feet by twelve feet which included the shower stall with NO shower curtain. One cell was left open so that we could use the toilet, however again there was no privacy, not even from one another. It was luck that two did not need the toilet at the same time.

There was no phone in this unit, the clean clothes never seemed to arrive and we had no library services. At one point an Elizabeth Fry worker came in to see us and was rudely told to get out since this was a restricted area - all this and we were being told this was "no punishment, it’s just because it is over crowded - you can still smoke!". Wow, big bonus, huh? We were not permitted to keep both cells open even though there was not room enough for all of us to sit at the table.

At one point, a woman was taking a shower and a TOUR came through - Yes, I am serious. Of course, there were apologies but they didn’t make up for the humiliation caused to that woman. Nothing would make me believe that the apologies were sincere anyway.

After days and weeks of complaining and calling the ombudsman, a few improvements were made, but not many. After almost a month, a phone was installed. Isn’t it our right to have a phone? Everyone else in the joint did. In this Centre you have no rights! You are made to stand at attention when some old bigwig comes prancing through - like it’s the army or something.

The comments from the male guards when returning from court - well, you just get used to it: "Want me to search you honey?", as they leer at you, or, "Any internals need doing?", Chuckle, Ha Ha."

Quinte Detention Centre is a really sick place and the staff, though perhaps about 10% were human beings as I define them, are not fit to work in a zoo let alone a prison. So, let me give you some advice. If you are going to commit a crime, don’t do it in any area near Quinte, because you may end up there!!!
ANXIOUS WOMEN AWAIT PRISON CLOSING

*Melissa Stewart and Julie MacKay,*
Co-Editors of Tightwire

Anything less than being fully informed about all of the options available to us, is not acceptable to the prisoners at Prison for Women (P4W). The scheduled closing of the prison in September, 1994 makes us very apprehensive about our futures. There are too many unanswered questions.

Some women think, if we are not from Ontario, we cannot go to the new Kitchener facility. The Native women want to know more about the "healing lodge" which is to be built for them. The Black women feel slighted because they have not been asked for their opinions on any of the proposed facilities.

Some women do not want to leave Kingston at all because they have family close by. Some have husbands and sons in men's prisons in the Kingston area and feel that if they are moved to a new facility they will have more difficulty seeing their loved ones. They have enough problems just trying to see them now, even though they are only a short distance away. Their visits now are always late with reasons given that there are not enough escorts available. What will happen when they are even further away?

Some women's needs center around day care facilities. The priorities of mothers imprisoned are often different from those of men incarcerated. Maternal instincts become more personified in many cases with the separation of mothers from their children, usually a deeply wounding experience for both mother and child. Addressing this important issue will be a major challenge for CSC staff. "Children are our most important resource", say these incarcerated mothers.

For a fraction of the costs of imprisoning mothers, we could provide a child from an underprivileged background with all of the personal and educational opportunities they now lack. This could assist in eliminating illiteracy among these children. The temptation to experiment with drugs, delinquency and other paths to conflicts with the law could be greatly diminished if resources were re-allocated. There should be no amount of money, time or energy too great to spend on our children. They are our future. In failing them, we are failing ourselves.

The system of incarceration also fails the women they lock up. One woman said, "We are wrestling not against flesh and blood, but against policy, against power, against rulers of oppression. There is no compromise between staff and prisoners. It's like a war zone." Another said, "We need to dig in. We need to take a position to support ourselves against CSC policies which threaten us. We need to stand our ground."

But all of this is difficult since there is little common ground among us. We are all unique individuals and have unique priorities.
Exercise and recreation are very important activities and the women interviewed felt that they did not have enough time outdoors, especially in the summer months. They also felt that there were not enough activities in the gym, that it is not fully utilized as it should be.

Some women complained about the guards. "The guards do not do their jobs properly. Some like to play 'heavy' and some are uncooperative and on 'power trips'." Additionally, just the problem of living with so many women in closed quarters is a hard ordeal. Many women, guards included, are afflicted with PMS at the same time. We gain information when we enter the prison system for the first time from other prisoners who tell us about the rules and programs, etc. If we did not help each other with information, we would have an even more difficult time for staff rarely tell us anything. They rarely give us a straight answer.

Listening to the experiences of different women in the population, I have learned that many have been victims from an early age. Many are survivors of abuse and many still are compelled to self-injure. They need to feel the pain to know that they are alive. One woman said, "We shouldn't be locked away in a concrete fortress" and then one day handed a piece of paper and told to "go out into the community and behave like responsible, trustworthy people".

After I began this article, on June 21, 1993 the Warden held an information sharing session to inform us about the new facilities. It seems that we might have to be moved to Provincial jails while awaiting the opening of the new Federal prisons. So far, though, no plans are firmly in place.

Another woman had these comments, "I feel that this excuse of being near families just doesn't cut it." Many women believe that the CSC is simply worried about the reputation of P4W, that the media and others' negative reflections on the administration puts their careers at risk. Instead of trying to make this a better place, they will just split us up and send us away. It doesn't make sense for me, either. Since my family resides in Ottawa, sending me to Kitchener which is twice as far away to visit as Kingston is for them, contradicts the reason given for moving me.

Many women have been here for a long time, and though it may sound funny to an outsider, this is their home. Its like saying, "well we know you have lived here ten years, but now you are moving and you have no say in it whatsoever".

The CSC has recently spent thousands of dollars on renovations and also on a new visiting unit here at P4W. Why were all of these changes not done a long time ago when they were needed? We wonder if P4W is being improved for the benefit of the men moving over from Kingston Penitentiary?
Why couldn't some of the thousands spent on new uniforms for the guards, have been spent on making changes here? Think about it - a guard could be in any type of clothing for all I care - it does not mean that they will not charge us, irritate us, like us any more, because of what they are wearing. Why not put some of that money to a good cause instead of using it for "outer garb"? If you were to do a survey of how these new uniforms for the guards are going to affect our view of them now that they are dressed differently...........

There are many women in here with substance abuse problems and no programs to help them. Why are there no programs? Cutbacks in the budget!!! Does this make sense to you? It sure does not make sense to me. We are returned to the street with the same problems we had when we entered the building in the first place.

Recently we had a visitor from Elizabeth Fry, Halifax. She told us the sod had actually been turned for the new Truro facility. As far as we know, both Kitchener and Truro are to go ahead. The warden for Truro has already moved there. She is said to be now liaising with various groups to enable the facility to function well with community based programs. She is also meeting with the townspeople. The size of the facility has already been downgraded so that less women will be incarcerated there than were previously planned for. When Therese LeBlanc visited us last spring, we were also told that the Halifax County Correctional Centre, Women's Section, is closing down completely. Does this mean we will be housed in Truro with women serving Provincial time? That's what it sounds like at the present time.

As we get more information, we will keep you informed and if you hear anything, please let us know!

Update 1994: Edmonton is now going ahead, and we are consistently losing more services here at P4W.

Report from Prison for Women (P4W)
Kingston, Ontario
For several years I have been writing on issues facing women imprisoned in Canada; particularly those incarcerated at the antiquated Prison 4 Women in Kingston, Ontario. My writing is prompted by my personal experiences and from being a captive witness to the pain, indignity and brutality inflicted on very young women, elderly women, physically ill women and many marginally literate women, with whom I live.

My own observations are independently reflected by those of Sally Wills, the Executive Director of Elizabeth Fry Society of Kingston. In a brief (1988) submitted to the Standing Committee of the House of Commons on Justice, Wills states that:

When we look at female offenders it is quickly seen that they are doubly oppressed (by prison and the facts of their own lives). Ninety percent of female offenders are victims of sexual abuse and/or incest (yet "Corrections" maintains the right to the physical violation of arbitrary strip searching). Virtually all female offenders are victims of physical and emotional abuse (but "Corrections" will use mace rather than talk an individual down). 90% are women of poverty, low education and broken homes. Approximately 80% are mothers, 50% are single parents. Most of us have a knee jerk reaction to the Inmate Mother; however, just because a woman is an offender does not mean that she is a poor parent. For most mothers the most difficult part of serving a sentence is the separation from her children. Most female offenders (approximately 80%) admit to drug and/or alcohol addictions.

For over FIFTY years "Corrections" has simply added pain-filled years to the cycles of abuse these women have already encountered. The cost of this traditional mode of incarceration has continually mounted until it is estimated by prisoner Gayle Horii to cost $80,733 per year per woman. Against the realities of the profile of a female offender and the cost to taxpayers, I continue to speculate whether the continuation of this brutal treatment of women is by accident or a reflection of a more sinister social design of "righteous wrath" against "fallen" women.

In 1988, a former Danish correctional official, Mr. Ole Ingstrup was appointed as our Canadian Commissioner of Corrections. Mr. Ingstrup has issued several Mission Statements that are intended to offer clear direction to the Correctional Service. He has also organized a Task
Force to address the situation of female offenders. I am told that 1989 can be viewed as the "Year of the Female Offender."

I am not optimistic. The "needs of the female" offender have been studied to exhaustion since 1938! In 1989, I have already been told that the most significant remedy being considered is the construction of a 10-12 bed minimum security facility in the Kingston area. This in itself is hopelessly inadequate. It demonstrates, once again, steadfast blindness to the realities of women in this prison and throughout this entire country.

I realize that remedies for addressing the situation of Female Offenders are complex. But the simplistic, naive idea that a 10-12 bed facility had significant merit is bureaucratic solutionism at a most cruelly inept and ignorant level. The only meaning to emerge will exist in the ol'boy back-slapping as construction contracts are signed. Corrections will pacify the public by high profile media coverage of conferences, substituting planning in place of action ... again.

It is past time that basic facts were taken into account as the Correctional Services of Canada is attempting to formulate solutions. It must be accepted that deporting women from all across Canada to Kingston, in itself, constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. Nothing should be done to further entrench this practice. Constructing any new institution in the Kingston area would both contribute to and knowingly compound the existing discrimination.

A viable, economical alternative would be to lease, or purchase for future re-sale, several houses that could accommodate a reasonable number of women. In many ways, there would be substantial benefits to following this course.

Financially, the cost of such an undertaking would be far more economical than the construction of yet another prison. The project could be viewed as a blue-print for a National network. Houses would be a real estate investment and could be re-sold as Provincial facilities developed and the demands on the Kingston area decreased. It would be an opportunity for a government agency to demonstrate fiscal responsibility as well as engage in vibrant social change. These factors would be a healthy challenge to the status quo.

The need for several houses rather than one facility comes from an analysis of women's needs. The women in the custody of Corrections represent distinct groups.

Women sentenced to (relatively) short prison terms frequently warrant minimum security conditions after brief evaluation periods. In a Community Home they would be permitted and encouraged to make full use of community resources. Currently, the CSC pays substantial amounts to have self-help groups and counselling brought into the prison. These funds could be channelled to support and develop similar programs in the larger community.
Often, women doing long prison terms or even life sentences come to be viewed as minimum security risks. They regress when held in a maximum security environment over extended periods of time. These women need relief from the harshness of P4W but they would not be allowed access to the greater community. These women would need resources brought to them and a structure created through which they could earn community privileges to churches, libraries and a YWCA or similar facility.

Two other distinct groups come to mind. One is women who need and want substantial help dealing with substance abuse and past victimization. Current experiences at P4W are making it clear that both of these problems are closely related. The other distinctive group of women is our Native sisters. They would be better served if they were assisted in setting up a residence in harmony with their own cultural and spiritual backgrounds. The dislocation of Native women represents the most brutal form of outrage being tolerated by the Justice System. These women suffer not only geographical and family difficulties but are also placed in a situation where "rehabilitation" is standardized by an alien set of cultural norms.

If successful in the Kingston area, this Community Correctional Housing model could be expanded into a nation-wide network of such clusters. In comparison to traditional prison construction the savings would be enormous. At this time in Burnaby, British Columbia, construction is about to begin on a NEW traditional prison for 140 women, that at a cost of $50,000,000. The design for Burnaby is a modern version of the failure in Kingston.

In contrast to the fierce fortress model contracted by the mainly Male Enterprise of Corrections, community homes would demand intense human involvement; not just dollars, concrete and steel. Employment would be offered to many individuals with positive social skills. The programming for women in the areas of addiction, sexual abuse, upgrading of educational tools and job skills would serve other community members as both additional referral services to community members as well as a source of employment. The model would also be compatible with victim/offender reconciliation efforts.

Community models could easily be adapted to accommodate MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN. The grim and tragic family repercussions of sending mothers to prison is a fact that is ignored by the present system, as Sally Wills clearly points out. The institutionalized practice of separating women from young children to whom they have just given birth or have cared for over months and years is barbaric. Corrections should be moving in the direction of maintaining relationships, developing healthy growth rather than actively contributing to separation, its pain and the ongoing trauma of dislocated primary bonds.
The Task Force on Female Offenders may direct decisions that will dictate the direction of MANY MILLIONS of social dollars. Many institutions dehumanize; but prisons, as they now exist, make it their business. Our brothers in American and Canadian prisons have been trying to tell us that prison breeds hatred, violence and social contempt. Four years within the walls of the Prison for Women are making these male realities my own. The price for this brand of Corrections in Canada is $759,083,378. each year. The few number of women involved make the feasibility of attempting ALTERNATIVES practical. The issue is much more than dollars and cents, it raises profound questions as to the direction to be taken by the justice System into the twenty-first century. The prison built for women today will incarcerate the daughters of tomorrow - in increasing numbers. Prisons are not left empty and the social definition of crimes is easily changed. I hope Mr. Ingstrup’s Task Force will recommend and enact remedies that will avoid entrenching disaster.

Meegwetch
As Native people, one of the gifts we were given was kindness. As Native people, we were taught not to judge others, we were taught to welcome one another in a good way. As Native people, we are taught to forgive ourselves and then we can forgive others. The Creator bestowed upon us Native people many gifts which however, many of us have never understood.

Many of us have lived through abuse, whether physical, mental or emotional. As children we were never exposed to our traditional and spiritual ways. Many of us tried to deny our Native heritage. Our beliefs of nature were translated by many others as "pagan". We linked this negative reaction to others we constantly received. We were often called, "dirty alcoholics" and told we "would never amount to anything". Our spirits were destroyed which led to our conflicts with the law and our imprisonment. We lacked our own traditional ways of coping and became caught up in a world that was never ours.

We’ve let other people control our emotions, feelings and thoughts. We do things that we wouldn’t dream of doing or saying - all to be accepted. In time we become what we see around us. We become hateful, revengeful, selfish, greedy, judgemental, spiteful, uncaring and unfeeling. It is only through our Elders, our sweat lodge, our ceremonies, the pipe and The Creator that we begin to understand what a proud heritage we have.

We begin to look at "Ourselves", the pain we have caused our friends and families and all those that have passed through our lives. It is then that the healing begins "within ourselves". The road is long and hard. We struggle within ourselves on a daily basis, not wanting to let go of certain things for fear of rejection and ridicule. But, in spite of the hardships we endure, we are never alone.

Look to The Creator for guidance and strength, The Creator is always there. Once we begin to follow and understand this road, it gets easier and we begin to love ourselves, take care of our spirits, our minds and our bodies. We can see through the eyes of The Creator, the beauty that surrounds us. You will feel that inner peace as you come into yourself. For the first time in your life, you will feel good about "You", and others.

We have denied our identity for far too long. We lost who we were. Don’t be afraid to take that first step. What you will find eventually is that you understand that under all of the garbage and masks we’ve worn, lies a beautiful, warm caring person who has a lot to offer others. You will feel re-born when you finally let your true self surface. We are the caretakers of our spirits. Don’t deny your inner beauty and your gifts for the sake of others.

Let only good spirits live in You.
ENTRENCHED SOCIAL CATASTROPHE

Ms. Cree

Native people lead the kkkountry in statistical categories such as unemployment, alcoholism, infant mortality and early death rates from violence and criminally-related activities. According to a study by Trent University, Native people in the criminal justice "cystem" are more likely to be "gated" under The Dangerous Offenders Act, Bills C-67 and C-68, and therefore are deemed the most dangerous and most violent offenders in Canada. This is also true for Native women.

Native women, however, face quadruple standards of discrimination when entering the prison cystem: 1) because we are women; 2) we are Native; 3) we are poor; and 4) we do not usually possess an education necessarily equivalent to the status quo.

PROFILE: Ms. Cree is eighteen years old, a single parent with two children. She lived in the city of __ where the offence took place. She was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to four years. Her parents are deceased. She has two sisters and two brothers. Ms. Cree was a housewife whose sole income was social assistance.

Ms. Cree entered the institution with a grade four level of education. She quit school due to problems in her foster home. Ms. Cree has not been involved in an education upgrading program. She has been offered a job cleaning yet has refused this placement. She also feels the school supervisor does not treat her or other Native students properly. As a result she will not work anywhere in the institution.

Ms. Cree was first arrested at the age of sixteen for uttering and forging documents. She was put on one year's probation which she completed successfully. The subject displays no responsibility for her criminal involvement. The subject clearly has a drug and alcohol problem. Her institutional participation is limited to Native Sisterhood. The writer strongly suggests that Ms. Cree remain a maximum security inmate. The writer is not in support of community release at this time. Day parole denied. Full parole denied. Escorted temporary absence denied for one year. Ms. Cree was involved with a would-be serious incident with a number of her friends on May 1, 198__ when security staff were proceeding to dispel an incident in another part of the building. As a result of Ms. Cree not being able to remain charge-free for any length of time, her cavalier attitude, her activities and friendships with many known drug dealers in the institution, it is the writer's opinion that Ms. Cree meets the #2 and #3 criteria under Bill C67-68.

Ms. Cree is a danger to society, to herself and the staff members of the institution. Ms. Cree is being referred under Bill C-67-68. Ms. Cree's sentence expires January, 199__ Next case management review scheduled December, 198__

(Reprinted courtesy of Tightwire Winter, 1988, Vol.22, No.4, pp.26-29)
This is a fictional profile, but it closely resembles a perceived reality on the part of the bureaucracy who assess the Native woman as she enters prison. Those who do so come from an opposite life-experience. The average case management person is Caucasian, married, has one or two children, may have a university degree, is from a middle class background with no comparable experiences to those of a Native woman.

Obviously there are going to be some very profound difficulties that the Native woman will have in making adjustments within the institution and in serving out her sentence. Almost every Sister I have talked to has told me they were raised in foster homes, sent to juvenile detention centres, were victims of sexual abuse, were victims of rape. And, finally entering prison for Women, we have all become victims of bureaucracy because we do not have the right colour of skin, the right kind of education, the right kind of social skills and the right kind of principles to get out of here.

Most often criminal defense lawyers in conjunction with crown prosecutors and judges agree that a guilty plea with a lengthy sentence will correct past lifestyles, our way of thinking, and make us into law-abiding "citizens". It is an absurd, phucking joke to think that the criminal just-us system with their residential care, treatment, programming, counselling and mental health programs are specifically designed programs to meet the needs of Native women when we have never had an equal footing in the case management strategic planning sessions that take place. The bureaucracy and paper pushing outweighs the importance of listening to what the Native woman says she needs.

Usually the woman in the cage is too busy surviving the new rules, new regulations of daily life in La-La land to even consider what the future holds after she is finished her sentence.

When we come to prison, we need to adjust to greater and greater violence in our lives. We adjust to increasingly deadly conditions, and come to accept them as "natural". We adjust to having freedoms stolen away from us, to having fewer and fewer choices, less and less voice in the decisions that affect our lives. We come to believe that making $4.20 a day and the things we can buy with it are the most important life goals. We have adjusted to deafening silence because it is now mandatory to wear headphones. We have adjusted to the deafening noises and screams coming from segregation when our Sister has just been stripped of her clothes and maced in the face. We have adjusted to the deadening entertainment of bingo games that give out prized bags of taco chips and we hear glees of happiness at this score because some pathetic individual hasn't tasted taco chips since 1979. We have adjusted to the lack of conversation because some days there is absolutely nothing of significance or meaning to a few cheap words. We have adjusted to dreaming of our futures. We have adjusted to divorcing ourselves from relationships with our husbands. We keep adapting to new and ever more dangerous conditions and ideas in the name-sake of survival.
We forget how life once was, how blue the sky is, how good food tasted. We forget because the changes are gradual and unannounced. No one can forewarn us of what lays ahead. If we could imagine ourselves taking pleasure in a slave job like cleaning floors over and over again, day after day, year after year, and see ourselves as fanatical psycho's when our freshly waxed floor gets a scratch on it and ruins our entire day, we would recoil with horror and shame because our minds and values become as twisted and irrational that impose these conditions upon our lives. We become so phucking numb from the incredible b/sh we are exposed to: trying to see a case management officer to get a call to our children is a major event. It is no wonder that so many of us cut our throats, lacerate our bodies, hang ourselves. It is no wonder that we need to identify our pain onto our physical bodies because our whole lives have been filled with incredible pain and traumatizing experiences - psychic pain, physical pain, spiritual pain.

When you ask a Native woman why she was placed in a foster home she'll likely tell you it was because Children's "Aid" arrested her because her parents didn't send her to school regularly. When you ask a Native woman where she was sexually abused, she'll likely respond it took place in the foster homes. When you ask a Native woman why she finally killed somebody she'll tell you she was a battered wife and she lost control of her sense when she was taking another beating. She didn't mean to kill her husband, her lover, her friend, she was just so spun out after each licking she lived through - she just was so spun out.

I am your typical Native woman and one who has survived the criminal Just-Us Cystem. When I think about the time in prisons, I often wonder how I maintained my sanity. I never conformed in my heart or in my mind but my body danced. I learned how to cope with lies. I believe justice does not exist for Native people. The battle of will is to see through the wall, to see through the screws and their power plays - their bureaucratic games of power and pleasure.

I learned there is a certain degree of hypocrisy in the groups that represent women in prison. The money and efforts that go into "services" is a mere band-aid effort in conspiracy with the criminal just-us cystem. The money and efforts would be better directed at commuting the families of the incarcerated women to the prisons. The time that is spent on conducting study upon study is wasted time because statistics stay the same, the pain stays the same, the faces of the women change but the stories are identical. I entered Prison for Women as a young, poorly educated, Native woman. I will soon be released with similar characteristics but you can add another deficiency. After seven years I am now an ANGRY, young, poor uneducated, Native woman!!!!

Signed in the blood of My Sisters
ALL OVER THE WORLD WOMEN LIVE AND DIE IN PRISONS

For all women in crisis inside and outside the walls and especially and particularly to those who chose death over the hell that is "life" in prison, for the unresolved grief surrounding those who have died in prison, for their young lives taken by despair, for their deaths and those of others given no compensation or apology by any government, we can offer only their own words.

The prose and articles by Sandy (Sam) Sayer, Marie (Custard) Custer, Marlene (Shaggy) Moore and Pat (Patty) Bear stand together as a powerful Requiem.
Oh, Great Spirit,
whose voice I hear in the wind,
whose breath gives life to the world,
    Hear Me!
I come to you as one of your many children,
though I am small, and weak,
I need your strength and wisdom.

May I walk a path of joy and beauty,
May my eyes behold the reddened purple sunset,
May my hands respect the things that you have made.

My ears sharp to hear your voice.
Make me wise that I may learn
the things you have taught
your children before me.
The lesson's you have
hidden under every leaf and rock.
Make me strong, not to be
superior to my brothers
and sisters,
but to be able to fight my greatest enemy,
My-Self!

Make me ever ready to come to
you with straight eyes,
so that when life fades,
like the fading sunset,
My spirit will come to you
without shame.

Marie hung herself in the basement of the family visiting unit on February 27, 1990. Following another denial by the province of Manitoba to do her time in her home province, her father used his savings to fly to Kingston to see her. All Marie wanted was to be incarcerated in her home province so her family could visit her. Her dad took Marie home for burial.

(Reprinted courtesy of Tightwire Summer1989)
BROTHERS AND SISTERS
Sandy Sayer

Brothers, I open up my heart and tears to you
Remorse and bitterness fill my soul, I hurt for all the others that hold a lot of animosity inside of them
The only outlet we have is our grandfathers and each other
Here we sit, from one side of the country to the other
Entertaining ourselves day in and out wearing facades that release themselves in violence, self torture and fears.

And the "Powers to be" classify us only as a # and a file
No feelings, no thoughts, no nothing. They see us only as destructable robots, that are dangerous and heartless; our

Spirits will always remain free and for no immoral reason shall we lower ourselves to their satisfaction of breaking us by locking us up and taking our responsibilities and decisions from us. In very soul there is strength so strong, that nothing or not one ruthless people can take from us but ourselves...even then

Have pity for our people, that the system has taken from us our brothers and sisters may now be free but great spirit let us open our eyes to their pain they felt and let us all devote our anger, sorrow and pain in a positive way where we can set an example for our younger brothers and sisters that may face the same battles in the future...

(Reprinted courtesy of Tightwire Summer1989)
I am taking this opportunity to voice out my opinions. Witnessing issues in a perspective which consists solely of emotional and personal knowledge spoken from all of my heart.

First of all I do not condemn or discriminate against any specific individual, groups or Task forces for that matter. This is my opinion all in one and one in all. What you are about to read is one Native woman taking the time to share what has been sealed up and silenced ... now is the time to open that up.

While attempting to write on "The Task Force on Aboriginal Peoples in Federal Corrections," my mind was pacing, wondering on the possibility of doing something I can't make myself believe in. Coming to the conclusion of recognizing that I am not out to condemn certain peoples or parties or Task Forces. This is only one of many speaking as an individual. I believe deeply that I will speak when given the chance on any Native issue.

MY MIND IS INDIAN
MY HEART IS INDIAN
MY LIFE IS INDIAN

I wear such a facade that hides the animosity and hurt I feel until I see a time fit to introduce it to others seeing on the same level as I.

All this deals with us presently and more importantly, our future generations. Any opportunity that opens and invites ways for our people to better our lives inside and outside of prison. My heart belongs to my people.

All I ask is the truth be spoken, written and heard. No more rearranging the puzzle so it looks good in their eyes, for their files. Stop and remember all of us women that are striving for survival, for our lives and for our futures. We're left with high hopes and fewer dreams. It is my concern that there is a thirst for understanding, good hearted and open minded people are needed in choosing the right allies acceptable to deal with issues and reports dealing our cards and bring reports, more Task Forces that will show us another solution or, another "answer"?

To some people their job is work to be done. Once the job is finished they put us in a neat brown file and pass it on to the next one down the line. A better name for their whole concept is masking tape ... white man style.

It is our lives and our peoples' future at stake here. Decisions made by the "so-called-powers-that-be" that don't have the least bit of understanding of how we live and feel. Do they realize that they hold our future in their hands? They are deciding our futures but fail to acknowledge that it is our lives and bodies in here ... not theirs!!

(Reprinted courtesy of Tightwire Fall1989)
They may not see it now but in 10 years from now when another Task Force is on the prowl and they go through the statistics, analyzing the changes made (if any) and how they've worked, will they feel satisfied? A better question: Are we satisfied? How do we feel?

I get restless and begin to feel melancholy inside because as I believed and still do that there is always hope. Even through all the interviews, being analyzed and watched like animals...of course only willing to help my people...they supposedly know our needs better than ourselves. I'm still hoping that maybe something will be successful and will work for our people. I feel raped of what I cherished and cheated for all I gave and never received, not in a materialistic sense but, a moral one.

I don't regret all I've seen and what is trying to be done for our Sisters inside. Very little is all I ask and the bottom line to all this talk is ...

ACTION TALKS - BULLSHIT WALKS
A Skeptical but
Sincere sister...

July 22, 1989

Sandy hanged herself from her cell bars on "B" range on October 12, 1989. Among her family and friends who mourn her, are Sandy's two young sons.
ABATTOIR

Gayle K. Horii

Naivete uncloaked
defiling the sanctity
of traditional woman
I stand naked
alone
cold eyes stare.

Horror lives in
eyes
that plead
through black bars.
Tormented sister
I cannot forget you.

Choking terror
madness lurks
in the abattoir
asylum after dispossession
not a cure
festerling sewer
contaminates all.
Notes: Suicides at P4W
Gayle K. Horii

Typed copy of letter received by the Prisoners' Committee May 10, 1988 from Marlene Moore (Shaggy) in segregation.

Gayle: the nite I slashed I went to the hospital under. (unconscious) When I come back at 3 AM I put my mattress under the bed [Marlene couldn’t stand the bright light shining in her eyes, so she always put her mattress on the concrete floor and slept under the wooden slab bed] & my cell was cleaned out, but they left the thing I slashed with inside my cell. What are they trying to tell me. Keep doing it.

Typed copy of note "fished" (passed through the bars with a coat hanger) to me during a 10 day lockdown at Prison for Women. Pat Bear was in the cell next to me and kept saying she had to slash. She couldn’t take it.

Dear Gayle: Hi! So houz it goin? fine I hope. People push & push till some one gets hurt like me Gayle I can only take so much than after all that it’s beyond my control I’m not responsible for my actions that’s what it says in my record And people think I use that for my actions I don’t know I’ll wait for a few days than if they don’t hear anything about being out after 3 days after this note I’m goin to seg I don’t know anymore Gayle Sincerley Pat

Pat slashed and security took her to segregation.

The topic of slashing and suicide at Prison for Women was studied and a report filed to the Correctional Services of Canada in January, 1990 from a preliminary study done in February, 1989. Three more women killed themselves after this report was released. The most evident misreading about prisons by those outside of the prison "cystem" is the naive belief that security forces will give up control if a rational explanation is provided for doing so. In most prisons those promoting the necessity for tight security directly destroy lives, minds and senses. Any excuse for more security is easily "approved". In the words of one high ranking woman, "This is my fucking prison and I’ll run it anyway I want."

Though the author, Jan Heney (1990), displays compassion and insight into the causes of suicide at Prison for Women, her inclusion of the opinions of the very guards who had contributed to the despair of these dead women serves to further degrade the truth about the suffering of incarcerated women.
FEAR AND SHAME

Typed copy of letter to friend at Prison for Women by Marlene Moore, dated ten days before her suicide there on December 3, 1988.

Names * have been purposefully deleted to protect the surviving women incarcerated at Prison for Women. Some details of Shaggie’s illness (xxx) have been deleted to protect her privacy and dignity.

Dearest *

Hi Sweetie. Thanx for comin to the door. I reelly miss & love you - I aint doing so good *. I dont no - xxx - I dont feel good at all.

Im sorry *. I juss screwing up i feel like shit - But i am trying now.

I got 40 days - sent over to reginal for approval - But i also got a lawyer & a serious medical problem - they cant except it. Tell ** i said thanx for getting me the lawyer - he is doing wonders - Believe me. Also tell her i send my love - As well as *,**,***,**,**, my little Putt Putt - And *, * - i juss miss you guys so much. *,*,*,*, everyone that counts! * they had the hoses out - ready to handcuff me - shackel me - juss becuze i wouldnt move from one cell to another. 1230 at nite. Kish - Nataleetso, Winston - and about 10 other gaurs. juss becuze i slashed - well this is getteing me down xxx.

So after the cops got prepared to hose me down & there all in space suits & crash helmets i said ill walk - well when i got over here the cops
threatend to get the men over from K.P. to handcuff me to the bars. fuck. ive pulled i juss did today since i seen my lawyer.

They want me back in the hospital - shit they wanted that a long time ago. But i said fuck it - i got seg time - ill do it.

My other 40 days is up we been in here since the beginning of October. Im finished my time tomorrow the 15 & Reply hasnt come back reginal - But lawyer & medical is involved.

They cant do it. Anyway i got another charge of throwing blood at Nataleetso - got my lawyer on it.

fuck - check this out - * got charged becuz she warned me - they told her not to say nothing - she said fuck you copper & she yelled - Shaggie there coming - she said Nataleetso got the fire hose. Nataleetso terned around & said - your on charge for inciten Moore what da fuck is that. its like inciten a riot. All becuz she fucken warned me. Pigs im really pist off about that.

the Assholes. Leest she warned me. I was happy about that.

Shes getten her lawyer on it ya no. Hope she jams it rite up the coppers ass.

Anyway i was in big trouble. Im fucken sick * im gonna try to go to the range - But I dont think theyll let me cuz xxx. i dont no what im doing.

im reelly fucked up over whats been happenen in here.

All i can say is try. Dont be mad at me *. Tell * & Putt Putt the same - im juss reelly fucked up over this xxx - ask * She saw what she took out of my cell.

im sorry you guys i dont mean to xxx - i cant stop xxx
im reelly embarrest. ashamed. hurt. i began to hate myself. ya no.
cuz i think whod want a person like me around you no what i mean. i isolate myself cuz of this.

ill try * & * i will. im juss so mad at myself cus i cant stop.

Anyway you guys take Special Care - ill put in for a visit that bullshit - Bad influeance.

Fuck i didnt need anyone to help me fuck up. when they wanted to cuff me to the bars. its Bullshit the fucken goofs - ill seen them & remind them that it was my own doing & noone else was here.

Look sweetie you take Special Care of yourself i love & miss you guys alot & watch over Putt Putt for me - i no she had some bad news & im reelly concerned about her. ill rite soon again. * said hello & is nuts as ever - no - juss sometimes.

Shes ok - for a wong out Person. Ast to pass a message - first tell * i said a big hello & hope shes doing ok. Also * asted to tell her she said hello & she loves & misses her & that she hopes shes doing ok. Let her no that * is trying. Thanx *.. i gonna sign off cuz i feel rotten - But remember i love & miss you.
i love all you guys.

Stay Strong
im really sorry for keep screwing up. Some of my diagnosis are coming through & im really scared *. dont let alot of people no ok. i even hung myself - thats why i couldnt look at * the last time i saw her i got a rope burn really bad around my neck.

i aint happy - But im gonna try. Make sure * is ok. for me. She'll always be apart of me. i love her for allways. let her no ok.

Be cool K *

With Much Love & Respect
Always Your Buddy (Marlene Moore)
Shaggie XOXOXOXO

Shaggie never signed with her name, Marlene Moore, so when she printed it in brackets (the rest of the letter was written), we knew that this letter was a goodbye. Though all of us tried desperately to prevent Shaggie's tragic death, we were all powerless and prevented from intervening.

When I checked out of segregation I promised Shaggie I would visit her every day, if she would go to the hospital (because a woman she loved deeply had killed herself in the P4W hospital eight years before, Shaggy hated the hospital). The next day she agreed on the condition that she could have visitors every day. When I asked permission to visit her, the Deputy Warden, Julia Hobson, said "I'll think about it". Three days later, Shaggie killed herself. This material and another 12 typewritten pages were sworn to by me and notarized by a lawyer before I left Prison for Women, hoping that the presentation of it at Shaggie's inquest would place part of the blame where it was deserved. It was not admissible.
NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE
Heather Evans

Perhaps...
sitting partially
un-read on a shelf
in my cage
a cage of many
colors where
only black
and white exists
no
brown
no
yellow
no grey
walk by open
graves
voices
whispering
screaming
violent rage
brought on by
the system for the system
statistical bullshit
passed down from generation to generation
deaf ear to deaf ear...
spiritual waste raising mortar stone and
steel from our mother
giving back only death insanities
non-human non-existence
mothers and daughters all races all colors
only black and white exist no browns
no yellows no grey white society sez you are
poor illiterate but white so we'll help you
say white judges with black robes no grey exist
abused child already caged by white society
cannot trust or love or live can't even die
white society won't let me die with some dignity
reach down to let me feel to touch to taste
five winters innocence trust love shattered
fucked up white society killing helpless
children letting them live long enough to kill them
again again is this what you call help white society
you lock them away watch them die each day in the
graves you built for them white society...
...built on ignorance and hate
non-violent resistance?

Not fucken likely.
ADDITIONAL REFERENCES


Faith, Karlene. 1991. *The Female Offender*. Burnaby: Simon Fraser University Distance Education Program.


Response

This Women’s Perspective on Justice.
Restorative? Retributive? How about Redistributive?

Kim Pate

I want to start by situating myself for you. I am the proud mother of a 3 1/2 year old budding pro-feminist prison abolitionist. Michael teaches me much about fairness, personal integrity and justice. Not a sexist, racist, non-respectful or jail-oriented utterance or image seems to escape his ears, eyes or fails to elicit comment. He constantly reinforces my hope for our future.

My paid work is with an organization known as CAEFS. The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies is a national voluntary women’s organization whose focus is women who come into conflict with the law. The twenty-one autonomous members of our association provide a variety of services and programs with and for people, particularly women, who have been or are identified as at risk of being in conflict with the law.

Some of us know each other from one of my former lives, when I worked with the John Howard Society. After more than a decade now of working with youth, men, and now women, my perspective on justice has certainly evolved. Increasingly I have concerns about some of the tinkering and tampering that has been attempted - indeed, parts of which I have been very much involved with - in the name of justice.

I am writing this, as a consequence of having been asked to speak about feminism and restorative justice. As I thought about how I would frame my comments, I first struggled with what each of those words means. What is feminism? What is restorative? What is justice? Some likely regard the concepts as consistent, whilst others might regard them as mutually exclusive.

How we interpret these notions, how effective we see the current criminal and social justice mechanisms as being, how we approach the work we do, both waged and unwaged, depends upon the lens through which we view the world. That lens is shaped by our life experience and learning. One of the single most significant factors in the framing of such learning has to do with where we are situated vis-a-vis the dominant values, morays and understandings of our society.

To my mind, it is vitally important that we recognize that involvement in the criminal justice system is more indicative of the extent to which one is marginalized than it is of one’s criminality. This is no accident. Let us recall for and by whom our laws have been (and I would argue continue to be) developed and enforced. It should come as no surprise that laws developed by white, relatively well-off men, serve to preserve the dominance of that sector of our communities.
We must be careful not to merely repackage and recreate the inequities of our current systems. Even the use of such terms as "restorative" may need to be re-examined through others’ lenses. Restore to what, pre-existing inequities? Hopefully not. Similarly, when we speak about justice, what do we mean? Tritely, many will proclaim that they want "justice for all"! When discussions turn to redistribution of privilege and power, too often that stance begins to waiver and reframe itself into one best described as "my justice for all".

By continuing to accept notions such as 'victims' and 'offenders', as well as by continuing to focus on "the crime", whether we use a new term such as "harm done" or any other for that matter, we continue to reinforce the status quo. We still are tending to take what are predominantly white, male and middle class mores and values, and imposing them upon other members of our community.

Similarly, when we start to utilize such phrases as "protection of the public", we feed in to the double speak which condones and encourages the legal violence that characterizes our punitive criminal justice system. Many well intentioned organizations have fed into this and other seemingly victim-oriented approaches and have been woefully co-opted into what is fundamentally a punitive political "law and order" agenda, rather than focusing upon not creating more 'victims'. I speak now most particularly of the victim-oriented assistance bureaucracies that have been built primarily on the pain of the most marginalized, and mostly these are our women and children.

The current criminal justice system and most alternatives are built upon male-based norms and rules which ignore women's realities. Instead, they tend to systemically reinforce women's dependence on and subjugation by men. By and large, men encourage and support the development of detached, autonomous and individualized conceptions of justice. This has led to a perception of rights and morality as geared to arriving at rational, objectively fair or just resolutions of moral dilemmas. Women on the other hand, as well as many marginalized men witness the rising up and challenging of our First Nations people who tend to view morality and moral problems somewhat differently. It is posited that women tend to start from a more contextual and holistic understanding of moral dilemmas and search more consistently for inclusive and non-violent means of addressing social problems - an ethic of care and support, as opposed to one of judgement and control.

Even as nongovernmental groups, we in the "criminal justice sector" - if I may describe it as that - have not done well in these respects. Rhetoric and tokenism abound, socially responsible approaches to redistributing justice, premised upon inclusive, non-violent and non-discriminatory means are noticeably lacking however. Lip service is paid to what is termed "political correctness". Whatever happened to respect and dignity? I get very frustrated when I hear people - often those men
or women of relative privilege - bemoan the fact that they must be careful about what they say and to whom they say it.

I reject the notion that the problem rests anywhere but within themselves. Comments, actions or images that do not respect and honour the dignity of any person are generally reflective of both the individual as well as systemic biases of their communities.

To characterize them as otherwise or to attempt to attack the person impacted as being too sensitive or someone who misunderstands, problematizes the wrong behaviour and deflects responsibility onto the recipient of the disrespectful action, rather than situating it with the transmitter.

So, how does this relate to feminism and what feminists have been doing about criminal injustice? "Feminist" still seems to be regarded as akin to other "f" words. However, I know that the criminal justice sector has much to learn from, indeed daily benefits as a result of the work of feminism, particularly the work of community-based women in the grassroots independent women’s movement.

How many of you work with or represent community-based criminal or social justice groups? How many of those groups support the abolition of prisons? CAEFS is one of, if not the only, criminal justice oriented group to have taken a clear and comprehensive stance against the continued use of incarceration. It may surprise you to learn that last year many of the national women’s groups with whom we work passed resolutions in support of the use of alternatives to incarceration. These are the same groups who publicly argue the need for "zero violence". The absolute travesty is that while criminal justice groups have not tended to support the efforts of women’s groups, women’s groups have done a great deal to counter the increased use of violent and ineffective interventions.

Unfortunately, too many individual men, as well as groups that support the status quo regardless of their claims-makings, are so busy campaigning for parity with privileged men that they have forgotten and further alienated women. I have yet to hear of men campaigning for parity with women. The irony is that most activities, such as affirmative action programs for women and/or racial minority men and women, have been shown to disproportionately benefit poor, white men.

I mention all of this in order to put in context the increasingly strident demands of women’s groups that men also take responsibility for and own male violence as well as the perpetuation of other forms of patriarchy and oppression. Feminists expect non-violent men to start doing their share to stop violent and/or controlling men. They also expect men to be accountable to women and women’s groups.

For the last 2 1/2 years I have repeatedly faced the seemingly insurmountable roadblocks and inequities of systems, communities and individual men and women for whom it is easier to be silent and witness abuse than to bravely challenge the status quo and risk one’s own safety.
I have come to ever more seriously question the validity of merely removing our current criminal justice system, only to replace it with other models, particularly models that do not address the sorts of systemic biases highlighted earlier. New models with old philosophical roots will not a just society create, nor justice restore.

Now, I issue the challenge to each and every one of you to join our efforts. Let’s examine how we might apply all of this to the notion of community safety. People do indeed feel unsafe, women are especially fearful. Their fear is not unwarranted. All research and experience shows that women and children are most at risk, not out in their communities, but in their homes. The greatest risk of harm is from those closest to them.

What does this mean for those of us who have devoted much time and energy to the promotion of alternatives to what we know is an ineffective and unjust system; for those of us who have looked to "restorative justice" in the hopes of finding a better way to address the harm or crime in our communities? I believe we all have to approach this in two ways: namely, on a personal as well as on a professional, or more analytical level.

For a new form of justice - whether we call it restorative, transformative or some other name - to be able to "make things right" we must first do our own work. Each of us must identify, acknowledge and address our own biases. Men must promote non-violence and model anti-racist and non-sexist behaviour. They must also confront and call to account other men’s sexism and violence. Women must also unfortunately continue to challenge men, whilst simultaneously supporting and affirming the rights of women and children not to be abused. White people must challenge racism and other forms of discrimination every time they witness it. The list goes on. These are the first and very personal steps that we must take to redistribute existing bases of power and control.

In addition to challenging our own values and standards of behaviour, we must ensure that any new model of justice does not merely recreate or reinforce some of the most ingrained and systemic biases of the existing system. If we merely impose our values and expectations on others, we run the risk of imposing, albeit unintentionally or out of ignorance, further punitive approaches.

Many of us have attempted to implement restorative justice approaches in our communities, such prototypes as victim-offender mediation, circle sentencing or community justice panels. However, these are not always seen by the participants as more restorative and less punitive than standard court-type procedures. This is particularly true if the participants differ in gender, race, class or ethnicity from those who run or administer the programs.

This does not mean we should abandon the approaches, but nor should we stubbornly cling to our own notions of what should be done. Some
of the most effective approaches are those that are designed with, by and for the participants. It is far harder to perpetuate biases, intentionally or unintentionally, if you strive to include all stakeholders and actually redistribute the power and the control by ensuring that all who may be impacted, most particularly those with the least power, are full and equal participants in the process.

First we must achieve justice, then when things disrupt it, we may better be able to restore it. So, my challenge to myself as well as to you is that we continue to move forward, questioning and testing our own values and beliefs in addition to those around us. In order to truly develop a more just and peaceful community, we must open our minds and extend our experiences to include the breadth and richness of the diversity around us. Let us all work toward more creative solutions.

July, 1994

Kim Pate applies her degree in law and her innate humanity throughout her work in organizations such as CAEFS. She has singularly accomplished what no other woman I know of, who works in and among bureaucracies, has done - she speaks and writes openly about the causes of violence and champions the sovereignty of each individual inherent in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in an unwaveringly courageous and eloquent manner.

-Gayle K. Horii
In February, 1987 at the beginning of my life sentence, I met Claire Culhane in the Prisoners' Committee files at Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario. Until then, I was lost in the nightmare of what is called prison, still in the state of grievous shock - the condition of all first time prisoners. Reading her words to past members of the Committee offered me the first relief from the despair at the banishment from my life and family ten months previously in Vancouver, B.C. I can unequivocally state that without Claire, I would not be living today. She gave me the first understanding of what I needed to do - survive. Claire gave me the courage to want to live with a life sentence.

When I wrote her, despite the hundreds of letters she receives from prisoners alone, Claire replied immediately. If she would be away from home, during her marathon visits to different prison areas visiting and assisting at parole hearings, she would have someone there to reply that she would answer as soon as she returned. This is just one area in which Claire Culhane understands completely the reality of imprisonment - how each person incarcerated waits each day for the single acknowledgement that yes, s/he is still alive, is still part of the living world found only outside the walls. Claire knows that the receipt of a letter serves this primary function.

Claire’s own words speak to her profound humanitarianism:

...I neither know nor care about why anyone is in - all that matters is where their head AND heart is, and how we can work together in common cause....You have to aim high even while holding on to the reality that one can’t expect to find any sanity in any insane situation, jungles being what they are.

And, to the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women in 1990, Claire writes:

...the government will heed our advice about helping women who fall outside the white mainstream, I am writing to challenge you to extend that concern to women incarcerated in Canadian prisons. You will find all the same diversities, and in far greater need of attention than has been acknowledged in any meaningful way, to date.

I will never forget our first face-to-face meeting in the tiny visiting room at Prison for Women in June of 1987. With a smile that shone from her heart, a strong, clear voice and energy that rose with her commitment, this beautiful white-haired woman greeted me with a hug that imbued me with a strength and love that has stayed with me all of these years.

Before I was sentenced to life in prison, I knew nothing about prisons or about criminal law. Claire helped me to educate myself, and it is education which is the soil of survival. Claire is an educator par
excellence. Her scope covers all areas of social justice. In each and every letter, she would enclose a copy of a news clipping, brochure, newsletter or an excerpt from another letter describing some form of social activism. She would send information about civil disobedience and peace activism in struggles around the world, about her activities speaking on panels concerning everything from the poverty of children to capital punishment. Claire Culhane is a woman who clearly unmasks the rhetoric used to disarm real action towards eliminating the cycle of violence in our society. She effectively applies a political-economic perspective to the misuse and waste of tax dollars.

August, 1993: ... money being raised for the monument (to women murdered by men) would be better spent on building and equipping community centres for young people. ... Far more urgent is the need to deflect possible future offenders into positive, constructive projects than to build monuments to their likely victims.

... If the public, the media, the government officials are really serious in their concern about violence running rampant and creating tragic victims, let them look to the breeding grounds. Building community centres for our kids is far more urgent than building more prisons (for which there are always sufficient funds).

Claire does everything humanly possible to not only inform and inspire those of us incarcerated to understand and survive our own circumstances, but to contribute to the understanding and survival of others imprisoned in poverty, cruelty and despair outside of our walls.

Claire has done and continues to do all of this on her small pension. She recycles every piece of paper, copying and writing on any unused space, scratching over used envelopes and taping them closed, turning them inside out to use the reverse side, and carefully applying postage according to the weight of her lengthy parcels of information. How Claire Culhane has also managed to continue visiting prisons all over the country is an amazing feat of logistics and economic acumen. Claire has accomplished all of this while undergoing continual and unfathomable threats to her personal well-being, an ongoing act of extreme heroism.

In January, 1989 Claire was the only person capable of reaching through the barriers to speak directly to the Commissioner of Corrections, Ole Ingstrup. She accomplished this in time to save my life as I fasted in segregation at Prison for Women for my return to B.C. Throughout the next four years of ordeal spent locked up in the prison hospital at Matsqui Penitentiary for Men in Abbotsford, B.C., Claire visited and corresponded with me while she continued in her unabated support of all prisoners in Canada, championing particularly those physically, emotionally, intellectually, culturally or politically unable to defend themselves.

Claire Culhane challenged the authorities who denied my efforts for escorted temporary absence, wrote letters of support for my eventual
parole hearing and continued to encourage me to complete my BA (conferred while on day parole this past June 2nd at Simon Fraser University). My ability to survive imprisonment, to gain day parole and to succeed in my educational pursuits have been directly attributable to the indomitable spirit of Claire Culhane. Without the gift of her in my life, I could not have accomplished any of this.

My personal story is merely one of thousands of survivors who were graced with an angel on earth named Claire Culhane. Claire has never asked for, nor expected, even a simple word of gratitude. Her benevolence is uncharted and endless. Thousands of prisoners in Canada would gratefully provide testimonials to the genuine courage, incorruptibility and unfailing assistance that Claire has provided to them. I am merely one of the thousands honoured to do so.

Every person on this planet benefits because of the humanitarian contributions of Claire Culhane, for her rebuttals to injustices have no boundaries. Claire is a legend of accomplishment and expertise in all arenas of humanitarianism and has earned many times over this country's highest award of honour. Her courage, dignity, intelligence, exhaustive and extensive work for social justice and education, her incorruptibility and her "grace under fire" are unmatched.

Claire Culhane is a heroine of the people in a conscientiously unique time. Claire Culhane has bestowed upon all Canadians, a highly essential and vital role model for future generations. May she be honoured as we are blessed by her presence.

With Respect,
In the gentleness of Sisterhood
Limited funding to shelters and other women’s services, as well as a legal system that does NOT protect women who suffer violence at the hands of their partners, have resulted in too many women having to defend themselves and their children. Join the many voices calling for an en bloc review of the cases of women who have been imprisoned as a result of their involvement in the deaths of abusive partners.

STOP JAILING WOMEN FOR DEFENDING THEMSELVES!

Write and/or Petition: The Honourable Alan Rock
Minister of Justice
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario. K1A 0A6

For Information: Ms. Kim Pate
Executive Director,
Canadian Association of
Elizabeth Fry Societies
600 - 251 Bank Street
Ottawa, Ont. K2P 1X3
Tel: 613 238-2422
Fax: 613 232-7130

Inside:
Melissa Stewart
Prison for Women
P.O. Box 515
Kingston, Ontario
K7L 4W7
CALIFORNIA

DRUGGING OF CALIFORNIA WOMEN PRISONERS

The forceable medicating of California women prisoners with unnecessary mind-altering drugs is being contested by an ad hoc group. The group, consisting of pretrial victims of this illegal practice, point out that the consequences of the drugging have been devastating, from the erratic behaviour produced by the drugs during individual trials to later lengthy withdrawal symptoms. The F.B.I. has commenced an investigation of the group's claims, and one case is currently before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

To provide support/and or for information, write:

JANE DAISY BENTON
W# 28860,
Miller B, 177L
Frontera, CA 91720 U.S.A.

CHOWCHILLA WOMEN FIGHT FOR BETTER HEALTH CARE

Since the beginning of 1994, three women prisoners, two of whom had AIDS, have died at the Central California Women's Facility at Chowchilla. In March, the coalition to support women prisoners at Chowchilla called upon the State Assembly Committee on Public Safety to begin an immediate investigation into both the deaths and the quality of medical care at the prison. The Coalition urges everyone to join the campaign for justice and better medical care.

Letters demanding a legislative investigation should be sent to: Assemblyman John Burton, 455 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94103, U.S.A.

Cards, letters (stamps, too) expressing support for the women inside can be sent to: Joann Walker, #W 17572, C509-19-2L, P.O.Box 1508, Chowchilla, CA 93610 U.S.A.

For more information, contact the Coalition to Support Women Prisoners at Chowchilla: P.O.Box 14844, San Francisco, CA, 94114 U.S.A. 510 530-6214

Norma Stafford

In the first paragraph of the introduction of her book, Karlene Faith defines the unruly women about whom she eloquently writes: The unruly woman is the undisciplined woman. She is a renegade from the disciplinary practices which would mould her as a gendered being. She is a defiant woman who rejects authority which would subjugate her and render her docile. She is the offensive woman who acts in her own interests. She is the unmanageable woman who claims her own body, the whore, the wanton woman, the wild woman out of control. She is the woman who cannot be silenced. She is a rebel. She is trouble.

In Unruly Women, Faith displays the agility of mind that is necessary to apply information from years of experience and profuse research into a readable and definitely an enjoyable text on the history of women, their sins/crimes, and their punishments. From the Old Testament times into the 13th and 14th centuries, up to and into our present lives, Faith lays out all the good, the bad, and the indifference about women and their political, economical, religious, and social battles to survive and to be counted as assets, not liabilities, in society. This book must surely become a textbook for any women’s studies classes. Men who really care about women should read it for a deeper understanding of the women who surround them. The book could be declared a handbook for all women everywhere. Faith’s historical review is remarkably complete, informed throughout by her sensitivity to the plight of women. The book also shines with frank and open anger at the patriarchal traditions whose effects she documents.

Throughout her book, Faith raises many questions of "how" and "why" historically women have borne the brunt of patriarchal religious leaders’ vengeance. Over and over she points out that women’s crimes are sexual (prostitution), economical and political/religious because of the imbalance of money, education and power in a capitalist government. Women’s crimes are normally much less violent than the crimes of men. Women’s crimes are crimes of survival because of their position on the low rung of our economic ladder. Faith’s facts prove that if women have the same educational and economic opportunities as men, then there is little chance that these same women will turn to drugs, prostitution or to forms of anti-social behaviour.

Faith points out that in the earliest days of England, the King was considered to be next to God in his power. He was looked upon as a divine being. Therefore, when he delegated authority, this same authority reached from God to the King, to the church and down to the husbands of all women no matter what might be the social position of the husband. The husband was the absolute ruler of his home. Any wife
who nagged her husband, who disobeyed him, who argued with him was punished by this same husband. It was the duty of the husband to flog his wife and children to keep them subdued and obedient to him. Disobedience to the husband was a direct affront to the King because of the line of authority delegated by this same King. Under this system punishment by the husband was usually considered to be sufficient. However, if the husband could not control his wife and if his disobedient wife was too rebellious then she would spend time in the public stocks where her head, hands and feet were locked through openings in a wooden frame. In this helpless, humiliating position, she endured all manner of taunting from the local citizens, plus she was pelted with raw, rotten vegetables. During this same period of time, a wife could gain equal rights under the law by murdering her husband. Then she would be hanged for her crime.

The author takes the reader back and forth through different geographical settings and different periods of time. However, this is not confusing due to the ability of the author to relate her facts, give her analysis of those same facts and then bring all of her information together in a well organized manner. For me, the text of this book is a mural painted not with a brush -instead, the picture is a definite word-picture painted by the intellect of the caring, curious, sensitive mind of Karlene Faith.

Faith covers in detail a broad spectrum of facts regarding women’s history in crime, the types of crime, the facts and myths regarding women’s psyches and their bodies. Faith also describes the punishments for these crimes from the days of the Old Testament to the 13th and 14th centuries and into our modern day penal institutions. She has gathered a bountiful supply of evidence that shows it is the imbalance of money and political power that causes women to commit crimes of survival. Crimes committed by women have a lower rate of violence than the crimes committed by their male counterparts. Crimes by women are committed by those who are from the less fortunate economic classes. These crimes consist mostly of prostitution, fraud, bad cheques, stolen credit cards and buying and selling drugs. The lack of education, job skills and the opportunity for university level education defeat many of these women before they have the chance to get started in life. Later in this review I will discuss a project that Faith started in the United States in 1972 at the California Institution for Women in Frontera, California. This project had such an impact on the rate of recidivism among the women prisoners there that it was astounding.

When a social structure teaches men to be authoritative and teaches women to be submissive and docile with the woman being denied the right to earn a meaningful living, women are placed again in the position of being dependent upon men and/or the state welfare system. Again, woman becomes the victim.
The working-class woman comes through in this book as a strong, defiant rebel, the vanguard of working class revolution. Historically, women have not only worked side by side with their male counterparts, but have gone to battle in great armies of defiance against the ruling classes and the land-owners. Battles of women have been, and still are, battles for the simple right to live.

In the historical punishment of the woman criminal the punishment has extended from "mere" flogging and public humiliation, to the supreme sacrifice of being hanged for stealing or being burned at the stake for not reporting a pregnancy. Eventually houses of detention were established, which came to be known as jails and prisons. Here the woman criminal was locked away from society.

Karlene Faith has spent 25 years researching penal systems throughout California and her own country of Canada. Her research has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that prisons and penal systems have always failed in their goal to change a woman’s criminal behaviour. When a woman is released from prison she has gained no new knowledge, no trade skills and no higher education that would deliver her from her previous life-style. Therefore, she returns to the same environment, the same social and economic pressures that caused her to become criminal in the first place. Thus, the revolving door scenario develops. This means that a woman will be out of prison, on parole for a short period of time before she does something that will return her to prison. Sometimes these acts which return her to prison are deliberately criminal in order to provide her with the only safety and security that she has known - that inside the prison system.

Poor women are still the most likely to prostitute themselves. Aspects of prostitution are still illegal. Even today the law of the land refuses to allow women to have control over their own bodies. Religious leaders of Christianity continue to wield power in the political arena having their beliefs and moral issues about the control of the body of woman, about the sexual control of woman, made into law. Afro-Americans, Native Americans and Asians make up the majority of our prison population even though these same people are a minority in our society. The state builds more prisons to house "unruly women" to "protect society". Educational opportunities for the poor are a lopsided facade in a social structure where money and profit take precedence over human beings. We are still called witches with a depth of negative connotation to the word. Today’s witches are developing an alternative lifestyle of worship in which they are in control, attaching themselves to their natural universe and earth for a better identity.

Faith is a citizen of Canada and most of her writing focuses on her native country. However this should not deter the reader who lives in the U.S.A. from studying this book. Upon colonizing North America the British instituted their patriarchal concepts of God, King, Church and State. Along with these they brought what seems to be their innate fear
and hatred of women. All of these beliefs were implemented and enforced into law.

In 1972, Karlene Faith made a contribution to the women incarcerated at the California Institution for Women (state prison) in Frontera, California (C.I.W.). This was the first time that state’s penal system had ever allowed or provided university level classes and education for women prisoners. Women were still being taught to sew, clean and serve others. Faith approached the powers-that-be at the prison and obtained permission from them to introduce university-level education to the women at C.I.W. Under her direction, a large group of volunteers from the University of California at Santa Cruz entered the prison and began teaching. The response at C.I.W. was overwhelming. Even though racial tensions were high, these classes allowed women of every ethnic background to come together to learn, not only from their instructors, but also from and about each other, as women. This unity frightened the powers of the prison. The teachers who worked so hard, who gave so much, who received no pay, who brought in tons of books to feed starving minds and deprived and aching hearts were almost constantly harassed by prison officials. The teachers fought for the prisoners from outside the bars while the women prisoners organized and fought from within. A powerful force of resistance was built. The program continued to grow, even though at one point Faith was banned from the prison.

At the time that Faith organized and began the Santa Cruz Women’s Prison Project, the rate of recidivism was 70%! Faith and her volunteer staff did follow-up studies on 100 of the women who completed her program. Most of the women continued their education once they were released from prison and then established themselves in good jobs and new-found professions. This follow-up study showed a remarkable impact upon the women who completed the classes. Recidivism for this group dropped from 70% to 5%! Yet, eventually, all college courses and all university classes were forced out of the prison. Hungry minds were left to starve in order to feed the ego of the prison power group. Yet, even with all of the power at their command, they could not erase the knowledge, the self-esteem and the woman spirit which had been given in love and honour to those who received it. I feel that I speak with a voice of authority on the subject of C.I.W., for not only did I spend four and one half years of my life there as a prisoner for writing bad cheques, I was there when Karlene Faith introduced those first classes. I was one of the women who never returned to prison because of those classes. I attribute my success since then to those people - Karlene Faith and the teachers who came in 1972.
Illustrations

I offer these sculptures, paintings and graphics created while in prison as political commentary and illustration of the reality of imprisoned women.

-Gayle K. Horii

"Adaption of CAEFS 1978 Logo". The French and the English in Canada share the demands for imprisonment as punishment and though First Nations’ peoples do not, they are imprisoned at a vastly higher rate than their colonizers. The scales of justice tilt towards the bars while the feather reaches out to end injustice. Page 4.

"The Agony & The Ecstasy". Of all women, those in prison are the most vulnerable and helpless. They struggle for survival, for dignity against the exposure and the barbarities imposed upon them in the name of "security". Page 8.

"Woman’s Heart". Different from Atlas, who holds and controls the world, displaying his power, the woman attempts to move the world with her heart. Different from Sisyphus, who is condemned to push the boulder in his unrelentless quest to get to the top, women push forward, still on their knees. Her arms signify the juxtaposition of the powerlessness that many women feel with the innate refusal of women to use physical force as a method to gain power. Page 22.

"East to West". All over the world, women suffer in prison. Page 24.

"Nickolaus and Baby Nick". This painting was done for a courageous and beautiful woman I was fortunate to know while at Prison for Women. It signifies the undying love and strength which women cling to in prison in order to survive the separation from their children. Page 27.

"Dark Glasses". Mask the eyes of women signifying the enforced restriction against any emotional display. This fascist control reduces the woman to a status less than a child’s. Like an unborn, she returns to her own womb in fetal withdrawal. Page 30.

"Women in Time". The ancient hour-glass has been replace by digitalized time-keepers, but women are still imprisoned. In Canada, immobilized with extremes of control each hour composed of grains of pain filling the woman with disgust and contempt for her keepers. The more "secure" the conditions, the greater the harm. Page 43.

"Spirit-Keeper". The eagle is representative of the spirit of the First Nations’ people. Their art is missing from this edition signifying the missing felt for their lives and for those sisters now held in the most barbaric manner ever imposed on women since 1835. Held in Kingston’s Maximum Security Prison for Men. We love you, Murdock, Joey, B.A. Staying alive is the best revenge. Page 49.

"Embrace". The missing of family. Page 50.

"Sisterhood". The figures blend together signifying the bond which is never broken as we struggle for identity and the rights to liberty. The figures epitomize the vulnerability of women, their attempts to comfort one another and protect one another, while often unknowingly hindering the other from standing independently. Page 53.

"Fear & Shame". Degradation, deprivation, death! Page 55.

"Untitled". I know they are dying; I know who is killing them; I know why. Page 58.
ABOUT THE COVER

The art work on the cover and throughout this issue is by Gayle Horii. This art was created while Gayle was incarcerated at Kingston Prison for Women and at Matsqui Penitentiary. The sculpture on the cover is titled "En Nom de Dieu". The artist explains:

EN NOM DE DIEU

The rationale used for torturing and burning women at the stake for witchcraft is identical to the patriarchal need for controlling all women. Each black flame signifies the many assaults directed towards the sexuality of women and particularly, towards women in prison. Her body is cut signifying the pain she has already endured and the injuries she inflicts upon herself when her despair and rage turns inward. The stake is invisible as are the ties that bind her, which signifies the covert manner used to impose added punishments upon women. She asks: Why? Still?
Cover: Gayle K. Horii
“En Nom de Dieu”, 1989

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