Journal of Prisoners on Prisons
On Being A Nigger
Charles Huckelbury

In the folds of this European civilization I was born and shall die, imprisoned, conditioned, depressed, exalted, and inspired. Integrally a part of it and yet, much more significant, one of its rejected parts.

W.E.B. DuBois in Dusk of Dawn

Notwithstanding recent attempts to depict race as an artificial construct of governing bodies, I consider myself white. Fifty years ago, I was born into an upper middle-class family that traces its roots to northern European immigrants who entered this country not long after the Mayflower landed at Plymouth. I did not question in my formative years and do not question now the gifts endowed by nature and the abilities honed by nurture that have enabled those of European descent effectively to decide, for better or worse, the fate of the planet on which we live. I came of age in the sixties and enjoyed the privileges and perks (usually assumed as my right) that included an education at excellent universities and exposure to art and culture that extolled European civilization above all others. Before the ravages of five decades took their toll, my hair was light brown leaning to red. My eyes are blue, and my skin freckles in the sun, indicating that my particular phenotype is far more comfortable in colder climates where melanin is not required to shield the body from intense ultraviolet radiation. And yet, in society's eyes, I am a nigger.

Imagine if you will, the shock of this discovery, flying in the face of everything I had come to believe and defying the logical extension of what I saw as a European progression that had lasted relatively uninterrupted for over two millennia. During the turbulent sixties, I had managed to remain aloof, refusing to acknowledge the claims of racial and ethnic minorities of being victimized by society in general. I believed that any man or woman could do whatever his or her talents dictated. Meritocracy and the Jeffersonian ideal of an intellectual aristocracy appealed to me; ability and opportunity were the twin pillars on which my philosophy rested. If life was a metaphorical foot race, then everyone certainly deserved an equal place on the starting line, but never did I presume that everyone would or should finish in the same position.

Of course, my peers were all white, and although I recognized certain disparities in abilities, I never questioned the freedom for all of
us to expand to our personal limits. I projected this same assumption onto people of colour, refusing to listen to their cries against a racist society that denied them even the most fundamental opportunities for self-improvement. I believed that they simply lacked substance or else preferred subsistence living as social parasites. I pointed to obvious success stories like Ralph Bunche and Thurgood Marshall - it would be Colin Powell and Clarence Thomas today - to demonstrate the rewards discipline, intellect, and motivation brought, never believing that a man or woman would permit anyone to dictate what happened to him or her and their children.

I do not remember the first time I either heard or used the word “nigger” and obviously do not recall the context of either incident. Both doubtless referred to blacks in general, since during the fifties, the more reactionary elements of society used the term inclusively instead of preferentially, some even going so far as to use the n-word as an ethnic umbrella, under which “every” person of colour was gathered. I had heard blacks refer to each other as niggers, and in my naivete, I could not understand the hostility when a white person dared use the same epithet. Never could I grasp the magnitude of the insult. Indifferent to historical precedent and the stigma slavery had stamped on the soul of every African descendant brought forcibly to this country, I blithely passed on the periphery of the black population, content with my own existence and wholly unconcerned about 10 percent of the nation that remained disenfranchised.

In 1974 all that changed when I was sentenced to life in prison. I quickly discovered that skin colour does not confer nigger status; one’s position in society does and is imposed by the prevailing power structure, that is, society itself. As a student of history, albeit one with an incomplete education, I soon discovered the parallels between slavery and incarceration, and the environment in which I found myself clearly demonstrated that I had been relegated to the status of nigger. White, black, red, yellow, or brown, “every” convict was a nigger, with our rights circumscribed by both our confinement and the law of the land. Like Dred Scott, I was property, not of any individual but of the state and its monolithic prison system, and were I to escape and make my way north via some latter-day underground railroad, I could be returned at the discretion of the owners, that is, the State of Florida. Whereas the United States Constitution counted male slaves as three-fifths of a
person for demographic purposes, convicts did not rate that high; we were, and are non-persons, niggers in the most authentic sense of the word and consigned to the social oblivion historically enforced by every court in the country.

In 1896, for example, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that separate facilities for races were legal and just. I discovered the same attitudes and applications in prison, at least with respect to separation. We were segregated not by race but by our refusal to obey the law, yet unlike the aftermath of the *Plessy* decision, no effort was exerted to make our position ostensibly equal to those outside. No one cared about such rudimentary things as food, clothing, or education, and society assumed that we could survive on less than they. Indeed, many expressed outrage that we had what few comforts we did and publicly stated that we should be flogged and fed fish heads and rice twice a day. More moderate suggestions, including ones concerning education, were met with pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* rhetoric, the polemics usually taking the form: “Why educate the bastards? They’re no good anyway and too stupid to learn.” I began to hear Old Massa’s voice loud and clear.

Our loved ones suffered along with us, required to commute to and from the prison on the weekends in a generally futile effort to keep the family together. Given the long sentences most of us had, no tactic could have preserved such a union where the husband or father would be absent for twenty to thirty years - and often permanently. As it was in the days when the men, women, and even children were sold separately, convicts watched as their wives, sons, and daughters left them forever. After all, niggers did not need families; we were not “normal” and therefore could claim no societal obligation to maintain our nuclear families. We had no civil rights, and our human rights were constantly in question. Like the Spaniards in the New World, society needed a reminder that their niggers also possessed souls, but we had no Las Casas to plead our case.

Whatever label one puts on it, incarceration “is” a form of slavery, or at the very least, indentured servitude, and manifests a blatant teleological philosophy. No concern is ever given to the propriety of the act itself; only the end result is important. And for convicts, that end result is the total, coercive humiliation of a human being, breaking him psycho-
logically and constantly reminding him that he is less than his fellows, that he is in fact a nigger.

We are transformed into second-class citizens, if in fact citizens we still are. Guards are the functional equivalent of overseers, the crackers of the plantation, and have "carte blanche" to treat us in whatever manner they choose. They beat us and kill us with impunity. We are required to shine their shoes or boots, serve their food, or fetch and carry. We must defer to their every whim and often pay for rebellion with our lives. Lord Acton's observation on the corruptive ability of absolute power found its proof in the antebellum South, and its modern affirmation stalks the corridors of today's prisons. Niggers we are and niggers we will remain in society's eyes and in the eyes of those it appoints to keep us in our places.

And yet, and yet ... the pendulum does swing. Slaves were freed by the Thirteenth Amendment, protected by the Fourteenth, and enfranchised by the Fifteenth. Society at that time, at least part of it, recognized that even its niggers had never abrogated their rights, even when they were held in physical and psychological chains, deprived of their families, kept illiterate, and reduced to the status of chattel; they had had those rights, basic human rights that Jefferson recognized, ripped from them as soon as they were placed in chains. Efforts to redress those wrongs led eventually to the giant strides made by the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties, although resistance was concerted and often brutal. Blacks ceased being niggers, at least in more enlightened discussions, not because society's opinion had changed - it had not - but largely because they were now seen as political fodder whose bloc votes could be courted and won by the most patronizing office seekers. But at least publicly they were recognized as human beings worthy of consideration.

Compare these advances with those articulated by the United States Supreme Court under Chief Justice Earl Warren. Beginning in 1961, prisoners' rights became a "cause célèbre," attracting activists of every strip and resulting in several landmark opinions (Miranda and its progeny) that police and prosecutors continue to criticize. No longer could we be beaten until we confessed to whatever crime the police were having difficulty solving, and we could request and receive legal counsel as soon as custodial restraint was instituted. Moreover, conditions in many prisons were so deplorable and the lack of "due process" so egre-
rious that the federal courts had no choice but to intervene to eliminate gross Eighth Amendment violations. Like the Black community before it, the convict community began to achieve titular recognition as a group of human beings worthy of fundamental rights. Indeed, the Court eventually decreed in *Furman v. Georgia* (1972) that States could no longer kill us arbitrarily and capriciously. We had come a long way, baby.

Now, however, we are suffering the effects of a uniform retrenchment at all levels. Gone is the acceptance that we are also human beings, unquestionably flawed but humans nonetheless. And like Blacks before us, we have become a political football, only this time the politicians make no effort to hide the animosity in their public faces; without the franchise, we do not count except as beasts of burden to bear the victors’ spoils.

In every election, one issue leaps to the forefront and becomes the linchpin of the campaign. In the late sixties and early seventies, it was the war in Vietnam and civil unrest at home. In the mid-seventies, Nixon gave the Democrats the ammunition they needed to regain the White House, but Jimmy Carter fell victim to an orchestrated economic attack by OPEC that raised gasoline prices and produced the infamous - and erroneous - malaise he is accused of describing in those affected chats. In the eighties, along came Ronald Reagan and his confrontational tactics with the “evil empire.” But accompanying these obvious issues was a more subtle effort to shift public opinion regarding crime and punishment, until in the last two decades of the twentieth century, when the country is at peace (except for intermittent excursions to validate the Monroe Doctrine, kidnap heads of state, or protect oil-rich proxies), when a strong economy and low unemployment guarantee prosperity for most, and when no other external or internal threat looms, crime and criminals became the hot button in successive campaigns for local, regional, and national races.

Yes, we are it; society’s niggers are always good for a vote on one end of the political spectrum or the other. No one wants to be perceived as soft on crime, and with monsters like Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, and others constantly making headlines, support for more repressive laws and confinement is easy to find, especially when public servants convince the body politic that niggers neither deserve nor require a millisecond’s consideration. If, as Emerson observed, a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds, then the attitude cultivated
and maintained by society toward its prisoners clearly demonstrates the limited imaginations of a people responsible for increasing the prison population to over one million men and women, executing mental defectives and minors, and raising paramilitary police tactics to an art form.

This is not to say that, like the black community and their enslaved forebears, we are blameless. Most assuredly we are not, and I make no attempt either to argue with detainment for criminal behaviour for society’s protection or to claim kinship with a people whose only offense was to be chained and transported by force to this country. Unlike expatriate Africans, we are active participants in our own confinement. But culpability is not the issue; society’s insistence on creating a permanent underclass and the philosophical posture that denies our fundamental humanity are, and the members of that underclass - niggers - have no chance to rise above the station society has selected for us. Indeed, it is society’s intent to keep us there, just as slaves were kept in their place by brute force and repressive legislation. Like the plantation owners in the antebellum South, the majority of Americans today do not discriminate, if you will pardon the irony. Slaves were seen as all of a piece; unworthy of inclusion on equal terms into the family of man. Today’s convicts are likewise deprived of any preferential assessment: all of us are scum, all are irredeemable, all are equally despicable.

One factor, however, escapes most analyses when treatment of, or attitudes toward convicts is discussed. Whereas for 350 years, slaves had no logical reason to expect manumission, our eventual freedom is guaranteed in over 90 percent of cases. Treating humans like niggers is always morally reprehensible, but from a utilitarian position, it hardly matters as long as that status remains invariant. If a society never intends to free those it holds in captivity, then treatment is irrelevant, and one’s keepers can exercise their will without restraint.

The obvious concomitant to perpetual captivity is the ability of the captors to break their prisoners’ spirit and convince them that they are in fact niggers deserving of their fate. This has historically proven difficult. Alabama’s chain gangs and the new supermax prisons to the contrary, it is futile to attempt to break the human spirit by force alone. We are simply too resilient and in some cases, far too stubborn. Surprises, of course, do occur, as in Nat Turner’s short-lived rebellion, John Brown’s futile raid on the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, and
the insurrection at Attica, to cite but a few of the more notorious examples.

But, and the but is monumentally significant; if one’s keepers have no choice but to release their charges after a specified time, then it does not take a giant leap of logic to understand that their attitudes should reflect that awareness. Perhaps a society can impose nigger status on those it loathes, and in some instances, make that label stick. What happens, however, when that nigger gains his freedom and during the course of internalizing his status, comes to understand that a perpetual state of war exists between him and society who sees him as a nigger? What happens when he begins to act like the nigger society tells him he is?

A prisoner made the observation some years ago that ex-convicts have only three options upon release: we can reintegrate into society and become productive, contributing members; we can become public wards and strain a struggling system already on the brink of collapse; or we can resume the role of predators. The first option represents the most beneficial, both from society’s and the ex-convicts’ perspectives, and it makes the most sense. The second evolves from hopelessness and an anomic loss of self, derived from the indoctrination that convinces the susceptible mind that he is unworthy and therefore need not try to change his status. But the third is the creation of anger and a gutwrenching, mindbending need to pay somebody - anybody - back for the years of being treated like a, yes, like a nigger.

Last year, a journalist examined the maximum-security unit at Pelican Bay (California) and interviewed some of the men inside, one of whom was frighteningly candid. He said that things had been done to him inside that no slave, no animal should have to endure. This individual was ending his sentence; no parole, no supervision of any kind, and he made the point that he could go wherever he wanted, do whatever he decided, and he was mad enough (and bad enough) to get the job done. This is the unavoidable result when society creates niggers by permanently subjugating a race or class of people, keeping its collective foot on the necks of those it tries to hold down, and never letting them up either to breathe freely or even to catch a glimpse of blue sky instead of the dirt in front of their faces.

Niggers of any colour eventually get angry, and in my twenty-two consecutive years in prison, I have seen scores of them. Most are long-term prisoners who will have two or sometimes three decades of prison
behind them when they are released, and they are mad. They are mad like you would not believe. Their families are gone; they are largely unemployable; and the vast majority are psychologically unstable. I stress here that these people are going to be released because they have done their time; you cannot stop them. They will be living in your neighbourhoods and shopping in the stores where you, your wives, your sisters, and your children shop. Think about it: mad niggers everywhere you go but without the identifying skin colour that would have previously warned you when you thought all niggers were black. The scenario scares me; it should terrify the average citizen.

But, you answer, we have police to protect us from such predators. That is certainly true, but the very nature of crime and random violence precludes its prevention, and like it or not, it does not take a lot of creativity to avoid the police long enough to commit a crime. The role of the police is, after all, apprehension. They catch us after we have committed whatever offense it is that we have chosen to perpetrate, which means that no one is safe from someone harbouring a grudge that has festered for twenty or thirty years. I repeat: no one is safe. Examine the conventional wisdom: niggers are crazy. We do not care who we hurt in the process of getting what we want. If that is the case, then why persist in legitimizing a system that creates niggers in an assembly-line process, turning them out year after year like so many new models of automobiles with built-in engineering defects: accelerators jammed at full throttle with no steering?

Some primitive societies believe that knowing a person’s name confers an advantage on the one knowing, and thus names are kept secret. So it is with convicts. I know my name, even if society sees me as a nigger and even refers to me as such. If society agrees about the definition of a nigger, that distinction is society’s alone. Most men and women do not see themselves in that role, no matter how often they hear the term applied to them. They retain their distinct, personal identities, even if they have to submerge them to survive, and society should be thankful that they preserve that degree of autonomy instead of acting according to the model urged on them.

Call me Ismael or what you will, I refuse to be anyone’s nigger, because, whether society realizes it or not, its niggers are dangerous people when pushed, and I have more important things to do than ponder revenge. That is, unfortunately, not a universal sentiment behind the
walls and fences communities have erected to contain their prisoners. Those men and women whom society has discarded - its niggers - will, like Frankenstein’s monster, one day turn on their creator, not behind the walls where society will be able to ignore the consequences but out there in the street. For those of you who have forgotten, Mary Shelley’s novel was subtitled “A Modern Prometheus,” but unlike the legend, the fire this time will consume rather than console.

ENDNOTES

A burst of colour and the vortex began to spin, a jumbled mass of scattered thoughts shot through my mind at incredible speed, my breathing became ragged and laboured. Then as I gained some control of the quickly tripping synapse, a picture began to emerge. The image cleared at the back of my skull.

There was no dignity in dying at the hands of a state ... any state! But it was my turn. I had exhausted all avenues of appeal. They had moved me to the death cell just hours before: the death watch took over; guards I had never seen before, none I knew; all seemed so much larger than my six-foot frame. The one outside the cell staring in intently, watching my every move. Another to the right by the death chamber door, sipping coffee from a styrofoam cup but none the less alert and glancing up to peer at me. They did not try to talk to me, as if I were a pariah.

Laying there on my last bed, my hands behind my head ... planning my last moves. Through the upper bars and across the way the deadly eye of the gunrail’s weapon casually pointed my way, its deadly menace well known to me ... the man’s face hidden in the shadows behind the rifle’s stock ... the black eye raising and lowering minutely in mimic of the hidden gunner’s respiration.

Buzzing, ringing, clangs, and muted shouts came through the thick cement walls. The sounds that bothered me the many years of delay: keys turning, food slots banging, Spanish, English, Swahili, and other dialects of many angry voices shouting out in defiance from the cell blocks. A cacophony muffled and distant now from where I lay not fifteen feet from the gas chamber door.

Acrid smells of antiseptic wash surrounded me. The death cell area was in full swing and I was just one of three who would go this week; the two before and now it was my turn, centre stage in the ritual of death.

The two before had gone quietly with little fuss. Their final statements of inane remarks, meaningless gestures to victims and families, one’s heartfelt reach for God, no doubt fell on deaf ears, and with tears he precedes me to ash.

I had decided that I would not go numbly down the path. I would not make a statement nor plea for clemency from the very system that had
produced me as fodder for its now vast machine. My final moves, actions, would speak louder than words.

With my state-issue five witnesses, I had provided the executioner’s act with an audience that would not let this dance of death remain surreptitious from most. They would not allow the events of this morbid week to go unnoticed in the back pages of time, where in ignorance the public could skip the account and not really think of the state that has to resort to killing its own citizens in address to its social deficiencies.

The hours, minutes, and seconds of this final day were “tick-tocking” away with speed. At some time, they brought my last meal and I wolfed down the gastronomical surprise, belching as the last remnants slid down to my stomach. When in death’s grip, my sphincter relaxed and the contents of my viscera spilled out, the stench of feces would add a sinister bouquet to assault the players in this rite when they entered the chamber after the deed was done. A pungent reminder of their part in the macabre.

Already the rubber tube protruded from my shirt front, where the medico had taped to my chest the stethoscope which would reverberate the sounds and finality of my demise, the criss-cross of adhesive tape “X-ing” me out.

Pacing back and forth to the hubbub around me, the time was coming close. The studied and practiced procedures of the deathwatch were in progress. Behind the death chamber door, the executioner was preparing the elements of the final brew. Little thuds and muted sounds filtered through the steel door.

Pacing back and forth, the cold cement chilled my stockinged feet. The black eye of the gunrail’s rifle muzzle following my movement, back and forth. The deathwatch eyes followed me, back and forth, back and forth. “Calm down” I told myself, albeit in these moments of absolute terror, it was hard to do.

The Catholic priest came in and said some jumbled words to me, as the thudding of my heart became louder in my ears.

“It’s time, it’s time,” the deathwatch commander intoned. I stopped and made my move. The secreted razor blade came out and slashed my throat, blood spurted as the jugular parted. Now my wrist; red appeared. Inside my arms, the blade rode, nipping the junctions of life’s road there. Slinging my arms about, I flung the juice, splashing and splattering everyone, the walls, and all.
Splotches of blood on the uniforms of the minions of death as they charged into the cell to stop my act. I smeared the blood on their skins, hair, and all over myself. Subdued, they “cuffed me up.” The medico wrapped the slashes up. They were pissed! Their nostrils flaring in anger as they rushed me through the door into the chamber itself, strapping me in quickly as I spat on each.

The blinds on the windows flew up as they retreated out the gas chamber door. Aghast, the witnesses gaped at the sight as the door shut and clamped tight. I swivelled my head to and fro to make the blood flow. It seeped through the wraps, darkening them with a moist red stain and dripping to the floor. The witnesses’ eyes were wide in horror; mine with madness.

Suddenly, my head sprang back as the gas hit my nose. I stiffened, my hands in fists, the knuckles white! I slumped forward and a shudder ran through my body. The blood stopped, my struggle had ceased. My eyes closed, I relaxed as the bitter sweet gas overtook me. Peaches? Apricots? No! Burnt almonds! This was my last sense as my breathing ceased and life left me a shattered surreal hulk; red, white, and institutional green.


“Channel Four, they’ve got you on Channel Four!” the voice screamed!

Automatically I sprang to the selector knob. The T.V. tube brightened, my mug shot appeared, the newscaster’s voice rang in my ear ... “... was given a full reversal today by the United States Supreme Court, ending a fifteen-year legal battle to execute him”.

Commemorative Celebration in Honor of Ronald Keith Allridge
James V. Allridge III

With an execution date being set a day before my birthday, 1995 proved to be a very stressing year for me. For those of you who have known me for a while, you know that the hardest thing that I’ve had to deal with that past year was the execution of my own brother, Ronald Keith Allridge. He was executed by the State of Texas on June 8, 1995.

Ronnie will most likely be remembered by most for the many negative aspects of his life, but not to me. I will remember him as a loving, sensitive, caring, intelligent and quietly reserved person. He loved to read and gather knowledge on all levels. He was a storehouse of erroneous information and would have done well on any quiz show like Jeopardy!

He will be remembered by those remaining on Death Row and those in the abolition movement as one of the first not to willingly walk to his death. He refused to voluntarily come out of the Death Watch Cell and made them come in and physically carry him out. He felt by doing so, he would show them to be exactly what they are - murderers going to get their victim.

The administration proved just how cold-hearted they could be when they asked me to help talk him out of the cell. They attempted to use my desire to see my brother one more time as a bargaining tool to defuse the situation and to quietly lead him to his death. My last words to him were, “Do what you have to do.”

I think Beatrice speaks of the disdain of this act best when she wrote to me, “... What they did by [trying] to get you to talk Ronnie out of the cell is the very worst thing they could have done. This is pure torture in my eyes. It is very wrong for them to do. They put Ronnie and you in a dilemma. In a situation that has no solution. You knew that you could see him again if you went, that you wanted to go, but if you went, this would mean that you would help to get him to the execution. Someone who asks this from a brother is the most detestable person in the world .... They are allowed to confine you, to keep you in prison, to take away from you a certain freedom, but they are certainly not allowed to torture you.”

Ronnie wrote his “Final Thoughts,” what proved to be two days before his death. I would like to publish them, in full, for the first time.
since his murder. I want you all to have a somewhat personal glimpse of the love that he had for those that were involved in his life.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**  
by Ronald K. Allridge

As I sit here, about to face my "punishment," I can't help but to wonder what it all means. Will it affect anyone besides me and my family? Will it stop someone else from doing what they are about to do? Will it deter crime? Or, will it just make someone more determined not to be apprehended?

I have been on Texas' Death Row for over nine years now and I have learned quite a few things. One of them is that the violent crime rate in Texas hasn't had a significant decrease in the last ten years, but Texas has executed more people than any other state. Even though Texas has been in the forefront with the amount of executions they've carried out, they are still overwhelmed by crime. Even though they continue to execute people at an alarming rate, they are constantly opening up prisons instead of shutting them down! Why is it so hard for people to understand that, "lockin' 'em up and throwin' away the key" is not the answer? Why can't they realize that capital punishment doesn't deter violent criminal acts? Why do they say they are concerned about the futures of their children when they continue to spend more money on prisons than they do on schools? Haven't they realized that it's cheaper to send someone to college than it is to prison? It would definitely be more beneficial to society and the economy to have them with a college degree than a set of parole papers.

I don't know the answer to the world's problems or even all of mine. But I do know that this country is faced with a very dismal future if it continues to journey down this road. It leads nowhere. It didn't lead anywhere in times past and it will lead nowhere in the future. As I said, I don't have an answer to the problems that society faces, but I have solved one problem for myself. That's my fear of dying.

When I was issued my last execution date, I faced that day with an overwhelming dread and a paralysing fear. The mere thought of it terrified me, even though I tried to put up a brave front for my family's sake. Fortunately, I do not have that problem this time. As I face this execution date - assigned to me for June 8, 1995 - I have no fear of what lies
ahead. I know I do not know what will come after, but I do not fear it. I realize that it is not so much the dying as it is "the fear of." I believe that human beings generally have a fear of death that makes them miss out on a lot of life. They need to conquer that fear before they will ever be able to sincerely feel the most enjoyment out of what they experience in this existence. This is just my opinion, but I believe it to be pretty close to the truth. Anyway, I have conquered that fear now and I have done it just in time. I did it myself, but only because of the help and love given me by the people that mean the most to me. Hopefully, they will hold my memories dear, and cherish their thoughts of me forever.

I want to pay a special tribute to: James Vernon Allridge, Jr., my Dad. He has always been there when I really needed him. Through the good and the bad times he has literally been there, and I know he will continue to be. If I could I would change a few things about our relationship and the way things went growing up, but I would never change the fact that I had someone who was always there. I know whenever I needed someone to turn to, Dad would be there. He might not have done everything right, but he wasn’t far from it. He will definitely always be special to me. Thanks Dad, for being you.

Otharee Moss Allridge, my Mom. She really is a special person and means more to me than life. I would have done anything to make her happy because she has always tried her best to do that for me. I have no regrets at all about her being the person that gave me life. That most precious gift has allowed me to experience all the joy, happiness, learning and loving that I have been through over the years and I want to thank her for that more than anything else. We have not always agreed, but we’ve never argued. And I know the way she feels for me is experienced by only a select few human beings. She has truly made life worth living and I apologize sincerely for any and all hurt or pain that I’ve caused her. Thank you Mom, for keeping me close to your heart.

Ah, and my daughter. She has truly been a joy to me. I know we have never been with each other in “the world,” but my thoughts of her have kept her with me everyday. As I looked into her eyes yesterday and saw the love there that she has for me, this just gave me a feeling that I can’t even describe. To know that she could still love me after all the moments she’s missed with me just tears my heart. It really makes me wonder what our life would have been like had I been where I was supposed to be. What joys could we have experienced together? What future
would we have now? I guess these things you don’t consider when you are being selfish. Hopefully someone will learn from my experience and realize that, “what you have is more important than what you might get.” I just want my daughter, NaDine Michelle Allridge, to know that I have always loved her. She has always had a place in my heart, even before she was who she is now. Daddy loves you Baby!

To my brother, James. I want to thank you for all that you have been. I really have enjoyed and appreciated having your support throughout my life, but especially over the last 10 years. I sincerely wish I could have kept you from this fate, but I was probably too selfish at the time to realize just what I was causing. So, I have tried to make amends by showing you love, devotion and respect, and hopefully this is what you’ll remember me for the most. I know I’ve told you that I love you but those are mere words that I can utter. The true depth of my feelings for you I don’t think could ever fully be expressed with mere words. But I want you to know that I do love you, cherish you and will always respect you. I can’t imagine a better person to have as a brother and I will always hold your memory dear to me. I don’t know what you will experience after I am gone, but I want you to keep your head up, to be strong and always think of me with a smile. Don’t be sad for me because I’ll be somewhere better. I love you Weinerhead!

To my son, Darius. Even though I wasn’t responsible for your birth, I still have always felt as if you were my son. I know I did some things wrong, but I never meant to cause you any harm. Hopefully you can remember me and the times we shared with fondness and decide that I wasn’t such a bad person after all. You take care of yourself and your little brother and sister because both of them need you much.

To my brothers: Darren, Lamont, and Stan. I really appreciate all of you keeping me in your hearts. I know I’ve been away from you more than I’ve been with you, but you still managed to love me regardless of that fact. It just makes me proud to realize that I have such fine young men as members of my family. Hopefully, our spirits will cross paths again and the next time we’ll appreciate it more than we did this time. I wish you to know also that I never meant to cause you any pain, things just worked out that way. I just want you to be strong for each other and always take into account each other’s feelings. Its when we forget about others’ feelings that things seem to turn out wrong. And remember, “I Will Always Love You.”
I wish to send a special thanks to my “big sister,” Peggy. I know she didn’t have to let me into her heart, but she did. I hope to meet her one day again so I can let her know just how much she means to me. May you have a bright and beautiful future filled with nothing but wonderful experiences.

I wish to send a special thanks also to my Great Aunt, Robbie Moore. She has provided me with her love and support, and also, a beautiful daughter who is my “big sister.” They know that I will always love them and I know they will keep me in their hearts for now and ever.

I wish to thank my attorneys, Don, Bruce, and Steve, for really trying to save my life. They knew it would be an uphill battle all the way but they fought the good fight. Its just too hard for a few people to try and fight a whole state. But knowing they couldn’t win didn’t stop them from giving their best efforts. To all of them, I wish to say, I sincerely thank you.

I have to thank my “little sisters,” Mookie and Ines, for coming into my life and giving me their devotion, trust and love. I really needed them at that particular time, just as I need them now. I hope they continue to have happiness and I want them to know that I will keep them inside of me always.

I wish to send a special thanks to my “wife” because she has meant a lot to me, especially in the last few months. I know we didn’t have a formal relationship, but it meant more to me than any I’ve had. I wish her continued success and happiness in life and I send my love to her and Junaid. I don’t know how she’ll feel about me leaving her like this but I know it isn’t easy for me. Damn, I love you woman and I just know that we will meet again. A love like our’s just has to be repeated. I freely love you, Shontia Lahon “Kittit-Kittie” Harris-Allridge!! May you have a bright and beautiful future.

I have countless others that I have on my mind and in my heart. If I were to try and mention them all, I know I wouldn’t have enough time left. But I know they will feel me thinking of them and I wish them to think of me. As I embark on this journey, I want only to say that it has been a learning experience. Everything didn’t turn out right, but everything didn’t turn out wrong either. I hope I have left behind something that will give someone pause or put a smile on their face.
To everyone that means anything at all to me: MUCH PEACE AND LOVE!

***

I won't try to paint a perfect picture and say that Ronnie was an angel, filled with love and compassion for his fellow human being. That would be far from the truth - simply, a lie. But he was capable of love and had a great deal of love for many. I miss the love that he showed for me daily.

It is my hope that his death and the many others before him were not in vain. Texas has slacked up on executions, only because of current pending litigation in the courts. I'm sure they would have been executed if the State of Texas and Governor Bush had their way.

June 8, 1997 will be the second anniversary of Ronnie’s execution. I am asking that everyone who reads this to light a candle in remembrance of him on this day, or do something to further the abolition of the death penalty. Write a letter to the Governor, help circulate a petition or phone or fax a letter to President Clinton.

Not to diminish the pain and suffering of the victim’s family and survivors, but there are always two sides to every story and I know only too well of the pain and suffering of the executed’s family. My mother speaks of how she misses Ronnie each time she comes to visit and when she writes. My father tells me how he goes out to the cemetery and just sits and talks to Ronnie when things are troubling his mind. But the thing they don’t tell me is how painful it must be for them each time they come to visit me and not see Ronnie there next to me after 8 years of visits. They don’t tell me how painful it was for them to have one son executed by the State (with their three youngest sons witnessing the execution) in June of 1995 and then, only a few months later, have the other son come within 5 days of being executed. I have a very strong family and I admire them for their strength and courage.

Ronnie wrote the title poem for my recently released chapbook, Deadly Executioner. He also has several other poems included in the book. The book is dedicated to the numerous men that have been executed by the State of Texas since the reinstatement of the death penalty here in the United States. The book has been received very well so far and I would like everyone to get a copy or two, to pass along to a friend [see: About the Cover, p. 135).
Despite the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by the U.S. in 1992, it offers little protection for the individual or U.S. citizen against human rights abuses by the U.S. or any of the 50 state governments!

The human being, the individual, and the U.S. citizen have no legal standing to invoke international treaty rights in any federal or state court. This lack of standing is well illustrated in the kidnapping and prosecution by the United States of Panama's former leader General Noriega. "As a general principle of international law, individuals have no standing to challenge violations of international treaties ..." Further jurisprudence states: "Rights under international common law must belong to the sovereigns, not to individuals."¹

The U.S. Constitutional edict (Article VI, Clause 2) that a treaty becomes the "Supreme law of the land" upon ratification by the United States Senate has been perverted by the courts' questioning "whether that law is binding and enforceable in U.S. courts." Relying upon a confounding doctrine of self-execution, the courts' hold that the law of the land is, "not necessarily binding on domestic courts if the treaty requires implementing legislation or does not provide an individual right of action."²

Further illumination of this subject reveals that, "The humane and enlightened objectives of the United Nations Charter are ... entitled to respectful consideration by the courts and legislatures of every member nation, since the document(s) expresses the universal desire of thinking men for peace and equality of rights and opportunities. The Charter represents a moral commitment of foremost importance, and we must not permit the spirit of our pledge to be compromised or disparaged in either our domestic or foreign affairs." Then that spirit is quashed by the court with, "The Charter provisions relied on (by the plaintiff) were not intended to supersede existing domestic legislation."³

Even the basic human right expressed and referred to in a majority of international rights declarations, charters, and covenants as the "right to life" is dealt with flippantly by the California Supreme Court: "None of them compels elimination of capital punishment."⁴ Without life, no other human right can exist.

The problems of standing and the recognition of the most basic human right to life could have been rectified by the United States Senate
if it had lived up to humane and enlightened objectives of the United Nations and, if it had gone a step further in its ratification of the ICCPR by including ratification of the two optional protocols to the Covenant. The first optional protocol would permit a human being, within the borders of the U.S., the right to submit communications to the United Nations Human Rights Commission for consideration and action; that action being binding upon the state parties to the protocol. The second optional protocol would abolish the death penalty in the U.S. and recognize every human being’s right to life.

Given these facts and oversight, it is obvious that the much touted human rights of international treaties are little more than hollow human rights in America. However, despite the fact that human beings within the borders of the United States have no legal standing to invoke provisions of international human rights, treaties and other international instruments in U.S. courts, there is a way to bring human rights abuses to the attention of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Because the United States Senate refused to ratify the optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights when it ratified that document in 1992, only one avenue of protest is open to human beings within the United States - the 1503 Procedure.

Under 1503, human rights abuses which show a consistent pattern of violations in situations affecting a large number of people over a protracted period of time may be brought to the attention of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Unfortunately, the Commission has no enforcement power and any relief from abuses brought to their attention would be had mostly through the embarrassment caused to the government by the public announcement that the U.N. Commission on Human Rights has the situation under examination and review. The fly in the ointment in this matter, as in most judicial matters of international scope, is that unless it can be shown convincingly that solutions at the domestic level would be ineffective or that they would extend over an unreasonable length of time, all domestic remedies must be exhausted before a 1503 Communication is considered by the Commission.

There are essentially three U.N. documents that pertain to human rights: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The United States has
only ratified the first, and it did so in such a manner as to usurp the
effect and power of the document and the United Nations Human Rights
Commission.

By filing a lengthy list of reservations, understandings, and declara-
tions to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
(ICCPR), the U.S. eliminated language and provisions of the Covenant
that would have produced substantial changes in its view of human
rights. For instance, Part III, Article 5, of the ICCPR states: “Sentence
of Death shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below
eighteen years of age and shall not be carried out on pregnant women.”
The U.S. Reservation to this article states: “The United States reserves
the right, subject to its constitutional constraints, to impose capital pun-
ishment on any person (other than a pregnant woman) duly convicted
under existing or future laws permitting the imposition of capital punish-
ment, including such punishment for crimes committed by persons below
eighteen years of age.” Currently, the threshold in the U.S. for execution
is sixteen years of age, but by the language of the U.S. Reservation, it
could fall even lower and conceivably the U.S. and its states could begin
to execute their children unimpeded by international doctrine and scrut-
iny: an ominous sign in these times with the public outcry to treat juve-
nile offenders as adults.

Another telling example of the United States’ duplicity can be found
in its declaration to the ICCPR: “The United States declares the provi-
sions of Articles 1 through 27 of the Covenant are not self-executing,”
thereby rendering moot the U.S. Constitution’s Article VI provision that,
“All treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the
United States, shall be the supreme law of the land,” and tossing those
Articles of the Covenant into the quagmire of law known as “one of the
most confounding”: the Doctrine of Self-Execution.10

Despite all these obstacles, embarrassment in the international
human rights forum of certain state agencies and state governments,
including the United States government, through the 1503 Communications
Procedure, may well have some impact on the treatment of human
beings within the confines of the United States.
ENDNOTES


5. Optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Gen. Assm. Resol. 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966), Article 1, Article 5, Article 11, Sec. 3.


The change process inside of a prison can be as treacherous as the most notorious of its inhabitants. The danger associated with navigating through the murky waters of jailhouse politics makes prison change extremely hard to control.

Change throughout society is inevitable, but in prisons, there are strong competing groups of differing interests with much time on their hands and a strong motivation to prevent particular changes. Within the dynamics of the struggles to control change dwells a prison's reality.

The soul of a prison is not reflected by the preciseness of its construction nor the orderly appearance of the uniformed staff. In the same way, the prisoners' calculated chaos and deliberately random violence does not expose the real belly of the beast. The battlefield of inevitable change is where you will find the naked prison existing in real time.

Much like soldiers in combat, prisoners and prison staff have little overview of the arena where their conflicts play out in its totality. They can only glean narrow glimpses of their place from the small pieces of turf they happen to occupy at any given moment during an engagement. So, in fact, prisoner and staff alike never have a complete view of the prison in which they live, work and often struggle.

In a prison, the parties of competing interests are represented by the prisoner population; the rank and file uniformed staff and the administration (management). The interaction between these three groups defines a prison at any given time.

Those few times when all three parties are in agreement with the need for and nature of some particular change within a prison, quick and effective integration occurs at its core. Accommodations by all the opposing parties will be made to better effectuate the agreed upon change. A contrasting situation occurs when all three parties in interest are completely united in their opposition to the nature of and/or need for impending change. Complete rejection is the result of this circumstance. In addition, unrelated and unexpected change might be experienced as a result of the tactics employed by the competing groups in their individual efforts to resist the change. But such unforeseen change is usually accepted by all parties as the cost of their resistance.

By far, the most volatile and common type of change in the modern prison is the begrudging kind which results when two of the three parties attempt to impose change over the objections and resistance of the min-
riority group. Even though the force of the majority will ultimately lead to the imposition of some form of the championed change, the resisting minority will nevertheless be relentless in its attempt to undermine that change. This results in the development of dysfunctional change where the conditions which brought about the need in the first place are worsened by the change in a state of resistance. Thus, the change intended is never fully realized while the appearance of fully integrated change is maintained to appease the majority group. Reluctant change is always more destructive than the status quo because jailhouse politics will make sure it retains the potential for ongoing struggle.

THE SERGEANT, THE MAJOR AND ME

It was a short walk from the Misconduct Hearing Room to B-Block. As I headed for my cell to begin serving 60 days of cell restriction for my part in an ill-fated hamburger caper. There was little time to think much less sulk. The way I saw things, I was being mistreated. After all, in the six to seven months that I had been in Graterford, I had seen an abundance of violence, rampant thievery, and at least one cell fire. There was even a two-week prison lockdown when gun wielding prisoners took hostages and shot it out with State Troopers in a foiled escape attempt.

Compared to all those acts of misconduct, my measly infraction was hardly worth mentioning. I understood losing my job and being charged for the burgers, but getting 60 days locked in my cell for 22 hours a day seemed unfair to me. But as I shuffled my feet, stuck out my chin and brooded over my mistreatment, little did it occur to me that there would be others who felt I had been treated too leniently. And even others, who wanted to thrust me into the murky waters of jailhouse politics.

Stealing food from a penitentiary kitchen is a serious offense despite my personal beliefs to the contrary. Theft of food from the kitchen offends no less than two vital concerns of prison administration; spending and control. The ability to smuggle food from the kitchen makes the statement that the prison cannot control the prisoner. If other prisoners similarly challenge the prison’s control, the per day cost of feeding the population can go up drastically.

Ten pounds of bootlegged ground beef should have sent me directly to “Siberia,” which is what prisoners appropriately nicknamed the special housing unit often known as the “Hole.” The fact that I used the
Major of the Guards' bathroom in my plot to enjoy a grilled hamburger would have led to a doubling of my time in cold storage for the way I so arrogantly defied authority.

What did I know? I had not been in prison long enough to appreciate how seriously infractions of this nature were considered. At the time I could not see how my childish prank could ever threaten the security of the prison. Certainly this was far less serious than an attempt to escape.

When I finally arrived at my cell, I was unexpectedly greeted by the B-Block Sergeant. The Sergeant was a silent man with a strong presence who had great importance in my life. A man of military bearing, he stood a rigid six feet. His immaculate uniform was always clean, starched, pressed and precisely creased. He always stood straight with his eyes front, and the prison dress cap on top of his head gave height to his authority.

The Sergeant always had a cud of leaf chewing tobacco in his puffy clean shaven and ruddy cheek giving his southern drawl a lazier tone than anticipated. Though he was close to retirement age, that fact was as undetectable as his feelings.

When I saw him standing in front of my cell holding open the sliding door, I figured it was all part of the procedure of confining me to my cell for the next 60 days. I should have known the Sergeant did not turn keys.

"Didn’t think I’d be seeing you back so soon,” I heard the man say.

I assumed he was commenting on my having returned so soon from the misconduct hearing. Usually men given cell restriction took their time returning to their cell in an effort to extend their liberties.

"I got 60 days cell restriction, Sarge. Can you believe that?” I complained not realizing this was the wrong thing to do.

"(Spit) Boy, the way I see it you must be a real important inmate to have talked your way out of the BAU (Behavior Adjustment Unit -also known as Siberia). I don’t like important inmates on my block so you just watch yourself because you can be right sure I’ll be watching you.”

With that said, the Sergeant slid my door shut, double-locked me in and walked away like a general who had just reviewed his troops.

I was amazed at what I just heard. The Sergeant had just threatened me. Gripped by the paranoia that always permeates prison, I believed the Sergeant was singling me out and making it personal between us because I was Jewish. But that was far from accurate. My self-importance was
only in my own mind. The sudden "take-notice" of me by the Sergeant had to do with my former work supervisor, the Major, and the fact that he had intervened on my behalf to prevent me from serving my 60 days of confinement in Siberia.

The Major had only recently been appointed to his post by the Superintendent of Graterford who happened to be the first African American in Pennsylvania to hold that position. Similarly, the Major was the first African American to hold the position of Major of the Guard in any of Pennsylvania's state prisons. As such, the Major was the first member of a minority to personally direct the actions of an historically, almost all white, uniformed guard force at Graterford. Additionally, the Major had been promoted to his post from the rank of Lieutenant which was not only unprecedented, but also caused a stir amongst the several Captains over whom he was promoted.

The Major was also a reformer which made the situation even more difficult. He was a compassionate and decent man who did not feel that militarism and physical force were the way to solve Graterford's problems. This traditional style of prison management often led to the unfair treatment which had placed Graterford in crisis.

While the prison administration and the prison's overwhelming African American prisoner population were hopeful of the promise held by the Major, the almost all white rank and file uniformed staff were not happy at all about the appointment. Not only had a longstanding race barrier been broken, but there was also genuine concern that the Major's style would lead to giving the prison away to the prisoners. Governance by physical force, militarism and white leadership had been the way at Graterford for generations.

When the Major had decided that my actions were not serious enough to warrant sending me to Siberia, battle lines were drawn. Resistance to the Major had already been taking place in the form of mean-spirited and derogatory comments constantly being made about him by the uniformed staff. These slurs were often made in the presence of prisoners which only served to undermine the Major's authority with staff and increase his popularity with the prisoner population.

There I was in the middle of all this and I did not even know it. I was not yet tuned in to the political undercurrents which were sweeping through Graterford. I just thought the Sergeant was picking on me and I resented him for that.
While on cell restriction, I was let out of my cell for two hours each day to roam around the block for recreation. And during this time, I found myself and my cell being searched by the block guards on a regular basis. They never found anything and the searches were not as intrusive as they could have been. But even one search of a man’s cell or body is an intrusion into his sense of dignity and freedom and as such is deeply resented no matter how often either might be experienced. To this day, I still feel diminished every time I am involved in any type of search. There is no getting used to that kind of intrusion.

Naturally, this led my resentment and paranoia to grow with each search. I began to feel that every guard was out to get me. In the past I had avoided guards because I had little reason to communicate with them. I figured the less contact with uniformed staff the less likely I would be to offend anybody or to inadvertently break a rule. But now I began to hate these men in uniform and my avoidance was no longer a reasonable expression.

To make matters worse, some guards would ridicule and taunt me by calling me the Major’s boy. At times they would even imply that I had avoided going to Siberia by being a snitch. Implications such as this being made by any guard in a prison similar to Graterford were potentially life-threatening.

I was helpless to stop what was happening to me so I just built up more frustration, resentment and anger. Then on the 59th day of my 60 days of cell restriction, I was issued another misconduct. This for taking a little more than two hours for my out of cell recreation.

I went to another Misconduct Hearing and was given an additional 30 days cell restriction. As I returned following the hearing, the Sergeant was there waiting for me again.

“(Spit) Boy, I don’t know why you came to this block. You got no job and you just keep breaking the rules. (Spit) You must know some real important people. But let me tell you this. Let any of my officers catch you wrong again and nobody’s gonna be able to save you then.”

I did not respond this time. In fact, I am certain the Sergeant could sense the hatred in my heart as he locked me in my cell and paraded out of sight.

It was that day that I felt I was no longer a part of the system or even the country. I was too young and inexperienced to realize that the Sergeant’s malice was focussed elsewhere. The old soldier was just
trying to stop change or at least wound it. The black Major with his liberal notions was the Sergeant's real opponent. I was just someone who was unlucky enough to be chosen as the vehicle for the message.

By 1983, the Sergeant finally retired. I am sure he felt Graterford would fall apart without him. The Major was soon promoted to Deputy Superintendent of Graterford and a short time after that he was appointed Superintendent of Graterford where he reigns to this day.

Begrudging change in a prison builds up a great deal of resentment and malice. So much so that the end result is change so riddled with compromise and disregard that more problems are, in fact, created than solved. The beneficiaries of this kind of change can only be those who rejoice when systems fail. Now as a 15-year veteran of jailhouse political campaigns, I can only speculate on what could have been had the Sergeant cooperated with the Major. Could Graterford have become a better place? Could I have become a better person? Unfortunately, what could have been is now just a silent and unfulfilled prayer.
I was six years old, a brand new arrival to America, and with panicky eyes, I found myself sitting in a classroom for the first time. I could not yet speak or understand English which made my new world experiences that more strange and intimidating. I cowered in a remote corner of the classroom silently listening to words I could not understand and watched children play in ways I could not relate to. The new faces, sounds and activities led me to run home at the end of the school day crying to my mother and begging her not to return me to that classroom full of strangers.

But I did go back, the very next day, forced by my parents to face my fears, in the same way, I am certain, they had to face their own unfamiliarity with America and its ways. Oddly enough, beneath my tears, timidity and suspicion, I felt an overpowering combination of urge and sadness. The sadness came from not being able to be a part of the fun and camaraderie I had witnessed, while the urge was a strong desire to belong to the community of classmates. It was this collusion by my sadness and desire that gave direction to my gathering herd instincts, which I can now identify as my want to belong.

With time, my fears of school faded, but my want to belong grew stronger and more demanding. Fortunately, American schools exploit that primitive human want and use it to anonymously move children along the path of social utility and conformity.

Once the school identified my skills, I was encouraged to join groups, organizations and committees specially designed to enhance my abilities and performance. Basically, I was led in one of two directions; sports or academics. If I was athletic, I could join an array of sporting organizations. If I was found to be academically inclined, scholastic clubs were open to me. All of these very different groups were nevertheless united in their mission to satisfy my hunger to belong, while at the same time reward my performance and achievements.

This nudging and prodding happened without me being aware of it. I just thought I was going to school. I never guessed that my want to belong was being manipulated to help me overcome language and culture differences and to ultimately lead me to a university degree in Law.
ON WANTING TO BE A BRIGAND

Some nineteen years after the experiences of my first day in school, I arrived at Graterford and some of those same boyhood emotions revisited. Of course, there was that same nervousness of being in a new and strange community except this time my apprehensions were more intense because of worries for my personal safety. And then there was that same lingering joined pair of emotions; sadness and desire.

I had entered prison with a healthy suspicion of every one. Aggravating my doubts, was the pervasive use of jailhouse slang by both prisoners and staff. Once again, I found myself in a frightening world where I could not understand the language or behaviour of its people. And then there was that loud haunting whisper of mystery and adventure, drawing me to danger in its urging to belong, belong, belong!

True the jailhouse slang used by prisoners and staff was vulgar and aggressive, everything being said with arrogant certainty and selfish importance. But there was also an unbridled, reckless honesty which hinted at unconditional tolerance for the opinions and beliefs of others.

And then there was the way everyone, staff and prisoners alike, seemed to know each other personally; almost intimately. They laughed and interacted like siblings even when there was anger between them. This familiarity was so apparent that it seemed as if the prison was one big clan.

So I wanted to belong. I wanted to speak the language, know the secrets, and possess the acceptance of the clan. Clinical analysis of this misplaced wanting might explain these romantic notions in terms of denial, compensation for fear, shame, criminality or even the Stockholm Syndrome. I personally can not explain it. All I can say is that the assemblage of infamous outlaws, doing simply what such men do in a prison, had me wanting to be a brigand.

CHOOSING SIDES

When I first came to Graterford, aside from noticing the obvious fact that most of the prisoner population consisted of African American men, I never really gave much thought to the impact my race or religion would have on my well being.
At the time, Graterford boasted an 80 percent African American population. There was a large and well-established Black Muslim community with the vast majority of prisoners coming from Philadelphia. The Superintendent was a black man as was the Major of the Guards. But none of these factors could overcome the consequences of the fact that at least 80 percent of the prison staff were white Christians, most of whom were raised in the rural communities on the outskirts of the prison. This extreme imbalance between the racial, regional and religious composition of the staff and the prisoner population accurately reflected the dysfunction of the prison generally.

Non-white prisoners were embraced by the prisoner population while suspiciously scrutinized by the staff, who tended to reserve for the white prisoners the benefit of the rehabilitative doubt. And while the prisoner population did not much concern itself with one’s religious beliefs, except when it was time to recruit prisoners for religious organizations, the staff’s religious orientation made Christian observance a sign of contrition, in search of salvation, on the path of redemption, which translated into parole eligibility. Therefore, men who were both non-white and non-Christian were readily accepted by the prisoner population but were at the centre of the staff’s doubts and distrust.

Bias benefiting those who are part of a ruling class is understandable and even to be expected. So what actually defined race relations at Graterford was not the unabashed racial and religious favouritism. It was the divisiveness and relentlessness of competition between the prisoners for favour of the administration. Everybody in the prison was forced to play the race game because the only group identity available to prisoners was based on skin colour and religious beliefs.

Unlike a school, penitentiaries do not promote group activity or identity. Individuals are hard enough to control in a prison without giving men license to join in what might eventually turn into cliques or gangs. Furthermore, prisons have no interest in gauging the performance or identifying the skills and enhancing the ability of its prisoners. Graterford was in the business of confinement, and so its entire security force was geared toward discouraging and punishing group affiliations.

All prisoners were issued identical uniforms. There were strictly enforced rules against more than five prisoners congregating together. Circulating a petition was forbidden, while guards and counsellors were constantly directing prisoners to look out only for themselves and not
worry about the other criminals around them. And while particular prisoner social and religious organizations were given permission to operate in the prison, the administration made rules governing participation in such groups so cumbersome that they constituted an organization only in name.

Vacuums and voids are dangerous things because they are eventually filled by things not intended and sometimes unwanted. While Graterford certainly could punish a man’s attempts to belong, it could not eliminate his want to belong. So the minute I entered the prison, its dynamics went silently at work coaxing me towards racial polarization; trying hard to convince me that doing time was as simple as black and white.

**THE HERDS**

Generally, black gangs in Graterford are mere extensions of Philadelphia neighbourhood street gangs. Like Philadelphia gangs, Graterford’s prison gangs have names deriving from their locations in the city. These gangs have names like 21st and Noris, 60th and Market, 10th Street, etcetera. Many of the black prison gang members had also been members of the original gang when they were out on the streets.

The way Philadelphia neighbourhood street gangs had been able to develop in prison is simple. Street gang members who were incarcerated and sent to Graterford to do their time joined together to carry on the gang’s traditions. As more and more street gang members arrived at Graterford, they eventually became numerically significant enough to conduct gang activities.

When an African American prisoner comes into Graterford, scouts immediately go about determining what part of Philadelphia the man came from and whether he had ever been a member of a street gang. It is this sorting of black prisoners based on geographics that not only dictates the character of black prison gangs but also gave rise to the often used prison slang, “Homee,” which refers to an prisoner coming from the same neighbourhood or hometown. Black prison gang members are continuously recruiting their Homees for membership in their gang.

Black prison gangs compete with each other for turf and the control of contraband sales. While this competition often results in violent battles, various gangs will nevertheless unify in many of their enter-
prises. For example, rival black prison gangs might fight each other over the business of selling drugs, while they would still work together to bring the drugs into the prison.

Black prisoners not from Philadelphia could count on Graterford hosting a gang formed by men from the area of their hometown. What makes these gangs different from the black Philly gangs is that, for the most part, these black prison gangs have no counterparts on the streets. These non-Philly gangs originated in the prison and its members are often strangers who just happen to be from the same county or city.

The competition between regional black prison gangs and black Philly prison gangs tends to be very hostile and violent. There is seldom any trust or cooperation between them. Numerically, Philly gangs greatly outnumbered the other gangs, which allow them to dominate and completely exclude them from joint ventures.

But even without numerical superiority, it is my guess that Philly neighbourhood gangs would still command in Graterford because gangs that have carried over into the prison from the streets have the very important advantage of functioning under well-established rules, organizational structures, leadership systems and ideologies. In contrast, prison gangs that originate entirely in the prison tend to be weakened by frequent power struggles, uncertain leadership and untested organizational processes.

Because Graterford’s black prison gangs are rooted almost completely in geographical distinctions, gang membership is diverse. When examining the members of any of these black prison gangs, you can expect to encounter a collection of drug addicts, thieves, murderers and hustlers. You will also find Muslims, Christians and Atheists; all members of the same gang. This heterogeneous collection of “Homees” gives the black gangs at Graterford a dynamic that makes it hard for individuals to resist feelings of commonality and harder still for the administration to break them apart. These gangs resemble an octopus with many, many tentacles.

Black gangs at Graterford primarily operate as money making enterprises. If it was neighbourhoods that brought prison gang members together, it is money and drugs that keeps them together. Everything black prison gangs at Graterford do is to earn money. This means selling anything anyone is willing to buy. The money raised is then used to buy more contraband for sale and use.
Many gang members send money home to help support their families. It is almost as if gang members gauge their value as human beings by the amount of money they are able to raise. What is done with the money is unimportant because the true purpose of prison gang life seems to be in the hustle, with the money earned being merely an indicator of how good a hustler someone is.

White gangs at Graterford are completely different. Almost all of these gangs originated in prison. Like the black non-Philly prison gangs, these gangs are not well-structured or established because they mostly consist of members who are strangers to each other, brought together by the simple chance of their skin colour.

Numerically, the white gangs in Graterford are the overwhelming minority. This means that white prison gangs are mainly formed for protection from the other gangs. While a white prison gang might do some hustling, it cannot do too much of it because it cannot protect its turf or business interests against the larger black gangs. So white gangs are more often the consumers/purchasers of drugs and other contraband.

Also, most of the white gangs are not brought together by geographies. These gangs are generally held together by a desire to protect mutual interests. White drug addicts at Graterford will join together for safety and to pool their funds to buy drugs at a volume discount. There are white gangs of Catholics, Italians and Protestants, who socialize together and protect each other. White gamblers will often join together as will jailhouse wine-makers and body builders. In fact, white gangs at Graterford are really just small groups of individuals rather than gangs with a purpose.

White gangs are generally much smaller and less diverse than their black counterparts. Where black gangs need large memberships to generate income and protect their turf, white gangs need as few members as possible to stretch their resources. Also, a white gang that was too large would attract the attention of the black gangs which constantly challenged the commitment of prison gangs that get too big.

The exception to this are the outlaw motorcycle gangs that have managed to establish themselves in Graterford. All of their members are white men who were members of the same gang out on the street. This means that, like the black Philly gangs, they are business-oriented and not just protection seekers. They compete directly with the black gangs in the sale of contraband. Despite their relatively small numbers in the
prison, their cohesiveness and connections to the much larger street gangs makes them a power to be reckoned with. It also makes them good money makers; their hustle being almost exclusively in the sale of drugs.

**THE HOUSE ALWAYS WINS**

I was sitting on the toilet in Harun’s cell killing some time. It was a cold winter weekend and the morning chill managed to soak through the concrete walls. The block was open for recreation which meant you could choose to freeze in the yard or hang around on the block running the ranges until lockdown at lunchtime.

“I understand why guys in here join gangs and fight each other over their hustles. I mean it’s like that out on the streets, but why?” I emphasized, “Why do they have to hate and hurt each other so much?”

As the prison gods would have it, a few months after I had lost my job in the Major’s office, Harun was hired to take my place. This meant he now lived on the block with me, and I could visit him in his cell. We ate meals together, went to the yard together, and did a lot of jailhouse philosophizing. We became inseparable and one of the unusual sights in Graterford; a kindly looking, bearded, dark-skinned black Muslim from Philadelphia walking alongside a young Jewish man from New Jersey, arguing about one thing or another.

“What don’t you understand, or is it you don’t want to understand?” Harun asked, not really giving me his full attention yet brandishing his usual jovial grin on his chubby face.

Harun had done time for a homicide in New York, but he was born and raised in Philadelphia and had served in the military. He knew many of the men in Graterford and understood the workings of the prison. So as it turned out, in addition to becoming my closest friend, Harun became my window into prison life. He knew the language, the games, the players, and the dangers, but most importantly, he was willing to share his insights with me. That is how Harun became my Old Head and I his eager student.

Like a thirsty sponge, I spent hours sitting on the toilet in my Old Head’s cell, absorbing whatever he told me. He would answer my questions and challenge my conclusions. Harun’s wisdom and profound understanding of the prison system had me mesmerized by the brave new world he revealed. It was almost as if he were walking me through a for-
eign country I had never known existed. While it was a place of danger, it boldly promised excitement, mystery and adventure. This was certainly not the America I had grown up in.

It took me many years to realize that the Graterford I had been thrust into, and which Harun had formally introduced me to, was really an obscure portion of the American dream I had been chasing most of my life. Because I never bothered to look behind the dream I never noticed the long, dark and crowded shadow that trailed; that now had me locked in its darkness.

I shifted a little on the toilet seat. Though Harun had stacked old newspapers on top of the commode to act as a cushion, I still could not get comfortable. "Why don’t you ever just answer the question?" I asked.

As usual, my Old Head was sitting on the cold, hard concrete floor of his cell just a few feet away. He was facing its threshold, which was slightly behind me, looking down trying to write a letter to his wife and children. His cell was drab, mostly containing only State-issued clothing, bedding and some old newspapers.

However, he did allow himself the luxury of an old bruised radio, given to him by a prisoner who had finally gone home. It was a sad looking thing, threatening to fall apart at anytime. But it picked up the jazz and news station which was all my Old Head needed.

I once asked Harun why he chose to live so spartan. I even offered to let him use my radio, which he refused and said, "I don’t like people taking things away from me. If I don’t have anything in here that’s mine, then the authorities can’t take any more away from me than they already have. Besides, I don’t think it’s healthy for a man to get too comfortable in prison."

Harun finally broke the silence. "It’s obvious, you’re not going to let me finish writing this letter to my wife, are you?" He put down his pen on the floor, took off his glasses and began pulling down on his salt and pepper beard. Meanwhile, a prison guard walked by, looked in and nodded his head. Technically, I was not allowed to enter another man’s cell, but that rule had never been enforced, at least not since I had been on the block. "Now what is it you want to know about?"

"We were talking about hate and violence and why there’s so much of it in here, especially between blacks and whites," I said a little annoy-
ed that my friend had apparently forgotten what I thought we had been
discussing for a while.

"You might have been talking about that," he chuckled, "but I was
trying to keep my wife interested in me." He said this as he watched
some prisoners walk past.

"Come on, Roon," I half-laughed. "I said I understand the gangs, the
competition and the hustling. Business is business, I guess a man has to
do something to stay busy in here. But you must admit the violence in
here is outrageous. People hate each other here - not dislike but real
hate."

Harun shook his head as he cautiously watched more prisoners walk
by. "I don't know why you need to ask a question like that. This is
prison and it is what it is. What more does a man need to know. It's not
like you're going to try and change anything. You wouldn't want to lose
your TV privileges, would you?" he asked sarcastically.

"That was ugly," I answered. "But how do you know what I'd do?
Besides, you don't have a TV and I don't see you trying to change any-
thing."

Harun laughed out loud and got up off the floor to sit on his bunk
which was right beside me. "You young guys coming to prison these
days are really something else. You all think everything has to have an
answer and that you're ready for the answers you do get."

After a long stare loaded with silence, my Old Head continued, "It's
all a game." His ever present grin vanished.

"What, that's it? That's what you think? All the beatings, stab-
bings and killing over cigarettes and commissary is a game? It's no
game. Men dying is no game," I protested.

Harun adjusted his body a little as he looked at me in amazement.
I must have been a bit more excited than I intended. With a gentle but
serious tone he cautioned, "Are you going to argue with me or are you
going to listen to what I have to say, because I don't feel like doing a
whole lot of arguing with you this morning."

I sat quietly on the lumpy stack of old newspapers, waiting for
Harun to share his view of the restless shadow we lived in. Meanwhile,
various shades of gray prisonscape images scrolled in front of us, as if
a black and white movie were being projected on to the framed opening
of his cell. Silent, unfriendly faces seemed to glide by in some primitive
drive to keep moving, look inside things and never smile. This kind of footage is what kept a man at all times alert in his cell.

"Most of the hate and anger in here is all a game," Harun repeated. "A hustle, just another way for people in prison to make money from something they can get their hands on real easy. Anger and hatred are a prison’s cash crop!"

"When whites hate blacks they are stealing the sympathy and favour of a mostly white and Christian administration. When blacks hate whites they are strongarming appeasements and concessions. The administration, they get the most. Violence and hatred in prison means more money, more guards, overtime and more prison. What incentive is there to keep prisons safe and humane? All staff has to do is sit back and let the men in prison tear each other apart so they can then cry to the legislatures and tell them how much more money they need because their prison is out of control. Just like with the prison swag men, dope boys, and laundry men, there’s something being sold and money being made. Only it’s a lot more money than most of the guys in here can even imagine. It’s a lot easier for everyone to profit from the hatred in here than it is to help the poor and ignorant do something positive with his life."

"Come on, Harun, you can’t believe that stuff," I interrupted. "You’re sounding real paranoid, like there’s a conspiracy everywhere."

I recalled Double D’s belief that the administration was actually encouraging gang activity in the prison. I found it interesting that Harun and Double D were so similar in their thinking, but I was not ready to believe either of them. The prison was too chaotic to be that deliberate.

"Well, then you tell me why with all the guards, guns, locks, gates, walls and money, they still can’t stop what’s going on in here?" he asked.

I really had no answer. In fact, it was a question I often asked myself. "Okay, Harun, if this is all a game and everybody knows it, then why do the men in here play it? Why do they play when it can get them hurt and even killed? Tell me that?" I was certain this question would get Harun to rethink his position.

Harun stood up and smiled confidently. "It’s like a Dodge City crap game in here, Victor, everyone knows it’s crooked, but they play it anyway - because it’s the only game in town!"

He then ran me out of his cell so he could finish writing his letter.
Pell Grants for Prisoners Part Deux: It’s Déjà Vu All Over Again

J. M. Taylor

Perhaps the most asinine amendment to the already mulish United States Omnibus Crime Bill (Currie, 1994) was submitted by Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) three days before the Senate overwhelmingly approved H.R. 3355. On November 16, 1993, the junior senator from Texas stood before the most exclusive millionaires’ club in the world and lamented that prisoners serving sentences “for offenses like carjacking, armed robbery, rape and arson received as much as $200 million in Pell [higher education] funds, courtesy of the American taxpayer” (Congressional Record - Senate, 1993). She explained to the august assembly that although the year before they had approved the Higher Education Reauthorization Act (HERA), which in part stipulated that prisoners serving death and life without parole sentences were prohibited from receiving Pell Grants, the current reduced prisoner eligibility was still “not right.” Thus the senator’s solution was to prohibit all state and federal prisoners from receiving Pell higher education grants.

The senator was not alone in her discontent, nor the only legislator moved to action. Three weeks before, waving a copy of the Pottstown, PA Mercurey above his head, Representative Timothy Holden from Pennsylvania fulminated before the C-SPAN cameras that he was appalled to learn from the newspaper’s report that prisoners were receiving $200 million in Pell Grant funding, allowing them free college educations (Berkey, 1993A). “There is an obligation to do the best you can to give incarcerated people a chance, but certainly not from a program that has been earmarked for low-income people to educate their children,” explained the representative. This, he argued, was “an outright abuse” (Berkey, 1993A).

The abuse the congressman referred to, besides the fact that prisoners were receiving this grant, was that colleges listed bogus students, inflated tuition bills, and submitted fraudulent housing charges for already “housed” prisoner-students. He also accused the understaffed office administering the grant program of negligence. Holden then declared that he was planning to co-sponsor Representative Bart Gordon’s (D-TN) Amendment 1168, which would exclude prisoners from Pell Grant eligibility. At the conclusion of his speech, the congress-
man was barraged by other House members questioning him about his proposal.

In the immortal words of that great uniquely American philosopher, Yogi Berra, "It's Déjà Vu all over again." Over three years before the Hutchinson Amendment, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) initiated what became an annual Capitol Hill exclusion-fest to effectively eliminate prisoners' post-secondary opportunities. In early 1992, Representative Thomas Coleman (R-MO) and Bart Gordon (D-TN) introduced a joint resolution (1168) that would prohibit, "any individual who is incarcerated in any Federal or State penal institution" from qualifying for Pell Grant funding (Congressional Record - House, 1992A).

Both the Senate and House proposals were eventually defeated after extensive, though low-keyed lobbying in committee hearings (Taylor, 1993A). In the spring of 1993, Gordon (sans Coleman) reintroduced H.R. 1168, only to see it languish and fade away in committee backwaters during the session, never to see a floor vote (Taylor, 1993B). Gordon, obviously a politician not to be deterred by failure or facts, resubmitted his Amendment for a third time, with it so sensationaly spotlighted by Congressman Holden. Finally, on April 20, 1994, the day after the broadcast of a highly biased and inflammatory report on the topic by the news magazine Dateline NBC (Taylor, 1994), the House (in a vote of 312 to 116) added its own expulsion amendment to the crime bill. When President Bill Clinton signed the Crime Bill in September 1994, prisoners became ineligible for Pell Grant disbursements.

What was lost in all the smoke and mirrors of the grandstanding rhetoric was the purpose of the Pell Grant program, the very real crime fighting effectiveness of higher education. Coleman, Gordon, Helms and others who supported Gordon's amendment used specious reasoning and disingenuous pronouncements which culminated in descriptions of dire predicament that bore no resemblance to reality.

Senator Hutchinson (1994) rationalized her proposal for citing the federal government's expenditure of $100 million a year on education and training available only to prisoners. She stated that the Pell Grant program was created, "in order to help the children of the poor and working class families to have a chance to go to college" (Congressional Record - Senate, 1993), and that more than one million students were denied grants because there was not enough money to go around. To punctuate the point of this ongoing injustice, she used the example of an
exasperated police officer whose daughter could not qualify for a Pell Grant. The Senator quoted his trite retort that, “maybe I should take off my badge and rob a store” (Congressional Record - Senate, 1993).

To begin with, the Senator was a few dollars off in her claim of the amount the federal government spends on prisoner education and training. The Department of Education’s Office of Correctional Education, which coordinates the dispersal of federal dollars to state correctional systems, reports that less than $70 million is passed on to educate prisoners (Schwartz and Koch, 1992). In addition most of these federal correctional education funds are dollars dedicated to particular literacy and adult basic education opportunities such as the G.E.D. program, allowing administrators limited discretion in how to spend them. Less than six percent ($1.3 billion) is spent on offender education, vocational training, substance abuse counselling and programs of all types (Lillis, 1993a). With this amount of funding, it should come as no surprise that the median education of those paroled in 1990 was at the 10th grade level (Perkins, 1993), while 70 percent of prisoners have drug problems (Krammer, 1993). One state (Nevada) even reported no educational budget item at all (Lillis, 1993a).

For years, educators have noted that there has been and continues to be considerable need for improvement in correctional education programs (Quay, 1973; Partlett, 1981; Rousch, 1983; Corcoran, 1985; O’Neil, 1990). National surveys (Bell, et al., 1979; Conrad, 1981; Hovarth, 1983; Ryan and Woodard, 1987; Lillis, 1994) have all found that the major problem facing correctional education programs was the lack of funding. By 1993, Jamie Lillis, a research assistant for the Corrections Compendium, noted that “budget cuts continue to whittle away at the quality and perhaps even the very existence of many education and training programs for incarcerated offenders”(1993b). With only 15 percent of the adult prison population enrolled in formal education programming and three times as many eligible (Lillis, 1994), it is a fallacious assumption by the senator that correctional education is already adequately supported in the United States.

In 1968, when Congress created the Basic Education Opportunity Grant program, later called Pell Grants in honor of Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI) who sponsored the legislation, the purpose was to assist the poor and working class to have a chance to finance a college education. This goal has been (and still is) being largely achieved. In 1993-94, 70
percent of the Pell Grants went to students from families who earned less than $15,000, with 95 percent of the grants going to those whose families earned less than $30,000 yearly (Congressional Record - Senate, 1993). Reversing the Bush administration’s policy of pushing eligibility levels ever lower (Toch and Slafsky, 1991), Congress began in 1992 to expand the program’s parameters to include more middle class families by raising the maximum family income ceiling from $33,000 to $42,000 (Krauss, 1992). By the 1993-94 academic year, over 4.3 million students received $6.4 billion in Pell Grant disbursements (Berkey, 1993b; Berkey 1993c).

Even with this level of funding, over a million students were denied Pell Grant assistance in 1994. The short-fall in assistance was a result of a combination of inflation, overall reduced aid, and swollen enrollments. Between 1980 and 1990, the annual tuition at a four-year public university rose a whopping 141 percent, and tuition at private colleges rose even higher (The Washington Spectator, 1992). The cost of higher education, as a share of median family income rose from 12 to 16 percent of the family budget when the student attended a public school and to nearly 40 percent up from 26 percent when the student attended a private institution. Yet as tuition increases surpassed those of even the much vaunted medical inflation rate, state and federal financial assistance increased by only 50 percent, barely covering more than a third of the ballooning costs (Wagner, 1993). Combine the two factors of tuition inflation and relative aid reductions with the 34 percent jump in college enrollments beginning at the start of the recession in 1991 (Berstein, 1993a), and you have a national enrollment of 14 million students (Berstein, 1993b) many of whom and their families struggle to pay tuition bills. Since four out of five American families’ real income declined during the 1980s (Sanders, 1993), with full-time working families of four existing below the poverty line growing from 12 to 18 percent of the population (Hitchens, 1993), the crunch to give junior or daughter (God forbid, both!) a college education has never been greater.

A significant point omitted by the promoters of the exclusionary legislation is that every student applicant to the Pell Grant program that qualifies receives a grant. The yearly Congressional appropriation, which has never been enough to fulfill the program’s established spending parameters, is divided on a sliding, need-based scale amongst those who receive grants. Therefore, not a single Pell Grant qualified student
has ever been denied a Pell Grant because a prisoner received one. With the elimination of prisoners from the Pell Grant program not a single additional student will receive a grant, but rather the funds that had gone to eligible prisoner-students will be distributed amongst the rest of the millions of recipients. If evenly disbursed, this means that grant recipients in 1995 received less than an additional $5.00 a semester, while some 30,000 prisoner-students were no longer able to go to school (Sullivan, 1994).

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In *Who Goes To Prison?*, the researchers reported that 65 percent of prisoners had not completed high school. A like number had no specific job skills, and half had never been employed. A national survey a decade ago defined between three to four-fifths of the prison population as functionally illiterate (Bell et al., 1984). All the while, *Workforce 2000* observes that the majority of new jobs will require a skilled and college educated workforce, with the majority of this labour pool to be drawn from female and minority populations. With their gross lack of educational attainment, 60 percent of the prison population composed of minorities (Stephan, 1992), and 70 percent having existed below the poverty line the year preceding their incarceration (Perkins, 1993), does the question that prisoners are needy or deserving students even need to be asked?

It seems evident that even with the inclusion of prisoners the Pell Grant program is fulfilling its stated objective; assisting the poor and working class to finance a college education. This is especially so when considering the opinions of those voting for the *Higher Education Reauthorization Act*, who represent a wide range on the political spectrum. “One of the central goals of this legislation was,” thought to be by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), “to increase access to higher education for all Americans” (Congressional Record - Senate, 1992). Senator David Durenberger (D-MN) observed that “we do need to make higher education more accessible for every American student. And we do need to be accommodating to the changing nature of the student population” (Congressional Record - Senate, 1992). On the far right, Senator Phil Graham (R-TX), Hutchinson’s senior, stated that “ensuring access to higher education for all segments of society helps to equalize opportu-
nities for all people to pursue and achieve the American dream (Congressional Record - Senate, 1992).”

Senator Hutchinson’s lamentation over the one million applicants who were denied grants is a specious point. The already noted economic and demographic impact of double-digit tuition inflation, single digit aid increases, and exploding enrollments coupled with families’ shrinking real incomes, places a strain on an admittedly wallowing bureaucracy (Associated Press, 1992). Additionally, those “denied” assistance did not qualify for it in the first place. As a matter of due course, financial aid counselors advise students to apply for anything and everything possible, and then use the evaluative reports to assist in their own aid disbursement decisions. Furthermore, in the 1994-95 academic year, an additional 324,000 grants were awarded, totalling 4.7 million students (over one-quarter of the national collegiate enrollment) helped by the Pell Grant program (Berkey, 1993c).

Finally, the dramatically quoted police officer’s frustration is a little disingenuous to cite, and perhaps his is a hypocritical ire to boot. The family’s annual income exceeded $46,000 and they admitted that they did not save for their daughter’s education because they adopted her late in their lives (Berkey, 1993c). Not only did the family income surpass the grant program’s Congressionally set ceiling of $42,000 by $4,000, the father was eligible for over $30,000 in forgiveable federal education loans through the exclusive Perkins Loan Cancellation Program for law enforcement and correctional officers; a program not available to the average citizen. Thus while the average prisoner-student earns a skill related Associate degree costing less than $3,000 in Pell Grants (Sarri, 1993), the irate cop can receive ten times as much federal money to improve his skills, advance his career, and raise his income at the public trough. The ironic aspect of these (supposedly antithetical) two tax-funded programs is that they both end up fighting crime.

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Representative Holden’s arguments against prisoner Pell Grant participation was based on the Pottstown Mercury’s sensationalized series (Gauker, 1993), which in turn was substantially furnished with facts and figures from Congressman Gordon’s office. Yet analysis of Gordon’s objections still do not hold up. He complains that prisoners un-
justly take a large number of grants away from traditional students, some schools unfairly provide, "prisoner-exclusive scholarships" that are not available to other students, no one tracks prisoners to see if they use their educations "properly" upon release, and other funds should be used to provide these opportunities so as not to unnecessarily duplicate government services.

During the original House debate over Amendment 1168, Gordon's side kick in that ignoble misadventure, Coleman, claimed 100,000 prisoners received Pell Grants each year (Congressional Record - House, 1992). It turned out to be an interesting statistic. It would have meant that one out of every 8 prisoners at the time (there were 800,000 prisoners in the United States during that year) were college students (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992), while just a few years earlier only one out of every one hundred prisoners had a college education (Greenfield, 1985). Now Gordon "estimated" that only half of the number cited by Coleman (50,000 prisoners) received Pell Grants totalling some $200 million in funding (Berkey, 1993b). In the same breath, however, Coleman admitted that Pell awards for prisoners averaged only $1400, which if multiplied by 50,000 equals only $70 million in funding. The ludicrousness of both sets of figures is that they bare no resemblance to reality.

In 1993, Lillis (1994) reported there were approximately 38,000 prisoner-college students in the nation while other studies (Berkey, 1993d; Sarri, 1993) revealed that at most 80 percent of these students received Pell Grants. In other words, at best just over 30,000 prisoners received Pell Grants in 1993 (Pell, 1994) at an average of $1,400 per grant for approximately $42 million. Approximately six-tenths of 1 percent of the $6 billion in Pell Grant funds distributed in 1993 went to prisoner-students; all told, far less than the 50,000 recipients and $200 million in aid, cited by proponents of the exclusionary legislation.

The Representative was also critical of schools giving prisoner-scholarships to cover the differential between the Pell Grant award and standard tuition schedules. Gordon believes that since these prisoner scholarships are not available to non-incarcerated students, they are discriminatory in nature (Berkey, 1993b). The schools that provide these in-house tuition stipends can do so because of the reduced costs involved in educational programs in the penal settings. Classrooms, utilities and maintenance are provided at no expense, and student services ranging
from marketing to counselling to placement are greatly reduced as well (Blumenstyk, 1991). If these scholarships were not provided, in many cases there would be no other way for prisoner-students to pay tuition, even reduced tuition, since they are excluded from even minimum wage jobs, barred from loan programs, and excluded from other grants and scholarships. And now the honorable representative from Tennessee objects to schools who are able to pass along their reduced expenses as student assistance in the process of lowered tuition charges.

A point consistently stressed by Gordon is that prisoners need to be tracked to see if higher education does indeed pay off upon their release (Berkey, 1993f). Never mind that no other Pell Grant recipients are tracked to see if they "properly" utilize their college educations; prisoners are a special class that must be continually tracked. Howard Petters III (1993), director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, emphatically states that, "statistics have proven that investing in correctional education reduces the likelihood of recidivism, enhances employability upon release and thus taxability, and even benefits the prison environment for all who live and work there.

Even with some mixed results, during the 1970s studies from New Jersey (Thomas, 1974), Alabama (Thompson, 1976), Maryland (Blackburn, 1979) and Pennsylvania (Blumenstein and Cohen, 1979) reported substantial reductions in recidivism rates amongst college students. During the 1980s, a plethora of evaluations from Texas (Gaither, 1980), Michigan (Haviland, 1982), New Mexico (Psychology Today, 1983), California (Chase and Dickover, 1983), Ohio (Holloway and Moke, 1986), Washington, D.C. (Lorton Prison College Program - Annual Report, 1990) and in Canada (Duguid, 1981) revealed either reduced recidivism rates or at least reductions in the seriousness of new offenses. By 1990, two massive studies of nearly one-thousand prisoner-students each were concluded in New York and Michigan. The New York Department of Correctional Services reported that earning a college degree while incarcerated was positively linked with successful post-release adjustment for students who completed the program (Clark, 1991). In the Michigan Department of Corrections - Jack Community College program, it was learned that not only were graduates, who were identified as, "some of the most hardened criminals to be found in the United States," returned to prison significantly less than the average convict,
but when they did it was for less serious offenses (Wreford, 1990, p. 62).

Peter Drucker (1989) observes that in today’s world, education, especially post-secondary education, is the major determinant of an individual’s employability, career prospects and future. For decades it has been shown that there is a correlation between unemployment and dysfunctional behaviour including crime (Robinson, 1990), with unemployment itself being a significant contributor in parolee recidivism (Lawyer and Dertinger, 1993). Reports from New York (Wolf and Syles, 1981), Ohio (Holloway and Moke, 1986) and Canada (Duguid, 1981) during the recession of the early 1980s found graduates of prison college programs were employed up to twice the rate of other ex-prisoners. The Pennsylvania Business Institute, which operates a program at the state’s Graterford Correctional Facility, reported that of the 55 prisoner students released so far, only a few have returned and nearly all are employed (Berkey, 1993g).

A 1988 study concluded that society receives financial benefits of at least 12 percent on its total public and private investment in higher education (Bernstein and Magnusson, 1993). A recent National Bureau of Economic Research study reported that for each year of college a student completed, they earned 5 percent more than a high school graduate (Samuelson, 1992), and *U.S. News and World Reports* recently reported that over a working lifetime, a college graduate can expect to earn 1.9 times the likely earnings of a high school graduate (Zuckerman, 1995). Conservatively figuring a tax burden of 30 percent (Gergen, 1992), the prison college graduate more than pays for his incarceration and education just through taxation, not to mention law abiding behaviour as opposed to the norm of continued criminality.

As demands on governments exceed their fiscal capabilities, it is more necessary than ever before to invest in “smart” programs that not only reduce ever greater demands, but also add to the economic strength of the society. Over the years, several studies (Seashore, et al., 1976; Haber, 1983; Greenwood and Turner, 1985) have commented on the cost-savings that post-secondary correctional education programming can provide through reduced recidivism and increased taxation. My analysis of the possible cost-savings from increasing the number of paroled offenders with a college education to a level of 60 percent parity with the national rate of adults with a like amount of education (approxi-
mately 25 percent), revealed cost-savings of non-incurred reincarceration costs of $120 million annually (Taylor, 1992). Taking the model a step further, I found that by using two different crime-cost formulas, that the cost-savings to society of crime not committed by rehabilitated ex-offenders ranged from 2 to twenty billion dollars (Taylor, 1992). An IBM computer program called “Tax Users vs. Tax Generators” produced a report that only a 1.6 percent reduction in recidivism over a 15 year time span in Alabama would increase tax revenues from that subpopulation by 30 percent, while decreasing the demand for correctional spending by over 40 percent (Chancellor, 1992). Chris Marschner, the Hagerstown Junior Community College prison program coordinator, states simply that, “the rate of return on educating a prisoner is so great that [only] an idiot wouldn’t do it” (Money, 1992). This is a comment that makes one wonder about those who backed the legislation to eliminate the funding for such opportunities.

A final objection by the Congressman to the use of the Pell Grant program by prisoners is that other federal programs offer rehabilitative training and literacy education, and, “mixing the roles of the federal student aid and prisoner rehabilitation leads to a wasteful service duplication” (Berkey, 1993g). As noted previously, the “other programs” that exist are grossly underfunded, limited in scope, and are not applicable to college programming. Furthermore, higher education is a highly efficient means to reduce offender recidivism. Without Pell Grant financing these opportunities simply cease to exist (Lohman, 1992). Senator Pell comments that he does, “believe prisoners should be able to use a Pell Grant to achieve a college education. Other programs are not the answer. They are very inadequately funded” (Berkey, 1993b). David Evans, Pell’s staff director, scoffs at Gordon’s suggestion to use other appropriations to fund the prison college programs. “I don’t buy that answer,” Evans says. “It’s the way of getting out of it. Take the money from here and get it from somewhere else. There are no excesses of money at the federal level” (Berkey, 1993h).

Evans also disagrees with the assumption that prisoners deprive traditional students of Pell Grants. He claims prisoners are not doing so (Berkey, 1993h). Dr. Gary Rizzo, associate dean of Montgomery County Community College, who has been monitoring the school’s prison program for a decade, is even more adamant in his objections to this assumption. “Those traditional students are taking money away
from prisoners,” Rizzo argues. “There’s no compelling reason to deny [prisoners]. Their logic is flawed” (Berkey, 1993h).

Dr. Steven Steurer, the executive director of the Correctional Education Association and himself a prison teacher, openly wonders why correctional populations are continually treated so differently than the rest of society. In referring to the exclusion of whole state prison populations from Pell Grant eligibility because of the “states’” violation of the supplant/supplement rule imposed by the 1992 Higher Education Reauthorization Action (HERA), Steurer observes that everywhere else students apply for Pell Grants at their colleges and are declared eligible if they meet the criteria. In his opinion, “the policy is rather inconsistent and, to say the least, unfair” (Steurer, 1993).

In the final measure, perhaps the strongest reason to allow prisoners Pell Grant eligibility comes from the simple words of a graduate of these programs. Commenting on earlier Congressional attempts to exclude prisoner grant participation, the ex-prisoner reflected that, “I would hate to think what would have happened to me if there was no college program while I was incarcerated – without it I would have joined the ranks of repeat offenders and become another addition to the escalating figures of recidivism” (Justice Watch, 1992).

* * *

The real issue behind the smokescreen thrown up to obscure the problem is not the relative infinitesimal use of Pell Grants by prisoners, rather it is the overall higher education funding crunch coupled with stagnant if not declining family incomes. The attack on prisoners receiving Pell Grants amounts to shopping around for scapegoats. As political analyst William Greider (1991) explains, it is, “a way to change the subject from what is really hurting people.” So that, “whenever people are losing their jobs and social decline is visible, it’s easier to blame the troubles” on minority segments who seem to be, “getting more than their share.” The fact that politicians avoid addressing substantative issues with positive actions, leaves little wonder why a recent Gallup Poll found that law makers rank below lawyers and even talk-show hosts in public esteem (Wildstrom, 1993). The rogues gallery assembled, in effect, to perpetuate crime through assuring high rates of recidivism by
denying prisoners access to Pell Grants is a classic example of the hypocrisy emanating from Washington in the guise of governance. Very few of us would even think to question the lack of moral integrity possessed by prisoners; it seems to be a given. However, should we not at least question the political integrity of those obtusely promoting the exclusion of prisoners from Pell Grant assistance?

Senator Hutchinson represents the great state of Texas, which brought the nation the macabre spectacle of dueling gubernatorial candidates outbidding one another on the number of prisoners they would fry if elected (Minton, 1993), proposed state legislation to ship prisoners to China as a cost-savings measure, the perennial bill to punish thieves by cutting off their fingers (Parade Magazine, 1994), and 56 prisons currently under construction (Heines, 1994). From this wellspring of criminal justice philosophy, the senator not only voted for the most repressive and bloody (adding over 50 new death penalty crimes) legislation in U.S. history, but in addition proposed the elimination of funding for the most effective crime fighting program in corrections today. And all the while she was busy lethally injecting convicts and expelling prisoner-students in the senate, Hutchinson was battling her second indictment at home for misusing State property and employees to conduct personal business and political campaigning (Irvin, 1994). Perhaps it was the senator’s alleged misappropriations of public funds that sensitized Hutchinson to what she myopically viewed as another theft on the public purse when she sponsored the prisoner Pell Grant ban. Hutchinson should be cautious, though, for some day she may need something to occupy her time when she is in one of those new Texas prisons.

Then we have everybody’s favourite troglodyte, father of the prisoner Pell Grant exclusion and self-admitted bigot, Senator Jesse Helms, whose state of North Carolina outranks even Texas on the Justice Fellowship’s Criminal Justice Crisis Index scale (Inside Journal, 1993). It was Helm’s proclaimed concern over student college funding that supposedly prompted his original prisoner exclusion legislation; though, later, hypocritically, the senator cast the single vote against the Higher Education (Pell Grant) Reauthorization Act (Krauss, 1992). Even his past ghost-writer [Leonard, 1992], the conservative national columnist George Will (1994), recently considered the proposed funding ban and felt it was, “grandstanding and chest thumping,” and came out in support of prisoners receiving Pell Grants.
Another in the lineup was Representative Thomas Coleman from Missouri. This state shuttered all of its prison college programs early in 1994 because it had reduced its funding for prisoner education and treatment from 3.3 percent of its 1983 corrections budget (Ryan and Woodard, 1987) to only 1.2 percent of its 1993-94 budget (Corrections Compendium, 1993). The specific elimination of state funding for its post-secondary correctional education program triggered the 1992 HERA’s supplant-supplement rule, which caused the entire state prison population to be declared ineligible for Pell Grant assistance as the state dropped below its 1988 prison higher education funding level as the Show-Me-State did. So as Coleman ludicrously fulminated about 100,000 prisoners receiving Pell Grants, he sent out 255,000 postcards to constituents at a cost in excess of $50,000 proclaiming that he was outraged by the Congressional checking scandal, and, that he did not bounce a single draft (Insight, 1992). Pete Sepp of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU) commented that, “the money he spent on that would probably rival anything he could have bounced in the bank” (Insight, 1992). The NTU identified Coleman as among the top seven percent of the users of the Congressional frank (free postage), which cost the taxpayers $80 million in 1992. Coleman defended his use of the franking privilege claiming the House Banking Scandal was the number one issue among his constituents, and, “the people of my district need to know their member of Congress still has integrity and didn’t bounce any checks” (Insight, 1992). He also spent enough in the single mailing to furnish over 33 students with $1400 in Pell Grants.

All in all, the near bumbling efforts of Hutchinson, Helms and Coleman pale beside the pernicious actions of Holden and Gordon in the debate. Though it is possible that Representative Timothy Holden’s remarks on the House floor were made out of ignorance that does not lessen their deleterious effects including arousing the feelings of those who listened to him because of the erroneous information he conveyed. Regurgitating and misrepresenting the information reported in the Mercury series, Holden cited a litany of abuses ranging from school-based fraud to inadequate oversight of the grant programs, to “lifers” receiving free college educations (Berkey, 1993a). The Congressman’s ire was not only misplaced, but exposed either his lack of reading comprehension, knee-jerk reactionism, or deliberate misrepresentation of the facts.
Abuses of the Pell Grant program were sadly rather common during the tenure of the Reagan administration. More than 1,600 schools (mostly fly-by-night trade schools teaching skills such as cooking and trucking (Foust, 1993)) have been closed during a recent two-year Department of Education fraud investigation (Berkey, 1993f). Focusing on corrections, only a handful of propriety schools with prisoners composing 100 percent of their enrollments were found to be guilty of abuses. These abuses ranged from charging prisoner-students for room and board to filing claims for non-existent students. Meanwhile, some three dozen ultra-orthodox Jewish seminaries in the New York area alone were accused of illegally bilking the Pell Grant program for as much as $40 million (Fenyvsi, 1993); more than the annual total disbursements to prisoner-students. Yet, no one was calling for the banishment of would-be cooks, truckers or rabbis from the Pell Grant program for what their schools did, only prisoners.

The allegations of the DOE's Office of Post-Secondary Education (OSPE) of mismanagement of the federal grant and loan programs are reasonable charges. Instances of store front schools, non-resident students, and non-enrolled students receiving millions of dollars in aid supported the mismanagement charges. However, this is another legacy of Reagan staffing cuts that left only 3 administrators to police 800 schools in the southwest (Toch, 1993), for example. To accuse the DOE of negligence in administering student aid programs is the same as berating the wheelchair basketball league for not having a team in the NCAA's Final Four. In none of these "fixes" to the Pell Grant program are there DOE-OSPE staffing increases. So even with the more stringent regulations that helped to convict the fraudulent schools the department will still occasionally drop the ball.

The really insidious, inflammatory charge made by Holden was that prisoners on death row and serving life without parole sentences were receiving free (i.e. worthless) college degrees. This simply was no longer the case and Holden knew it if he actually read the newspaper story he waved above his head. The 1992 legislation took a number of steps to rectify existing problems in the Pell Grant program relating to prison education. Besides the discriminatory supplant/supplement rules, housing allowances were eliminated from prisoner grants, only one-quarter of a school's enrollment could be prisoners (although a waiver could be granted to non-profit degree granting institutions) and the political con-
cession was made that death row and life without parole prisoners were ineligible for grants (CURE, 1992). By the time Holden pontificated before the C-SPAN cameras, the "abuses" he cited out of ignorance or spite to antagonize a membership terrified of being seen as "soft on crime" had been a moot point for over a year.

Representative Bart Gordon, though, is by far the worst offender in not only the misinformation campaign, but in essentially promoting a racist agenda. Since the introduction of his Amendment 1168, the Congressman has been furnished with numerous evaluation studies and reports (including many of those cited here) detailing the effectiveness of post-secondary correctional education programs in significantly reducing participants' costly and painful cycle of recidivating through the system time and time again. His continued objection to prisoner Pell Grant funding because no one has tracked Pell Grant funded prisoner-students' post-release behaviour is a totally disingenuous allegation. No matter where the financing originates, it is the education, not the dollars that pay for it, that effects the change in the students. Ignoring numerous studies by the representative, some of which indeed noted Pell Grant financing, is particularly obstreperous. Along with the myriad of other erroneous "facts" cited by Gordon, his credibility on the issue, to say the least, is suspect.

Finally, Charles Sullivan, the executive director of the Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants public interest group, explains that Gordon's legislation smacks of racism since the majority of the penal population is composed of minorities (Berkey, 19931), and thus minority groups will be disproportionately affected by banning the Pell Grants for prisoners. In fact, several studies (Blumenstein and Cohen, 1979; Haviland, 1982; Holloway and Moke, 1986; Wreford, 1990) have noted that post-secondary correctional education enrollments largely reflect the ethnic composition of prisons. Beverley Coles, director of education and housing for the NAACP, observes that the higher education shortfall has made college education increasingly inaccessible for African-American students, 85 percent of whom receive some type of aid (Del Valle, 1992). And with more young black males in prison than on college campuses (Maurer, 1990), Sullivan (1991) wonders, as absurd as the concept is, about having to go to prison to receive a college education, are we now going to close that avenue off, as well?
Lillis (1993b) in the *Corrections Compendium*, comments on financing correctional education. She points out that “voters and legislators around the country must choose between inmate rehabilitation or inmate recidivism.” By playing to the “cheap seats” in the rhetoric of getting tough on crime and fighting government waste, the advocates for excluding prisoners from Pell Grant participation are only exacerbating the agony perpetuated by the continued criminalization, victimization and reincarceration plaguing our society.

In the final analysis, piercing the fog of how many grants, how much money, how else to fund, etcetera, the elimination of prisoner Pell Grant eligibility effects the closure of post-secondary correctional education opportunities in the United States. Questioning the wisdom of the ban when it was still a proposal, Fernando Garcia, a 21 year-old prisoner at the Camp Hill Penitentiary in Pennsylvania, wondered, “Why stop me from becoming a better person?” (Berkey, 1993f). With all the factors considered, “Why indeed?”

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Deconstructing “Criminalisation”: The Politics of Collective Education in the H-blocks

Jacqueline Dana and Seán McMonagle

For people involved in liberation struggles, it is not enough to commit oneself to the ideal of freedom; instead one must break from the structures put into place by the oppressor government and society. One of the crucial steps in gaining freedom is forming a system of self-education where the ideas of a revolutionary movement can be developed, tested through discussion and passed on to others within the movement. In the case of the Irish Republican movement, a good deal of this education takes place within the confines of prison, amongst political prisoners.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire proposed that oppressed peoples wishing to be free must first learn not to perceive of themselves as ignorant outsiders with an inferior culture to that of the dominating class. According to Freire all people possess knowledge to bring about their own freedom. This is where education comes to the forefront of the struggle. Friere (1989) argues in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,

> No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from their oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption (Friere, 1989: 39)

One of the problems with some populist-type movements is that the leaders often belong to the upper class, members of the “educated” elite, which invariably possess, in Freire’s judgement, “a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know” (Friere, 1989: 46). In this way oppression never is addressed head on, and substantive changes never come about, for the leaders second-guess the people’s needs (while rarely taking actions that would drastically alter the status quo).

The oppressed instead must come to realize their responsibility for their own liberation, and accept their ability to transform their own situation themselves. In the end revolutionary change can only come through dialogue, not from what Freire calls “libertarian propaganda.” Education then must take on a new form - instead of indoctrination it also must take on the form of dialogue where everyone’s experiences and knowl-
edge are considered and explored. Students become not receptacles for knowledge but "critical co-investigators" working together with their "teacher" to learn new truths about their situation. As Freire puts it, within such a system "no one teaches, nor is anyone self-taught. Men teach each other, mediated by the world" (Fríere, 1989: 67-68).

Freire's concept of non-hierarchical, dialogue-based education can be applied to the system begun by prisoners within the prisons of Northern Ireland, particularly within the H-Blocks at Long Kesh. From a desire to share and enjoy their native Irish culture as well as from their need to learn more about the political struggle, incarcerated Irish Republicans developed an educational strategy to combat the pervasiveness of the English world view. Education, in fact, became a focal point in the battles against Britain that would be staged within prison walls.

When large numbers of Irish Nationalists and Republicans were arrested and interned beginning in 1971, the new prisoners made a determined effort to share whatever knowledge they possessed of their traditional Irish culture with the rest of the internees. In Long Kesh internment camp, alongside the IRA military drills, weapons classes and strategy discussions that were a priority at the time, the few POWs who knew Irish Gaelic or had a knowledge of history or other subjects became teachers, sharing their knowledge with the others within the freedom of the "cages" where there was little interference from guards or restriction of movement.

This process changed dramatically with the introduction of the new prison system, in place after 1976. Following the recommendations of Lord Diplock, officials built a new prison with traditional cells, and in tandem began a policy of "criminalisation." Henceforth, instead of internment without trial, and subsequent prisoner-of-war status and treatment, political prisoners were sent to Her Majesty's Prison Maze, known popularly as the H-Blocks. Here they were expected to wear a prisoner uniform and be restricted to individual cells, relinquishing all elements of their inherent political status.

The British government was not prepared for the level of resistance to criminalisation that would come with the new policy. Newly convicted Irish Republicans refused to wear a uniform and thereby accept the British attempt to depoliticize their motivations, and this meant in turn that they had no options other than to replace the detested uniform - their only clothing option - with blankets wrapped around themselves.
Because they did not “conform” to prison rules, they were denied free association and many other “privileges” granted to conforming prisoners. Unfortunately, this meant the end to the formal prisoner taught classes in language, history and politics that had existed within the cages of the internment camp.

However, the “blanket protest” as it became known, along with the subsequent “dirty” and “no-wash” protests, did not bring an end to political education on the part of the prisoners. Because they were on protest, Republican prisoners could not sit together and have classes. Instead of admitting defeat, the prisoners discovered that they could still educate one another, but now by shouting to their neighbours through doors, out windows or along water pipes. In this way a slow process was established where all men in a wing could share information by repeating it along the line until everyone was included. As former Republican political prisoner Felim O’Hagan explained, such a process had a great “levelling” effect on the prisoners (O’Hagan and McKeown, 1991: 7). Individual status amongst the prisoners was effectively negated by a lack of interaction, forcing them to acknowledge themselves as equals. Without the availability of books, classrooms or even anything but the crudest of writing materials, each man became equally responsible for contributing his own knowledge to the best of his ability. Those who had become fluent in Irish while in the internment camp, for example, now were able to bring their knowledge to the corridors of the H-Blocks.

After five years of prison protest and hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981, the British government unofficially began to grant many of the Republican prisoners’ demands, including 24-hour association in the wings and access to study materials. As a result, the prisoners now are able to organize themselves in a communal society, where everything is shared as equally as possible, including the general maintenance of the wings, food received in parcels, postage stamps, and the use of the television and other items. For these men, living as political prisoners means the ‘community’ always comes before personal gain.

Living in this way teaches the men how to interact on an equal level. Regardless of one’s position outside, in the H-Blocks no one is considered more or less important than another, and each man is obligated to contribute to the best of his abilities. In turn, this system affected the formation of the prisoners’ own educational system. The communal lifestyle encouraged the prisoners as a whole not to return to a hierarchi-
cal educational system where one person alone would be the teacher and authority. The prisoners instead arrange classes and debates in such a way that they incorporate everyone who wishes to participate, holding each person accountable for doing a fair amount of reading and then interpreting the ideas and leading discussions, and appointing only a facilitator to keep things on track. In this way they become actively involved in the pursuit of knowledge instead of simply being passive recipients.

In order to understand the prisoners' educational program, it is helpful to examine some of the classes that the prisoners commonly organize for themselves in the Republican wings of the H-Blocks. Each wing sponsors many different subjects pertinent to the interests of the prisoners, including historical analysis, political ideologies, jail history and Irish language. Each rang, as a class is called in Irish, usually is led by two men who ensure that all avenues and sides of any given topic are explored. These leaders facilitate the discussion by posing questions to the others and make sure that there is adequate debate on all subjects.

The first rang new prisoners participate in, and the only one required of those considering themselves political prisoners, is "Jail History." The class covers the history of Republican prisoners in Long Kesh, from the time of the blanket protest and hunger strikes to the present day. Those in the political wings make this class compulsory because it examines the importance of the struggle inside the H-Blocks, helping to define what being an Irish Republican POW is all about. In this class, men discuss the prisoners' successful struggle for de facto political status and better living conditions for all Republicans held in prison in Northern Ireland. From others who experienced the early days of the prison regime they learn how the prisoners in Long Kesh and elsewhere achieved the unofficial political status that they enjoy now through both physical resistance and determined protests.

As a result of the jail history classes Republican activists learn they can continue the struggle even while incarcerated. Whether on the outside a prisoner was an active IRA volunteer or simply a civilian who sold the political newspaper An Phoblacht/The Republican News, there is a role for him within the prison - he learns not to become complacent and accept his fate at the hands of the British government. All POWs discover that because of the Republican educational program no one is useless, and that being in prison does not mean that the British govern-
ment has defeated them. Their work just takes on a different form and operates within a different context.

Other classes address the prisoners’ political involvement from a theoretical viewpoint. A frequent class is the politics or ideology *rang*, which is commonly made up of about eight men who examine different ideologies such as capitalism, socialism, liberalism and fascism. The men read up on one of the ideologies each week and debate positive and negative aspects of the topic. In this way they have a better grasp on different methods of government and economic systems, making it easier to consider the ramifications of those which the Republican movement espouses. After a group completes a basic introductory *rang* in ideologies, some of the men may elect to go deeper into these issues, choosing to have a more intensive capitalism versus socialism *rang*, where they can debate the specific merits and flaws to each system.

Continuing from the days of internment are the abundant Irish language classes. In the early days of the H-Blocks, when men were on the blanket protest, future hunger striker Bobby Sands was one of the main people to encourage the use of Irish in the wings. Having become fluent himself while in the cages of the internment camp, he began teaching the others Irish “out the doors.” This entailed shouting the lessons up and down the wing, and the “students,” if lucky enough to have a bit of graphite and toilet paper, would write the words down. Others would write the lessons on the walls if possible or try to commit the lesson to memory. In this way Sands and other Irish speakers began the classes, with the focus on general phrases about day-to-day activities.

Quickly, the study of Irish became a crucial part of the POWs resistance to the prison regime. Since most prison officials did not understand Irish, the prisoners took advantage of this, and much of the Irish spoken conveyed information about the prison and the guards to other prisoners. When they realized the effectiveness and popularity of this system, Sands and others began teaching the language in earnest, helping the men build up a much larger vocabulary so they could engage in conversations. It was generally acknowledged among Republican prisoners that if they wanted to know what was happening then they would have no choice but to learn Irish.

With the end of the protests, prisoners set up a formal educational program for Irish. As it operates today, those with good Irish organize a number of courses for different levels of learners. Those with a moder-
ate knowledge of Irish might teach a bun rang, or beginner’s course, while those prisoners holding gold fainni and considered fluent take the advanced rangs. In the beginners’ class the prisoners tackle easy vocabulary that allows them to express ordinary actions that take place on the wings. The higher level classes use textbooks, but these books are left up to the discretion of whoever facilitates the class. In all Irish classes, everyone is encouraged to test each other. The “teacher” is there to facilitate and guide the rang, but ultimately everyone is responsible to himself and for each other.

Another class, one known as “Historical Analysis,” is perhaps the most important to the Republicans, for in many ways participating in this group helps solidify their own ideas on the struggle and helps form their dynamic ideology. Functioning as a discussion and debate circle more than a “class,” Historical Analysis allows POWs to explore the history behind incidents in the period 1966-1986, such as the civil rights marches, the fall of Stormont, internment, the hunger strikes and Bloody Sunday. The class has a certain amount of pre-planned structure. A draft outline of contemporary Irish history was written down by one of the POWs, and it is this draft that the prisoners use as a starting point. In the draft, each chapter outlines an important event and asks questions for the class to tackle. For example, the first chapter considers the Northern Ireland government in the years 1966-69, with the problems created by the conflict between civil rights marches and Stormont, and poses the question, “Was the state reformable?”

A section of the Historical Analysis class would have about eight men participating, and each week two of the men would take turns covering one of the chapters in the outline and assigning reading to the others. The week’s leaders draw up a number of points to discuss, as well as formulate questions to ask the others as a way to initiate discussion. The group then examines the topic from all sides, trying to determine what happened, why the event happened the way it did, and engaging in debate to decide if the Republican movement could have done anything differently and what lessons can be learned from the event. In this way British, Loyalist and IRA actions are all held up to equal scrutiny. Sometimes the group will agree with the ideas in the drafted history, but often they see new aspects of the event that had not been considered before. Furthermore, as an important dimension to this process, often at least one of the men in the wing may have been a
participant or witness to the event discussed and can share his experiences with the others, bringing an emotional and human side to the otherwise academic discussions.

Besides the classes, on each wing there is the Sinn Féin Cumann, a gathering of some of the more politically active men on the wing. This group sponsors at least one discussion a month on a variety of current events and issues important to the men as a whole. Some recent topics include the recent IRA cease-fire, the Downing Street Declaration, issues of crime and punishment in the community, sectarianism, and the role of the Irish language and culture in the struggle. Overall, those involved in the Cumann work through issues affecting the Republican community as a whole, both inside and outside of prison, and it would be these men that members of Sinn Féin consult for a representative selection of the feelings and ideas of the prisoners. And once out of prison, many Cumann leaders become more actively involved in the political side of the movement, some even becoming Sinn Féin candidates in elections.

Seen together, these classes and debates open up a dialogue between the prisoners where all who choose to do so can take an active role in the education and political development of the wing. No one needs to sit and receive information handed down by experts removed from the scene of the struggle - instead, everyone becomes both teacher and student. And information and knowledge is not static and pre-determined, but instead is constantly updated and developed through the combination of everyone's experience and analysis.

As a result, the education that takes place in the H-Block empowers the prisoners to work for the end to their own oppression. Although many of them attend the prison administration's classes to A and O Level exams and work within the prison's Open University system to get university credits, the prisoners' political education, that which refines their knowledge of the struggle and their own place within it, occurs in the wings, unofficial but very much alive. As long as they continue to explore their own culture and history and debate the ramifications of events outside, the Republican prisoners resist the criminal label the British government tries to attach to them. Ultimately the "educational programme" in the H-Blocks helps Republican prisoners remain actively involved in the movement, and in some ways even contributes to the movement as a whole, for it is the men in the H-Blocks - the prisoners - who have the leisure time to read and debate topics fully. These men
come to terms with what it means to be an Irish Republican activist in today’s political climate, and they also come to a serious understanding about what the struggle has meant to the people of Northern Ireland for the last twenty-five years.

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Grief is too present in my life. I have to start writing this story or die. I am not sure how I will die. Several possibilities come to mind but none with any guarantee of success. I have been finding it increasingly easy to locate the carotid artery in my neck. Seems simple. I will only need the blade from my pink BIC and a few moments of resolute determination. But then I see the face of Marie. She lay on the cold gray cement outside my cell. From behind grim bars I stood a frozen watch as the blood oozed from the gory slashes on her neck. She did not die. Marie was put in steel shackles. She bled a lot until a nurse could be found. Trusting her death to a BIC did not work.

Hanging, from what I hear, is messy and despite determination, death not a given. Johnny’s long-lingering coma is grim witness to this fact. I suppose none of us survive long without some sense of hope. For those entombed behind tonnes of concrete and steel of the Kingston Prison for Women (“P4W”), the most fragile fragment of hope is incredibly precious. Johnny’s fragment dissolved. She was a warrior woman who decided to hang to death but failed. For months she was held by the cruel threads of a mindless coma until death finally came. I do not trust hanging. But Johnny is also connected to Pat Bear and hence to my story.

The first time I saw Pat, or her feet, was at the Regional Treatment Centre (“RTC”). She was wrapped in a blue blanket sitting on a ledge in front of an ice covered window. From under the blanket peaked two of the tiniest feet I have ever seen on an adult. They were so small they looked as if they belonged to a child rather than a young woman. Could have been size three but I suspect they were even smaller than that. I had been in my cell when she arrived. Now I had a chance to find out who this new person was. I said, “Hi, I’m Jo-Ann. How come they sent you over to these dungeons?” She smiled sort of shyly and said, “I’m Pat Bear. I guess they just got tired of me over there.” I sure liked her smile and I just blurted out, “I bet they sent you here because your feet are too small to walk up and down all those tunnels and stairs at P4W. You came here to give your feet a rest!” Well that just set Pat off laughing and laughing. She was laughing so hard she could barely talk but she finally gasped, “Jo-Ann, you’re a comical woman.” This short conversation set the tone for happy and comfortable familiarity.
When I asked Bear where she was from, she replied, "Out West." Since we were in Kingston I asked her, "Do you mean west like from Toronto?" "Oh, no! I've never been to Toronto! I mean west. West like the prairies." I sort of remembered some stuff about the prairies from distant days of school geography but I was totally ignorant of the fact that while Pat's distance from her geographic home could be measured in miles, the distance from her cultural roots was immeasurably further. Probably because of our mutual loneliness we came to a meeting of hearts rather than minds. Simply by accident, I had stumbled upon a fundamental most dear to Cree social life, humour.

It was a good thing that we could warm our hearts with each other's company. For at the RTC the only treatment was January's freezing weather whining through the ancient windows of Kingston Penitentiary. I recall a female guard commenting that she wished she had worn her fur coat into work. This comment was made as she stood outside the cell of a woman left naked except for a house blanket type of nightie. The grim offense for which this woman, Lisa, was being punished was that she was refusing to eat. Treatment also included the drilling of jack hammers as cement blocks and bars were rearranged to accommodate more female prisoners. We were the ones who had broken down at P4W. We were transferred across the street to old Kingston Penitentiary ("KP"). I seriously wondered how the Correctional Service treated more critically distressed women.

At that time KP was notorious for housing Canada's worst sex offenders. I am not sure what disturbed me more; the drilling noise making cells smaller and smaller or the thought of being a female hostage in a prison of 400 men. I did not understand how deeply Pat was affected by being separated from her Cree society but I know these experiences were separating me from any sense of social decency existing in Canada. I do not know how far Pat shared the grim projections of my mind but she sure shared the same chilling temperatures and the same numbing noise.

When we were let out of cells to socialize on our concrete doorstep, I always greeted Bear with a little gasp of surprised astonishment and say, "Wow, you STILL have those tiny feet; they haven't grown at all!" Since they really did fit rather well with the rest of her compact body, Bear was constantly amused at my astonishment. Her laugh at my fool-
ishness was a chuckle that suited her equally well. She would usually grin and tell me I was just being silly.

However, one day to her “stop being silly comment,” she added the threat, “or I’m going to get you!” And there she stood armed with a chunky square of thickly iced chocolate cake. This rare treat had appeared on our supper trays. One thing, for sure, was the guys serving the food line always tried to give us something special like the biggest pieces or an extra bit of fruit. They seemed to really feel for our isolation.

Well! There stood Pat with a wicked, lively grin on her face dabbing her fingers into the gooey icing. Before I had time to really take in the scene she had plunked a huge gob of icing smack on my nose. This was a declaration of war! Clutching my blanket, I whipped in and out of my cell for my chocolate treasure. I totally forgot my plan to save it for a night time munchie. Yelling back, “I’ll get you,” I ran after Pat who was running for a hideout in the mildewed shower room. Suddenly she stopped, turned, gave a whoop and lunged at me with two sticky, black cake covered hands. Laughing and screaming in return, I broke off a chunk of cake and threw it at her. My pitch caught her square in the forehead. Pat now came to a full halt. One mucky hand went up and she slowly pulled the chunk off her face and stuffed it in her mouth. She was laughing so hard she nearly choked. I laughed with her until my sides were aching. What a sight we must have made. The guards had come onto the unit after hearing our yelps but they looked more stunned than angry at the sight of our light-hearted cake fight exploding within the confines of a maximum security prison.

As I look back and consider not only the nightmare quality of our surroundings but also a span of twenty years between our ages, the amount of playful laughter we shared was truly amazing. And there was also the matter of cultural difference. Bear was a young native woman from the prairies. I was an eastern white. Somehow our spirits were joyfully joined in small ways and we eased each other’s time at the RTC.

Neither of us stayed there a long time. Only a couple of months. In the way of women serving federal sentences a few months is not a remarkable amount of time. We both returned to P4W where over months and years our paths crossed but never intertwined so intensely. I would see Pat hanging out with Johnny from time to time and I was glad she had another pal. But I knew that a special bond had been
formed between the two of us and it was easily recognized by others; probably because we continued to laugh so easily when we ran into each other.

I guess I became more stable or appeared to be so. Pat did less well in keeping up appearances. It seems to me she became a victim to competing ideologies. One month she would meet with visiting Native Elders and they would encourage her to use traditional healing medicines like smudging with Sweet grass or Sage and going to a Sweat Lodge when this was occasionally possible. The next month Pat would see a white male psychiatrist who would give her his medicine bundle of anti-psychotic pills. She found no relief in this cross-over of treatments. I have been told that in former days, Pat had had a problem with solvent sniffing. She now seemed to return to this behaviour in some attempt at alleviating her turmoil. Her situation was fairly common knowledge but no more effective action seems to have been taken on her behalf.

One day the guards called me to talk to Pat. She did not want to leave her cell and was very upset. This time we could not laugh. Pat was about to be set free. She felt terribly dislocated and unwanted. She had nowhere to go. I could not console her. The guards just took her away to the harsh isolation of segregation, for her own protection. Shortly thereafter, the doors of P4W finally opened to Bear. She was turned out to Kingston and after a few days hung herself to death in a city park.

I was walking down a prison tunnel when I overheard guards talking about her death. My reaction was, at first, disbelief. Then, the next day I saw a very brief mention of her name in The Whig Standard, Kingston’s daily paper. I felt incredibly helpless, wishing I could have done more and left knowing so little. Pat died outside the prison walls so no one from the prison acknowledged any responsibility for her death. I was never to know what became of her body or where she was laid to rest. But I do know I have continued to carry her in my heart.

It was not that long after Bear’s death that Johnny attempted to suicide. Actually this became an era for a large number of suicides at P4W. I managed to survive through seven years inside but in attempting to live I feel I am joined by spirits of sisters who have chosen a different path. The power of their examples has moved the once remote thought of a suicidal death into the range of common place. For me it is a good thing that the echos of Bear’s happy laughter still linger in my soul.
Prisons can be a breeding ground for the feelings that lead to thoughts of suicide. Historically, there has been little or no support for prisoners, both in terms of suicide intervention, and in helping fellow prisoners cope with the aftermath of a suicide or a suicide attempt. This article will detail the unique needs of female prisoners, with a focus on the current environment of fear and uncertainty. Both the events leading up to the Arbour Commission and the effects of the dispersal of female prisoners to institutions across the country, with no regard to the relationships these women have built over the years, have created a potentially disastrous situation. The recent programs implemented to help these women survive the prison experience will be outlined.

According to Ramsey et al. (1987), Canada’s federal prisons have an average rate of completed suicide of 125 per 100,000. This is more than eight times the rate in the general population. The average rate of self-mutilation is more than twice the estimated rate in the overall population of Canada. Adjusting for age and sex, prisoners complete suicide almost four times more often than people in the general population. While data about the frequency of self-mutilation in similar age and sex groups are not available, these behaviours occur at least three times as often in females. “Although specific control studies have not been done, it is probable that all types of suicidal behaviours occur in inmates of Canadian prisons at a markedly higher rate than might be expected if such persons were not incarcerated” (Ramsey, et. al, 1987: 3).

Between 1988 and 1990, six women hanged themselves at the Kingston Prison for Women (“P4W”). There is no information available concerning the number of attempted suicides, nor of self-mutilation (slashing or carving) both of which are common. In these years there were a total of 31 suicides completed by federal prisoners in Canada. Thus, the women accounted for over 22 percent of the total federal prisoner population who committed suicide. What factors are contributing to this problem and what can be done to address it?

Theoretically, it has been suggested (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976) that the reasons for suicidal behaviour in women are different from those of men. Typically it has been thought that the fact that women complete suicide at a lower rate than men, while attempting it more often, is a result of the fact that women tend to be more hysterical and impulsive,
and use attempted suicide in a manipulative way. This is an attitude rooted in the male paradigm of aggressive behaviour.

However, there is a body of work (Weissman, 1974; Rosenthal, 1981; Bancroft, et al. 1979; Simons and Murphy, 1985; Lester and Lester, 1971) that suggests that women’s suicide can be better understood by the ‘self-in-relation’. There are many interrelated aspects including empathy, connectedness and mutuality which is central to a woman’s experience. Kaplan (1984) has suggested that within the proposed framework, a better understanding of why women attempt suicide more often may be gained. The key elements of this framework are vulnerability to loss, the inhibition of anger, the inhibition of assertiveness, and a sense of low self-esteem. As will be shown, these elements are overwhelmingly present in many female federal prisoners, along with other risk factors such as addiction problems. These factors are exacerbated rather than helped, by the institutional setting and practices.

The number of female federal prisoner suicides is a statistic not readily available. Since the number of female prisoners is so low, statistics in general are included with the men. Admittedly, such a small group would likely show wide variations over the years, but including them with the men disguises many problems and differences in prisoner characteristics. The Correctional Service of Canada (“CSC”) seems not to know how to deal with this small group of women. This is reflected in the application of treatment programs and disciplinary procedures.

Because no one seemed to know who these women were, apart from age, offense, length of sentence, addictions (if self-identified) and education level, the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women undertook a survey (the first of its kind) from August to November, 1989. At the time of the survey, 203 women were in custody serving federal sentences: 125 of them at P4W; 78 women were being held in provincial institutions, usually on Exchange of Service agreements; 15 women either refused to participate or were on temporary absences.

The majority of women serving sentences of five or more years were held at P4W. Prisoners ranged in age from 19 to 75 years of age, and two-thirds had children. At P4W, 58 percent had children, 48 percent of them had at least one child less than 16 years old, and 24 percent had at least one child less than five years of age. However, only 30 percent of women of P4W had any visits from family and/or friends.
Three-quarters of the women had, at some stage in their lives, been addicted to alcohol or drugs. Of these women, all but 17 had some current problem with addiction. The Aboriginal women tended to have severe problems: 71 percent said that substance abuse was a major factor in committing their current offense and those committed previously; 40 said they had committed an offense to support a drug habit; and drug-related offenses were the reason for the presence of 49 of the women. Physical abuse was suffered by 68 percent of all the women (a few noted occasional childhood discipline). This abuse skyrocketed among aboriginal women, of whom 90 percent said they had been physically abused, often severely and over a lengthy period. Sixty-one percent had suffered sexual abuse, as opposed to 53 percent in the overall female prisoner population. Twenty percent said they had slashed, cut, or attempted suicide during their present sentence, and 53 had done so at some point in their lives. Thus the situation of aboriginal women among the general female federally incarcerated population is in some sense similar to that of women as a minority within the greater population of federally sentenced prisoners, which compounds their problems.

The institutions have also been described as being “awash with drugs.” One prisoner commented, “It’s easier to stay off drugs on the street than on the inside” (Solicitor General of Canada, 1991). “Home brew” is also readily available. The study ignores the problems of mental illness and emotional abuse the women may have suffered.

Thus there is a small population of women, many suffering from the effects of years of various kinds of abuse, and struggling with addictions problems in a situation where temptation is everywhere. Now add to this the institutional environment and the effects of isolation from family and friends.

The prison is an old-fashioned, dysfunctional labyrinth of claustrophobic and inadequate spaces holding 142 prisoners of all security levels, minimum through maximum. It has been described as “unfit for bears.” It is inadequate for living, working, eating, programming, recreation, and administration. Spaces are insufficient, poorly ventilated, and noisy ... the prison grounds are surrounded by an enormous wall, which in the male system, is used by maximum security institutions only, and in many other aspects the building has the characteristics of a maximum
Study after study has been done on the correctional system and/or the Prison for Women. Every major inquiry has commented on the prison, some very unfavourably. It has been generally agreed for years that the prison is unsuitable for women, and that in fact it amounts to a form of discrimination against female prisoners.\(^2\) Indeed, just four years after the prison was opened, Archambault (1938) recommended closure of the prison. In 1978, Solicitor General Jean-Jacques Blais announced that within a year, the prison would be closed. It was not. Instead, in the early 1980s, $1.4 million was spent building an 18 foot concrete wall around the prison.

There seemed to be little political will to make changes, until *Creating Choices: The Report of the Task force on Federally Sentenced Women* (1990) was released. The majority of the Task Force members were women, many of them Aboriginal.

The task force reiterated the findings of previous governmental and non-governmental reports on the Prison for Women: that it was over-secure; erroneously based on a male model of corrections; that women prisoners were geographically dislocated and isolated from their families; that the programs did not meet the needs of prisoners serving a life sentence, or Francophone or Aboriginal women; and that there were few community or institutional links (Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston, 1996, p. 23).

It was finally announced that the prison would be closed in 1994 and five regional institutions would be built with a cottage-like setting. One of these would be a Healing Lodge for Aboriginal women. Two of the institutions have opened and have had some major problems, duly reported by the media.\(^3\) The current deadline for the closure of P4W is March, 1997. [Ed's Note: As of July 1, 1997, it remains open.]

The women feel a lot of trepidation about the move, are uncertain if they want to be moved, and uncertain where they might be sent. They face the possibility of being separated from their friends and in some instances their partners.
Another issue, besides the physical surroundings, is that only 30 percent of women at P4W receive visits from family or friends. Women housed in provincial institutions tend to receive more visits, however difficulties remain. CSC makes some attempt to place prisoners serving shorter sentences in their home provinces, but because of the size of the country, this does little to alleviate the isolation. Of particular concern is the separation of mothers and their children. Many times contact can only be maintained through telephone calls and letters; most times economic circumstances prohibit travel of any real distance.

"Since 1985, four studies have been commissioned by the Canadian government to examine the impact of separation on women and their families, the social costs of incarceration, mothers and the possibility of institutional nurseries. But no action [has] ever been taken to address the critical problems" (Solicitor General of Canada, 1991). In the meantime mothers suffer a devastating loss and often lose touch with their children, who are cared for by relatives if lucky, or bounced from foster home to foster home if not. Those mothers fortunate enough to maintain physical contact with their children often do so in uncomfortable conditions. Few prisons are set up to accommodate children. Often they must make do in a common visiting room, for a couple of hours at a time. P4W does have two bungalows, but they are primarily used for conjugal visits.

It has happened that prisoners have not been told about a death in the family until considerable time has passed. In addition, even if the woman is notified in time, it may not be economically feasible for her to attend the funeral. There are no counsellors available to help her deal with her grief except the prison psychologist. Although about half of the prisoners view the psychologist favourably, the rest are distrustful. In any case, since the opening of the new prisons the Department of Psychology has been gradually eroded. Currently they have very little time to do counselling. Instead, they must concentrate on the assessment of prisoners upon their admission to prison. This erosion of psychological services has occurred despite an increase in the prison population to 151 from a low of 95.

Rules and their enforcement also cause tension. Many women perceive that the rules are arbitrary and applied randomly. Women's behaviour in prison tends to differ from that of men (it tends to be more verbally abusive), and, "in many countries there are suggestions that many
disciplinary charges in women’s prisons relate to very trivial behaviour for which men would not be charged” (Solicitor General of Canada, 1991). The rules are thought to be petty, inconsistent and unfair. This leads to tension and anger, and prisoners have suggested that clearer outlines and less discretion in the laying of charges would be more acceptable to them.

Prisoners feel that their rights are not respected, and, as revealed in the Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston (the Arbour Report), this is often in fact the case. Many prisoners are denied their legal rights while in segregation, to the point of denying them phone calls to their lawyers. These rights are spelled out in Correctional Service policies and Commissioner’s Directives. Custodial staff, however, seem to view these as privileges rather than rights: to be given or denied as a form of reward for good behaviour, or as a means of coercion to elicit particular behaviour from prisoners.

The grievance procedure is very bureaucratic, unwieldy and frustrating for prisoners as well. Lengthy delays and pat responses are common. The Arbour Report found that,

Particularly at the appellate level, both Regional and National, responsibility for the disposition of grievances is often given to people with neither the knowledge nor the means of acquiring it and worse, with no real authority to remedy the problem should they be prepared to acknowledge its existence .... At present, it would seem that the admission of error is perceived as an admission of defeat by the Correctional Service. In that climate, no internal method of dispute resolution will succeed. (Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston, 1996, p. 162).

This aggravates the feelings of anger and despair felt by the prisoners. Whether she has a valid concern or not, she feels powerless and that no one will listen to her.

There is also an informal hierarchy in the prison where prisoners with little power can be particularly vulnerable. Also, there is an underground economy that operates within the walls, and prisoners may find themselves in debt without the means to repay. (This is particularly true
of drug debts.) Prisoners may be raped, beaten, or threatened with death by other prisoners. They are sometimes murdered. Some of the guards may turn a blind eye to this activity making the prisoners again feel powerless and despairing. ‘Ratting’ (informing on other prisoners) is the worst thing an prisoner can do within this informal structure, so often the prisoners have no choice but to bear with it.

Prisoners also tend to form attachments to one another, given the lack of other emotional supports. They may invest a great deal of emotion in these relationships, and for many such a relationship is the first of its kind. If the relationship is in trouble, the women feel intense despair. Once the relationship ends, a woman must deal with living in close quarters with her former lover, and watch new relationships form. This can be very difficult.

Treatment programs for addictions and anger management are available, but they have primarily been developed in the context of a male model, because of the small population of female prisoners. Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are viewed with some hostility, particularly by Aboriginal women, because of their Christian basis. Also, there is some evidence that A.A. and N.A. do not work well (Chiauzzi and Liljegren, 1993). This may be particularly true for women because of the effects of labelling (“alcoholic” = “bad mother”), the confrontational approach taken (non-acceptance of a label implies denial of the problem), and the call for “God” to intervene (the alcoholic cannot control herself, and must ask for help; it also continues the dependence of the woman on others). Also the existence of a male God may be distasteful to some women.

The problem of treatment programs being designed for (and by) men, but being applied to women, is pervasive. Female federal prisoners have very different life experiences than do men, as well as different histories of offending. These programs may not be suitable for this very reason. Yet, the small numbers of federally incarcerated women do not make it economically feasible to research and design specific treatment programs.

The prison is obligated to educate the women to the Grade 10 level, but this depends on the willingness of the particular prisoner. Vocational training and work programs are primarily geared towards prison maintenance, and are traditional “women’s work” in nature, such as laundry,
beauty parlour and clerical work. These are limited in nature, and do little to allow the prisoner to escape the cycle of poverty once released.

These women have suffered estrangement from their families, isolation, and perhaps losses because of relationships on the inside; they are not free to express their anger and have it validated for fear of punishment. They cannot assert themselves, and if they try to "right" perceived injustices through the grievance procedure, they are brushed off. Many women have very low self-esteem stemming from years of physical and emotional abuse. They are imprisoned in bleak surroundings, most times at a level of security not warranted by their histories (Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston, 1996). It is not surprising that so many women resort to self-mutilation or suicide. It is perhaps surprising that so many of them survive the experience.

"During the latter part of 1979 and the early 1980s the number of suicides and self inflicted injuries among inmates in Canada's federal prisons rose sharply" (Ramsey et al., 1987). In response to this, CSC commissioned a study to examine these behaviours. They made a number of recommendations, dealing with implementing new policies and specialized staff training. This treatment model was developed in Calgary, and demonstrated in three Atlantic institutions of varying security levels. Since female federal prisoners not at P4W are primarily housed in provincial institutions elsewhere, this study did not include them, nor were their concerns considered separately from those of the men (Ramsey et al., 1987). From the subsequent rash of suicides at P4W, it seems evident that if staff there did in fact receive this training, it proved ineffective. This is another example of non-applicability of male-based models to female populations.

If a prisoner at P4W slashes or attempts suicide, she is placed in segregation, her clothes are removed, and she is given a paper gown. This is a long-standing practice. The environment in the segregation unit is punitive. The bars are painted black (in fact after the events leading to the Arbour report the cells were fitted with metal treadplate, making them dimmer and more cage-like). There is a cot, a sink, and a toilet. Until recently, the electrical wiring was so inadequate that prisoners could not have a radio or television, in direct contradiction of CSC directives concerning segregation.
Prisoners feel that, "[w]omen cannot shut out the pain of their neighbours, and each incident threatens to become a contagious epidemic" (Kershaw and Lasovich, 1991). After the suicide of Marlene Moore in 1988, an outside consultant was brought in. Jan Heney, who had had success treating women outside of prison, stated bluntly that,

... long standing prison practices and policies had fostered the kind of tension and desperation that provoked self-mutilation; more than that, the institution's manner of responding to women who slash was likely to escalate rather than reduce the rate of self-mutilation and suicide among prisoners.

She recommended an immediate end to the use of segregation for women who slash, saying that isolation increases rather than decreases suicidal tendencies (Kershaw and Lasovich, 1991).

However, the involuntary segregation of suicidal prisoners continues. The segregation unit is so feared and hated by the prisoners who are in such desperate need of human contact, that many women who slash sew themselves up rather than seek medical attention. This leads to a great deal of scarring.

If a prisoner does complete suicide, the lights are turned off in her cell for 24 hours "as a show of respect." Since the lights in the prison are normally on continuously, this is a grim reminder to the women that one of their group could not make it. These women are friends, lovers, enemies: all know one another. This can lead to a rash of suicide attempts. On November 25, 1988 a prisoner attempted to commit suicide. Before dawn there were two more suicide attempts, and one week later Marlene Moore was dead (Kershaw and Lasovich, 1991).

In 1990, a Peer Support Team was initiated by two members of the Psychology Department, in response to the rash of suicides, attempts, and slashings. This program, while successful in its way, has inherent limitations. The Peer Support counsellor (a specially trained prisoner), while often sharing the same experience(s), has little or no access to other resources. Confidentiality is also difficult because of the close living quarters. Corrections staff have access to more resources but the prisoners often feel they are in an adversarial relationship with them.

A Battered Women's Support Group was also started at the Prison for Women in 1994. This group helps women deal with their histories of
abuse and attempts to give them a sense of empowerment, and to help them break out of the cycle of dependency. However, in 1995 this was made an official program by the Prison for Women and chaired by a guard. The women spend six weeks being urged to speak whether they want to or not, after which they ‘graduate’ with a certificate. Attempts are being made to restore the group to its original collective format. There is also an attempt being made to establish a Grief and Bereavement group inside the prison in order to help prisoners deal with their losses.

The Elizabeth Fry Society can also be of help to prisoners, but again, many prisoners are distrustful of their close relationship with CSC.

The need was seen for a non-judgmental, independent agency which would counsel prisoners in crisis and provide community resource information and emotional support. In 1994 Project Another Chance Inc. (PAC) was formed with a grant from the Trillium Foundation. PAC’s mandate is to aid female federal prisoners and parolees in distress and to aid their transition into the community. The lines are staffed by volunteers with many backgrounds, including ex-prisoners and those who have struggled with addictions problems. Most volunteers have received extensive training in crisis management, addictions, and awareness of native issues. PAC is also investigating the development of a women’s treatment centre, for addictions problems, parallel to those existing for men. No treatment for addictions is currently available for female ex-prisoners.

Thus far, the response has been encouraging. Particularly for prisoners with no contact with family or friends, having a person they can call on to express frustration, anxiety, find information about legal matters, or simply to chat, is a welcome change. PAC has managed to avert several would-be suicide attempts, and contacted one institution on behalf of a prisoner when she was asking to be put into segregation for fear she would self-injure. She was finally put into the enhanced unit and is fine.

One concern for PAC, with the dispersal of female prisoners to the new regional prisons, is that CSC is resisting the continuation of the current practice of allowing prisoners access to PAC’s crisis line. Instead, one Warden has determined that she will use the services of the Canadian Mental Health Association (“CMHA”). While the CMHA
provides a valuable service, PAC maintains ongoing contact with a number of prisoners who will be moved, and who are suffering some anxiety about it. One would think that any means available to reduce the tension in the new facilities would be welcomed, in light of the problems encountered with the transition so far.

Women prisoners are likely to remain a small proportion of the total number of prisoners. Their backgrounds necessitate innovative treatments and strategies in order to successfully integrate them into their communities upon their release.

ENDNOTES

1. Aboriginal women have been recognised to have a particular set of problems, namely:
   - Aboriginal women are over-represented in the prison population of Canada.
   - They are quite distinct culturally, linguistically, and socially from the broader prison population of federally sentenced women.
   - They have significantly different personal and social histories.
   - They have significantly different offending histories.
   - The dispersion of Aboriginal communities across the country is a special burden to them.
   - The holistic approach to healing and reintegration into the community is at odds with the cultures and philosophies of conventional prison environments. (Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison For Women, 1996, p. 218)

2. Female federal prisoners have been treated as if they were an afterthought of the CSC. In fact, the undue hardship they must face in dislocation from their families was the subject of a court challenge (based on a Charter of Rights argument) (Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison For Women, 1996, p. 246). This was overturned on appeal, but without the opening of the regional institutions this would no doubt have been the subject of further challenges.

3. In Edmonton, there was a multiple escape (3 women), a suicide, self-mutilations and an attack on staff in the first 5 months. "Uncaged Women", the Sunday Sun, April 28, 1996. "Escapee Caught in Edmonton", The Toronto Star, May 1996.

4. This remark stems from conversations held between Project Another Chance staff and volunteers and the prisoners themselves, in an informal survey.

REFERENCES


I would like to begin by telling you about how I came to be a prisoner at the P4W. Here is how my life unfolded, from being sane, joyful, community spirited, and relatively calm, to living a nightmare.

I remember the very first time I met Gordon. He was immaculately dressed, his hair neatly combed. He was wearing a suit, with a perfectly knotted tie. Everything was in place. He was big and powerful and moved purposefully. I thought he was the most handsome, suave, debonair man I had ever met. He was very polite and seemed totally taken with me. I was selling real estate at the time. He told me he wanted to buy a small piece of land near the ocean, on which to build a cottage. He kept telephoning me with excuses to have dinner with me, and the like.

Two weeks later we were living together common-law. What started off as a honeymoon became the worst nightmare of my life. Gordon was a violent alcoholic, as were his father and brothers. I never really knew his family very well, except the one time Gordon and his father landed in detox centres at the same time. His younger brother committed suicide about three years before Gordon died.

My whole life was centred around keeping this man “happy.” During those years of knowing him and living with him, I felt certain I could “save” him. He criticized me constantly, and I developed feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. I did not feel that I was capable of doing anything right. During this time I was living in limbo, trying to fight off depression.

The physical beatings started right after we were legally married. I wore heavy make-up to cover the contusions and bruises inflicted at various times. He would play one cruel game in which he would put a plastic bag over my head while we were having sexual intercourse and strangle me, saying he wanted me to have a stronger orgasm. He would strangle me to the point where I would almost pass out.

Prior to the physical assaults on me, Gordon would always tell me I was “cruising for a bruising.” I wish I could go back and undo the pain of the past. I lived in constant fear. I believe he was a psychopath who liked to inflict pain. He put welts all over my back by beating me with a leather strap. On other occasions he kicked me and cracked my ribs and collarbone. My kidneys were bruised from his beatings.

Gordon began threatening both my daughter and me, stating that he would kill her. About this time he began making sexual advances
towards her. He was drinking a lot and taking cocaine and valium. I was at rock bottom.

On another occasion he held a loaded handgun to my head and pulled the trigger. The firing pin jammed in the gun, saving my life. I called the police. He was charged with the careless discharge of a firearm. They seized his guns and when he went to court he was prohibited from having any firearms for five years.

On the day that Gordon died, he had just been released from jail where he had served two months for assaulting me. This was his second charge of assault against me. On the day that he died, he came after me with a knife. I was asleep in bed when suddenly he was standing over me and holding the knife to my throat. He abducted me at knife point after ordering me to get dressed. We left the apartment and drove around in the car. That day, I told him I was never going to live with him again as man and wife. And that day, he raped me. He performed oral sex on me. He put his penis on my face, then in my mouth. I choked and gagged. I was so frightened. He started striking me on the head. There was no safe place. I could not get away. I was trapped.

After the years of battering, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, I finally recognized that my life was on the line. Everything was unmanageable. My relationship with my children had deteriorated. I had been mentally and emotionally denying the torture I had lived through.

I did not mean to kill Gordon. I only wanted to get away from him. When he was standing behind the car urinating, I sensed that it was my only chance to get away. I slid over under the driver’s wheel, turned on the ignition very quickly and put the car in gear. But I put it in the wrong gear; I put it in reverse instead of forward. I backed the car over him, and I left the area at a very high speed. I just wanted to get out of there. We were on a logging road in the woods. I very much regret what happened on that day. I believe my survival can only be credited to luck.

The R.C.M.P.'s Lower Sackville department charged me with first degree murder. At my preliminary hearing, the judge threw the charge out, saying there was not enough evidence to support a first degree murder charge. He had me stand trial on second degree murder instead.

The trial only focussed on that one day in our lives. No mention was made of any battering or sexual abuse in our relationship. My defence lawyer should have brought that up. Only the rape was discussed. There
was courtroom testimony about my pubic hair and Gordon's seminal fluid analysis. I felt nauseated with shame.

I pled "not guilty" all through my trial. When I was found guilty of manslaughter by the jury, the judge said his reason for sentencing me to the federal prison was, "deterrence to the public."

After sentencing, I was taken to the Halifax County Correctional Centre. After spending three months there, I was taken from my cell in that dirty rat and bug infested hole at 4:00 a.m., with no prior warning, in shackles and handcuffs. I arrived by van at Springhill Institution around 6:30 a.m. There I was fingerprinted, had my mug shot taken and was listed as a number, before being taken to Moncton N.B. to fly in an R.C.M.P. airplane along with some male prisoners to Kingston, Ontario. All prisoners were designated to different prisons in the Kingston area.

The ride in the airplane was turbulent, but worst of all, I was seated next to a very large, odorous, garrulous man, who continually leered at me. His flesh sprawled onto my chair and seat and he kept leaning against me. It was my first close encounter with a man since my husband died. I found this very uncomfortable and completely unnerving, and I thought it insensitive on the part of the R.C.M.P. to seat a battered woman next to such an aggressive man. We arrived in Kingston and were taken in different vans to local area prisons. I was taken to the Prison For Women ("P4W").

My first impression of the P4W was its dungeon-like appearance. There was a stench of urine and cigarette smoke in the air. I was admitted into the basement area of the prison, along with two other female prisoners. By this time it was around 8:00 p.m.

The walls inside the P4W were grey and ugly, with paint peeling off the bars. Everything was steel and concrete. I was asked routine questions on admittance such as whether I had any enemies amongst the other prisoners. This would influence the decision on where to put me. Most prisoners are placed on "A" Range for the first three months, for assessment, unless they are in need of protective custody or are mentally ill.

After the questions, a nurse was called and a body cavity search was performed on me and the other two women. It was a terrifying and humiliating experience.

"A" Range in the P4W resembled a zoo. There are 50 cells, six by nine feet each in size, in two tiers, with a small sink, toilet, single cot,
and a steel dresser in each. I was put in the upper cell level. By this time
I was totally exhausted from the 16 hour trip. The noise level was
incredible, with clanging, banging, screaming, and cursing. Some
curious prisoners were peering at me inside my cell, wondering who the
new “fish” was and whether I would fit into the prison sub-culture.
Paired uniformed guards patrol “A” Range every hour.

My first months in the P4W caused me severe emotional depriva­
tion, fear, pain and panic as I began to come to terms with where I was
and how I would survive. I suffered multiple crises: being away from my
family, the loss of relationships, social isolation, social stigmatization,
economical losses, the loss of home and goods, and feelings of unworthi­
ness. My self-hate grew into the thought of suicide. I entered into an
agonizing, dark aloneness. I felt emotionally shredded. I was completely
numb and my mind was blank. I had no sense of time passing. It helped
me to block the pain. I was like this for three months.

**Life At The P4W**

Upon entering prison, each prisoner is assigned a case management
officer who collects all information pertaining to the prisoner from the
police, court and sentencing reports and the judge’s recommendations.
When this information is correlated, the case management officer classi­
fies the prisoner. In the fourth month after my classification I was moved
to the wing area of the prison. Usually the more quiet prisoners reside
there, along with some protective custody cases. Fifty women are caged
on the two wings. Lately, with the increase in women prisoners, double­
bunking has occurred.

Women prisoners in the P4W do not receive natural light and fresh
air. They are housed in dismal surroundings, with a lack of privacy. It
is a maximum security prison, caging three security levels of prisoners.
Intrusive security measures are in force daily. Prisoners have little
access to adequate health, education and professional services. There is
also a lack of women-centred and culturally sensitive programs.

The contraband system is very common in the P4W, with commodi­
ties such as drugs, alcohol, contraband appliances, clothing, institutional
privileges, contraband food and canteen items. Sometimes, suicide seems
like the only alternative for a prisoner if she owes money to one of the
Melissa Stewart

range's leaders. The prisoners' code keeps women from talking too much.

A typical day in prison begins when you are awakened at 6:00 a.m. In one hour, each woman is to shower, dress, make her bed, tidy up her cell, and be ready to go to the common dining room to eat breakfast by 7:00 a.m. Breakfast consists of "juice," cereal or toast, coffee or tea, sometimes a piece of fruit. On Sundays, prisoners are served bacon and eggs and pancakes for breakfast.

During the day, some women are assigned work duties within the prison and go to work at 8:00 a.m. Some attend a program to upgrade their education to the Grade 10 level. Others might play cards if they have purchased their own deck, or do nothing. The work day finishes at 3:00 p.m. The gym is also open one hour per day for those who wish to exercise.

Lunchtime is from 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. It consists of soup, a sandwich, a dessert, and tea, coffee or "juice." Meals are adequate. Dinner takes place between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Each section of the prison eats separately. The wing area, which houses 50 women, eats first, then "B" Range. Women in segregation are served meals in their cells. In the punitive area of segregation women are served what looks like a large overcooked hamburger, made of questionable ingredients. Liquids are controlled and are given at the discretion of the guards.

Most prison programs focus on counteracting aggressiveness, anger and volatility. As such, the programs treat women as offenders rather than as victims. The prison system is not interested in fostering assertiveness. An assertive prisoner is a potential nuisance to prison authorities, who are mostly concerned with keeping "the good order of the institution," rather than viewing prisoners as future citizens.

The answer to the suicides of Native women in the P4W (as well as the suicides of two Anglo-Saxon women) by administrative staff was to ban some native programs and suspend some native social workers from entering the P4W. The other measure they took was to increase the ratio of guards/prisoners to 78/96.

These degrading conditions and the lack of constructive activity, can lead to suicidal thoughts and attempted suicides. Suicide is a mechanism to escape the brutal conditions. Rather than receive appropriate treatment/counselling, the suicidal prisoner will be placed in the new secure segregation units.
In response to the April 1994 riot, brought to public attention by the CBC television program “The Fifth Estate,” this new higher security segregation was ready in April 1995 at a cost of $475,000 to the taxpayers. Prison officials thought this would be the answer to “those unruly women.” It consists of 10 cells located across from the kitchen area, in the basement of the prison. The cells have steel doors in place of bars. Each cell is monitored 24 hours a day by individual T.V. cameras. The beds are welded to the walls. This new segregation unit has a smaller closed outdoor pen for exercise. One of the cells can even accommodate a handicapped person. Why would someone in a wheelchair need to be put in segregation? A reason given by acting prison warden Maureen Blackler was, “There are a few women that are violent and are dangerous to others, they pose a risk to both staff and inmates.”

**BATTERED WOMEN AND PEER COUNSELLING AT THE P4W**

I soon realized that there were a number of women who were in prison for an act committed in self-defence. These were battered women. These women numbered 25 to 30 (a group which included me), were of all different ages and came from very different educational, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Despite these differences, almost all of them had been victims of physical, psychological or sexual abuse, both as children, and then later from their spouses. Eventually, this abuse led to the crimes that brought them their federal sentences: often the killing of the abusers. These desperate acts stood in stark contrast to the women’s usually meek, self-effacing personalities.

Many of the P4W’s repeat offenders, who are familiar with the prison culture, have developed skills to cope with its harsh environment. Battered women prisoners are horrified by their first encounter with incarceration. The stress of their abuse and their subsequent removal from mainstream society are compounded by their sense of shame and alienation within the prison population.

Within the overburdened federal prison system, these shy and reclusive individuals can become invisible. They sometimes go months between meetings with their case management officers and often find their most basic rights neglected. Women of faith miss out on passes to attend church, and in the most extreme cases, prisoners do not receive their allocations of clothing or even feminine hygiene products.
As a result, the combined emotional and practical needs of battered women prisoners are urgent. However, until I became a member of the prison’s Peer Support Team in 1992 and first became aware that we made up a distinctive category of prisoner, there were no programs through which these women could take recourse.

The first P4W Peer Support Team was formed in May 1990, after two years of suicides in which time four native women hanged themselves. There were eight suicides in total from 1988 to 1996 in the P4W, when again on February 21, 1996, another young woman, Brenda D. was found hanged in her cell.

Prison psychologist Julie Darke and social worker Jan Heney began the first P4W Peer Support Team. Heney had done a study on self-injurious behaviour at the P4W and discovered there existed amongst the women prisoners an informal network of counselling and support. She recommended that a team be formed and formal training started. The first class of five prisoner/counsellors graduated in May, 1992. These women could be available to help other women in crises; thus began a team of women prisoners ready and willing to help others. It gave me the opportunity to help other women; something positive which came out of something so overwhelmingly negative.

Peer Support Team members have many of the same experiences as the people who use their services. However, peer support counsellors’ own access to many resources is limited. As well, confidentiality is difficult since service users and counsellors live in the same close quarters among the very same people. While correctional staff still have more resources at their disposal than peer counsellors, many prisoners are more comfortable dealing with peer counsellors as they often feel they are in an adversarial relationship with correctional staff.

In the absence of programs specifically designed for battered women, many relied heavily on peer-support counselling to help them cope. Sometimes a woman would call three or four times in one week. Realizing that the peer-support program could not effectively meet this sort of demand, I approached the administration and suggested that a battered women’s support group be formed. Nothing happened. Then Dr. Heather McLean of the psychology department wrote a letter in praise of the proposal, and permission was granted. Under the supervision of chaplain John Hess, we held our first meeting in April, 1993.
Together, members formulated the criteria for admission to the group. They decided that each member must be the survivor of abuse, that she must support the group’s vision of itself which is founded on a “hope to heal in a non-healing environment,” that she must respect fellow members’ rights to confidentiality, and she must be in prison for a crime committed in self-defence.

We also established group guidelines, drawing heavily from the Quaker-sponsored Alternatives to Violence Project, which has offered workshops in the prison since 1992. These guidelines include looking for and affirming one another’s good points, volunteering oneself only, committing oneself to non-violence, and being willing to take risks and possibly to suffer, if necessary, in order to maintain that non-violent stance. We recognized that non-violence is not passivity, submissiveness, or martyrdom. Members also have the right not to participate in an activity. The aim of these guidelines is to establish a “principled space” in which members can encounter the most positive aspects of themselves and each other.

Soon the Battered Women’s Support Group (BWSG) grew into a positive force in the P4W. Membership in the group was voluntary, as was attendance. Members were permitted to drop out at any time if they needed to, then return as their circumstances permitted. Instead of being referred to the group by staff, prisoners learned of the group by word of mouth and attended entirely of their own volition.

Meetings were informal. Members sat in a circle for presentations, which were then followed by question and answer sessions. However, some evenings were reserved for talking things out and struggling with the emotions stirred by the talk. Vital to the group’s success was the commitment of volunteers from outside the prison. These volunteers visited from as far as Toronto and came from a mixed-bag of backgrounds. As founder of the BWSG in The P4W, I was invited by the previous warden to attend group meetings as a community volunteer, when I left the prison on day parole in July 1994. This was something close to my heart, so attendance at meetings was something I enjoyed. The group had always functioned as a collective, and made its decisions accordingly. Over the three years we had been meeting, the group had evolved into a cohesive entity. I marvelled at the level of trust that had developed, and at the feeling of camaraderie we had built up.
The dedicated community volunteers attending the battered women’s support group included Jo-Ann Connolly, a Kingston lawyer and currently chairperson of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies Battered Women’s Defense Committee. We also worked with Queen’s University Law Professor, Sheila Noona, who originally did the ground work for a legal process which would permit women incarcerated for defending themselves against abusive partners to have an “en bloc” review of their cases. Sheila has offered insights into how the battered women’s syndrome could affect reintegration into a small community, because of the nature of the offense and the complex relationship between victim and offender in small, often isolated communities. The communities themselves are often unwilling to accept prisoners back after release from prison. Today, Sheila continues to be a support to many group members.

Toronto broadcaster Sian Cansfield commuted weekly to show her solidarity with the women and gave them a voice on her radio program. She did a one hour show just before Christmas 1994, and discussed issues surrounding abuse survivors and how the group members were dealing with their pain and separation from family members during the festive season. The broadcast resulted in Christmas gifts being donated to group members.

Sandra Dean, a local interior designer, has offered constructive suggestions on dressing and speaking in ways that increase a woman’s chances of being treated with dignity and consideration. She did a presentation on colours and the right choices of wardrobe, as well as proper etiquette.

Addictions counsellor Carol Bielby brought in three of the Boston Terrier pups she breeds. She talked about the love and devotion a dog can offer, and the respect and affection they deserve in return. The direct emotional connection between the women and those six-week-old pups was intensely moving. Some group members had lost touch with their feelings, and the puppies provided a way to emotionally connect again. In prison, women are not encouraged to express their feelings. And all of the feelings associated with addictions, along with the unique and serious emotional experiences these women have endured, can be so overwhelming. Only a pet could bring these feelings to the fore.

Healer Bonita Currier helped some of the women release residual feelings from childhood sexual abuse, and Salvation Army Major Carol
Barkhouse brought in entertaining and instructive videos. Some of the topics dealt with same-sex relationships, addictions, group dynamics, family violence, as well as comedies.

Supplementing the steady contributions from our six stalwart volunteers were presentations from various guest speakers, including:

- Dr. Mary Pearson, on diet, exercise, and wellness
- Shiatsu therapist Beth Morris, teaching massage techniques
- Criminal lawyer Josh Zambrowsky, on the impact of Bill C45 on women prisoners
- George Best (who counsels battering men), on the connections between early childhood conditioning, gender roles and male violence
- Four University of Ottawa criminologists: Sylvie Frigon and Christa Armitage, on the legal use of the battered women's syndrome; and Ashley Turner and Irene Sernowski, on the value of keeping a journal (along with gifts of a notebook and pen for each group member)
- Kingston Interval House staffers Terri Fleming and Pamela Needham, on power and control issues in relation to domestic violence and the importance of equality in partnerships
- Drama workshop facilitator Susan Raponi, of the Salvation Army in Toronto, leading illuminating role plays.

Two gatherings were particularly outstanding. One was the Christmas party - with "imported" home-made foods, portable piano keyboard to accompany carols and, best of all, carefully selected gifts for each member of the group. As much as the gifts themselves, the women appreciated the fact that they had been specially purchased by people from the outside who just wanted to express their support and affection. The gifts came at a time when, for the first time in years, parcels from home were not being permitted into the institution because of concerns about contraband.

The other important gathering was the National Day of Awareness, held in the gymnasium on August 30, 1994, and attended by representatives from North American native societies, local community and church groups, the various levels of government. Group members told their personal stories. Film producer Barbara Doran then showed her film *When Women Kill*, which kicked off a panel discussion. Journalist June Callwood spoke, as did federal justice committee chairman Warren
Allmand. Also in attendance was Member of Parliament, Peter Milliken. This gathering was attended by over 110 guests. Substantial donations of money were sent by retired Supreme Court Justice Bertha Wilson and the Kenora Sexual Assault Centre. Despite the resounding success of this event, prison authorities ruled out the possibility of such gatherings in the future. As a concession, they let us use the gymnasium for a bingo on March 22, 1995, to which no outsiders were invited.

Later, in response to the fall-out from the Commission of Inquiry Into Certain Events at the Prison for Women (1995) chaired by Madame Justice Arbour, corrections department officials took over the operation of the Battered Women’s Support Group and began to regulate it as a prison program. Prisoners must now attend the group for six weeks, at the end of which time they receive certificates of completion. All meetings are chaired by a guard instead of having a member facilitate. Instead of sharing their feelings when they are ready, participants are told when to express themselves. These conditions violate the original goal of the group which was to provide a “safe space” in which abuse survivors could share their experiences and work to heal themselves. The presence of the guard can be intimidating for many members, while the six week certificate of completion trivializes the emotional pain with which survivors of long-term abuse must wrestle.

The good news is that as of September 3, 1996, after I relayed these concerns to corrections officials, I have been assured the group can go back to its original mandate, without the presence of the guard. Once more I will attend the group to help members draw up a new constitution, as well as arrange to have a different group member volunteer to facilitate the next meeting. This will give members a chance to hone their organizational skills and to feel more comfortable in the limelight. This is especially crucial now, as the Correctional Service of Canada is gearing up to relocate the P4W’s population to five new regional facilities across the country. Prisoners have no choice about where they will go and, in many cases, the move will separate women from their partners of long-standing. The turmoil and pain this process poses for prisoners is exacerbated by a lack of information about the relocation process. There seems to be little information about the move available to many Corrections employees, and what information exists is not filtering down to the prisoners. This has created an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and
tension. Prisoners will need ongoing support as they adjust to their new environments.

After the fall-out from the P4W inquiry, access to the prison by outside groups in 1996 has been increasingly restricted. Currently, only three community volunteers are allowed to attend the Battered Women’s Support Group: Sandra Dean, Jo-Ann Connolly and me.

A news release from the Department of Justice in Ottawa, October 4, 1995 stated:

“The Solicitor General of Canada, Herb Gray and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Allan Rock, today announced the appointment of the Honourable Lynn Ratushny, a judge of the Ontario Court of Justice (Provincial Division), to lead a review of cases involving women convicted of killing their abusive partners, spouses, or guardians.”

When I spoke with Judge Ratushny on August 13, 1996, she told me there were 98 cases submitted for review. The “in custody” applications total 63; 35 cases are not in custody. She states that she has dealt thoroughly and fairly with 45 cases, and has contacted the women involved. Some of these files have been looked at, because she is dealing with the women in custody first. There are still 15 women in custody, whose cases need to be reviewed.

Upon leaving the P4W in July 1994, I began developing my vision of having an agency run by and for prisoners, enlarging upon the peer support team model I had learned in the P4W. With the help of important community leaders and since its incorporation in April of 1995, Project Another Chance Inc. has, with the support of the Trillium Foundation, made great strides towards establishing a conduit to the community for women in prison and female parolees. We now have 75 committed volunteers, many of whom have received intensive crisis response and suicide intervention training, as well as orientation on native women’s issues. The “Right On Line”, a crisis phone line for women prisoners and parolees, has been in official operation since December, 1995. I have been taking calls on restricted hours since May, 1995 and already the response from service users is very positive. After a great deal of organization and training, we are beginning to see the results of the very necessary service we provide. We have made a specific mandate
to seek the cooperation of prison administrators across the country in order to allow prisoners, who have increasingly restricted telephone access to the outside, to use our services.

Operated by a tiny staff and over 40 professionally-trained volunteers (including several ex-prisoners), the “Right-On Line” offers quiet, non-judgmental support, suicide intervention, referrals to prison and community resources and strives to establish a community link for women in conflict with the law. Parolees who call the Right-On Line can tap into practical information on resumé-writing, conquering addictions and finding affordable products and services, as well as building a supportive network of friends and advisors.

The P4W has always been and continues to be a living nightmare, designed and operated as a maximum security prison. This is inappropriate and harmful to federally sentenced women. They struggle with geographical and cultural dislocation, and have little or no contact with their children, families and communities.

When leaving prison, you are usually told a day or so ahead of time that you will be released. This gives the prisoner time to pack up her belongings, clean up her cell, say their farewells and prepare herself for the outside. It is quite disorienting and overwhelming when you know you will be released. Some women panic at this stage and are unsure if they can “make it” outside.

The dehumanizing aspects of incarceration cause prisoners to become more angry and bitter. They lose faith in the “system,” and while imprisoned they are essentially schooled in the commission of crime. Those released are less able to function as responsible, caring citizens.

Prisons represent a temporary warehouse where goods will eventually come out. But what if these goods are then more spoiled? We have prisons because we have come to believe in them, even though they do represent only a small proportion of the criminalized. Prisons represent that end of the system where we put the most readily detected, the most readily prosecuted, and the most readily forgotten about.
In this commentary, the author exposes the (en)gendered violence done to incarcerated women at Canada’s Prison For Women (P4W) during the strip search of April 26-27, 1994 conducted by the Institutional Emergency Response Team (IERT) and raises issues concerning the segregation Post-April, 1994. The legitimacy of this intervention, the “degradation ceremonies” in operation and the production of “docile bodies” are raised and critiqued in view of the situation of imprisoned women in Canada.

La place de la télédiffusion dans le domaine de la justice est d'actualité en Amérique du Nord. De la *Cour en direct* au procès d'O.J. Simpson, on joue sur la théâtralité de la justice. Au Canada, on en redemande. On veut nos propres procès télévisés - *Made in Canada* - sous le prétexte que l'on connaît mieux le système de justice américain. La fascination pour le procès d'O.J. Simpson en est un exemple intéressant. C'est *L.A. Law*, mais en vrai. C'est me semble-t-il, la continuation des émissions comme celle d'enquête criminelle *24 heures sur 24*. On ne se contente plus de la fiction, on réclame la “vraie” vie. D'ailleurs, il n'est pas surprenant d'assister à la prolifération d'émissions comme *Claire Lamarche, Oprah, Shirley*, pour ne nommer que celles-ci.
Certains diront que l'on donne la parole et la voix aux gens “ordinaires” et d'autres accuseront ces émissions de voyeurisme et de sensationnalisme. Au nom de la justice, le voyeurisme est légitimé. Mais la justice est bien loin de nos préoccupations.

Les affaires O'Carroll au Québec et Rodney King aux États-Unis, les émeutes de Los Angeles, les rites d'initiation du Régiment aéroporté de Petawawa en Ontario, tous ont une chose en commun: des images sur bande vidéo qui influencent et même changent le déroulement des événements. Des images qui permettent de dénoncer la violence policière et porter formellement des accusations contre des policiers violents, parois de rendre justice et d'autres fois, de faire démanteler des régiments. Des vidéos amateurs et/ou clandestins. À la différence de ces derniers, celui de l'intervention de l'escouade anti-émeute au pénitencier pour femmes au Canada en est un tourné par un membre de cette escouade. Ainsi, il s'agit d'un vidéo “institutionnel” qui, selon The Globe and Mail du 21 février 1995, a été obtenu par la CBC, par l'avocat d'une des détenues. Ceci nous amène à nous demander, par exemple, si nous croirions uniquement les récits d'abus des orphelins de Duplessis, les abus sexuels des enfants, la violence conjugale s'ils étaient enregistrés sur bande vidéo?... Pour avoir justice, faudra-t-il demander à Monsieur Bédard de Surprise sur prise d'enregistrer sur bobine, nos horreurs? Pour notre plaisir les dimanches soirs...

2. Intervention policière ou “rituels de dégradation”?

Dans un article intitulé “Les insolences d'un caméscope” de l'édition des 25 et 26 février dernier du quotidien Le Devoir, Pierre Cayouette se demande si “le coté pervers de l'affaire, c'est que ces vidéos risquent de court-circuiter le réflexe critique du téléspectateur. Le public saute tout de suite aux conclusions ... .” Il demande, par exemple, “[q]ui a retenu, en regardant les images de la prison de Kingston, que cette brutale et très contestable intervention policière faisait suite à quatre jours de troubles graves ...?” (je souligne). C'est un argument qui est au mieux, mince et au pire, peut être dangereux puisque selon ce que l'on peut voir dans le document visuel présenté à The 5th Estate le 21 février, lorsque les agents, très majoritairement masculins font irruption dans les cellules des détenues, tout était calme: certaines dormaient et la plupart n'offraient aucune résistance. Alors, au moment précis de l'intervention,
elles ne représentaient pas de danger, n'est-ce pas? Alors où est la justifi-
cation pour ces actes de répression? Et, ces rituels de dégradation qui
ont eu comme conséquence la ségrégation des femmes impliquées dans
les troubles d'avril 1995 pendant huit à neuf mois, c'est-à-dire enfermées
23 heures sur 24! Et, cette violation des droits de la personne?

De plus, les règlements des institutions d'incarcération stipulent que
- sauf en situation d'urgence - des fouilles à nu sur des détenues ne
peuvent être faites que par des agents de sexe féminin. Même la Cour
suprême du Canada a déjà statué en ce sens. Toutefois, bien que le
respect de ces règlements soit ici un enjeu essentiel, puisqu'ils visent à
atténuer les sentiments de vulnérabilité et d'humiliation des femmes dans
pareilles circonstances, on aurait tort de centrer le débat uniquement sur
de telles considérations. Car la principale question que cette intervention
soulève est, avant tout, celle de sa légitimité même. Et à plus forte raison
lorsqu'on prend connaissance de certains commentaires qui laissent
entendre que les véritables motifs de l'intervention étaient d'apaiser les
surveillants qui avaient manifesté à l'extérieur des murs de la prison,
suite aux événements de la fin d'avril 1994.

Alors, à la suggestion de Monsieur Cayouette que "... ces vidéos
risquent de court-circuiter le réflexe critique du téléspectateur ...," je
rétorquerais que ce vidéo nous permet enfin de voir vraiment ce qui s'est
passé et surtout de donner une crédibilité qu'on refusait initialement aux
propos des femmes, puisque ces images remettent en question sérieuse-
ment les rapports internes. Ce qui m'inquiète ici est que malgré les
témoignages des représentantes de la Association Canadienne des
Sociétés Elizabeth Fry qui critiquaient cette intervention, il nous faudra
attendre des images pour y croire.

3. Le corps maté, "le corps docile"

Les images sont troublantes. Les scènes ressemblent à des images
pornographiques. Il y a aussi érotisation de la violence. La soumission
des femmes mises à nu. Des gardiens, en l'occurrence des hommes,
mâtant des femmes. Mâtant le corps des femmes. Pour les transformer
en "corps docile." Une succession d'images de femmes nues, enchaînées
et ne résistant pas. Un collègue me demandait s'il serait approprié de
montrer ce vidéo à nos étudiants. Il était inconfortable. Il disait que de
montrer des femmes nues ... c'était délicat. Bizarre, étant donné que l'on
ne se gêne pas de montrer à nos étudiants des vidéos comme *The Accused*, *Ce n'est pas une histoire d'amour*, *Vol au dessus d'un nid de coucou*, *L'Orange Mécanique* et bien d'autres. Pourquoi, cette pudeur soudaine?

Une série de films existent sur les femmes en prison et servent très souvent de première impression de ce que sont les femmes détenues. Ces films hollywoodiens, en majorité, jouent sur des mythes et présentent les femmes en détention comme violentes, masculines, lesbiennes et ne remettent jamais en question les conditions de détention. L'idée véhiculée est que le problème réside uniquement chez les femmes et non aussi dans la nature de l'institution. Ce que changera ce vidéo. De plus, la réalisation de différents documentaires par l'Office national du film, depuis le début des années 1980, tente de présenter la voix des femmes, leurs expériences et leurs conditions de détention, comme dans *P4W* (pénitencier de Kingston), *C'est pas parce qu'on vit dans un château qu'on est les princesses* (la Maison Gomin à Québec), *Les bleus au cœur* (la Maison Tanguay à Montréal), *To Heal the Spirit* et *Getting Out* (sur les femmes autochtones à P4W) et, tout récemment, *A double tour* (le pénitencier pour femmes francophones à Kingston). Donc, on tente d'utiliser le médium très puissant qu'est l'écran pour présenter une contrepartie. Réalité, fiction ou voyeurisme? A mon avis, comme outil pédagogique, ces documentaires ont une valeur pour susciter une réflexion et une discussion autour de la problématique des femmes en prison, l'intervention et la situation des femmes autochtones, notamment. Les images parlent aux étudiant-es parfois beaucoup plus que ne parlent les livres et/ou les articles théoriques.

4. Sur l'enfermement carcéral des femmes

Pour mieux situer la problématique de l'enfermement carcéral des femmes, il faut savoir que les femmes en prison représentent 7% de la population carcérale provinciale (sentencées à moins de deux ans) et 4% de la population carcérale fédérale (sentencées à plus de deux ans). Au Canada, en juin 1990, 305 femmes purgeaient des peines fédérales contre 13,234 hommes. *P4W* est le seul pénitencier pour femmes au Canada, comparativement à plus de 40 établissements pour hommes. On y compte environ 150 femmes (entre 20% et 40% sont francophones) et quelques 150 autres sont incarcérées dans des institutions provinciales
suite à un accord d'échange avec certaines provinces\textsuperscript{10}, comme avec le Québec depuis 73, avec la Maison Tanguay, par exemple. Au total, on peut compter environ 800 lemmes dans les institutions provinciales canadiennes. Donc, s'il y a un seul pénitencier pour femmes au Canada, cela pose un certain nombre de difficultés. Une première se situe au niveau de la classification étant donné que toutes les femmes sont soumises au même type de contrôle même si les besoins de sécurité sont différents, contrairement à la situation qui prévaut dans les institutions masculines. Loin de moi de suggérer que les pénitenciers pour hommes sont des modèles à suivre, mais en ayant des "pens" à sécurité maximum, médium et minimum, on peut penser que l'on y offre un contrôle plus adapté aux besoins. Évidemment, l'incarcération est toujours un mécanisme de punition, de contrôle et de répression\textsuperscript{11}.

Une autre difficulté à souligner par rapport à P4W est que les femmes provenant de toutes les provinces canadiennes sont incarcérées à Kingston, engendrant ainsi de sérieuses difficultés pour celles ayant des enfants, notamment. Ce qui est le cas de la majorité des femmes en détention. Or, contrairement aux hommes, elles n'ont généralement pas de conjoint à l'extérieur qui s'occupe des enfants.

Le nombre non négligeable de suicides entre les années 1977 et 1991 à P4W a aussi sonné l'alarme. Selon des sources non officielles, une douzaine de femmes, dont huit autochtones (elles représentent environ 25\% des détenues au fédéral et sont donc largement sur représentées), se seraient enlevées la vie à l'intérieur des murs\textsuperscript{12}. Cette situation d'auto-mutilation a aussi mis en lumière le fait que les femmes incarcérées ont été très souvent dans le passé victimes d'inceste, d'abus physiques et psychologiques et de violence conjugale. Nous n'avons qu'à penser ici aux femmes qui tuent leur conjoint violent. Selon le rapport d'un groupe d'étude sur les femmes sentenced au fédéral, La Création de choix, plus de 80\% des femmes incarcérées auraient été victimisées avant l'incarcération. Donc la violence qu'elles ont subie aux mains, la plupart du temps, d'hommes (E.: pères, frères, beaux-pères et conjoints) ne devrait pas être négligée lorsque l'on parle d'intervention en général et aussi d'intervention “musclée” et “masculine” auprès des femmes.

En 1990, La Création de choix recommandait la fermeture de Kingston pour l'année 1994 (repoussée maintenant à 1996) et l'ouverture de six centres régionaux de détention au Canada\textsuperscript{13}. La fermeture de cette institution a été préconisée depuis presque son ouverture en 1934.
Plusieurs commissions d'enquête se sont succédées pour toutes arriver à la même conclusion: la fermeture de P4W\textsuperscript{14}. Plus de soixante ans ont passé.

5. De l'indignation au silence

Le public, les médias, les organismes s'occupant des droits des détenues, particulièrement par le biais de la directrice nationale de la Association Canadienne des Sociétés Elizabeth Fry, Madame Kim Pate, tous ont tour à tour dénoncé le caractère violent et non justifié de telles stratégies d'intervention. Quelques émissions se sont penchées plus sérieusement sur la question de la détention, comme à l'émission \textit{Le Point}, mais sans porter une attention particulière aux femmes. L'émission de radio des dames Payette a, par ailleurs, posé des questions plus fondamentales quant à la situation des femmes détenues. Mais, après l'indignation spontanée, le silence. Et comme le soulignait en entrevue Madame Nathalie Duhamel de la Maison de transition Thérèse-Casgrain de Montréal, l'attention donnée à cet événement fut très brève et elle se demande s'il faut qu'une femme se tue pour que quelque chose soit fait; et encore.

Mais enfin, si vous vous souvenez bien, nous sommes passés aux choses sérieuses: la rentrée de Monsieur Lucien Bouchard, la visite de Clinton et la sortie du budget Martin. Pour ce qui est du rétablissement de la peine de mort dans l'État de New York ... passons. Silence, caméra, on tourne.

\textbf{ENDNOTES}

1 Une version abrégée de ce commentaire, portant le même titre, est parue dans l'édition du 21 mars 1995 du journal \textit{Le Devoir}. Je tiens à remercier mon collègue, Fernando Acosta, pour ses précieux conseils sur cette première version.

2 La violence de ces images a rejoint beaucoup de femmes. Elles se sont aussi senties victimes.

The program (NBC, March 31, 1993), opened with a clandestine videotape produced by a guard at the Georgia Women's Correctional Institution Main Unit (with a population exceeding 900 women). We see male and female guards struggle with resistant women, strip them naked, place them in restraining jackets, and leave them hogtied ankles and wrists bound at their backs) and chained in dark isolation cells.

4 Le Globe and Mail du mardi 21 février rapportait qu'il y avait une femme dans l'équipe d'intervention.


7 Notez l'utilisation du terme “maison” au lieu de “prison.”

8 Par exemple, en septembre 1993, se tenait à Londres, un colloque intitulé *Captured on Film: International Film Festival on Women and Imprisonment*, présentant des films de plusieurs pays sur les femmes en prison. Le Canada y était représenté par *To Heal the Spirit* et *Getting Out*.

9 Voir Statistiques Canada, 1990 à la page 1.

10 Voir Faith, supra note 3 à la page 138.

11 Dans ce sens, je me réjouis de l'idée présentée par le ministre de la Justice du Québec, Monsieur Ménard, qui recommande la fermeture de certaines prisons québécoises dans le but de favoriser d'autres formes d'intervention. Il serait plutôt ironique que les difficultés budgétaires de l'État québécois contribuent à humaniser le traitement judiciaire des délinquants.

12 Voir Faith, supra note 3 à la page 139.


14 Dès 1938, le rapport Archambault recommandait la fermeture de P4W.
REFERENCES


FILMS

Like few Canadians, I followed the press coverage of the Arbour Commission hearings held in Kingston, Ontario, an Enquiry commissioned in 1995 by Canada’s Solicitor General on the tail of the C.B.C.’s *The Fifth Estate*’s televised airing of portions of a videotape taken in April 1994 at the Prison for Women in Kingston. To those who believe that Canada is a most humane nation but are unfamiliar with Canadian prisons, the sight of sleeping women prisoners, bound in chains, being stripped of their clothing and pulled from bedless cells by “Darth Vadar” suited, armed, male guards was sickening. This could not have happened in Canada seemed the general consensus. But those of us who know Canadian prisons, from the inside, were not shocked. To us these actions were mild in comparison to what we know goes on inside segregation cells in prisons throughout this country. The Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) called the event an “aberration,” but the aberration is, in truth, the fact that the public even saw the brutal strip search and that an Enquiry into such an occurrence, the first of its kind, was ever called.

Unlike most Canadians, I attended some of the Enquiry sessions and there observed closely the way in which Commission lawyer, Patricia Jackson, and the prisoners’ lawyers, attempted to extract from CSC officials their thinking in not only calling for and condoning such a procedure but in covering up the fact that they had done so for nine months afterwards. Ultimately, given mountains of evidence revealing numerous illegal acts on the part of members of CSC - the stripping of women by men being just one - some officials did admit that it was probable that the Service had acted illegally. But officials prevaricated. Well, they argued, no one but CSC officials and staff know what happened before the Emergency Response Team was sent into those segregation cells. Madame Justice Louise Arbour, the presiding judge, presented her recommendations to the Solicitor General based on Enquiry findings in late March 1996. However, because so few journalists were covering the Enquiry itself - seemingly having lost interest once the more titillating aspects of the show drew to a close in September - it is unlikely many members of the public will ever hear another word on
the subject of the P4W Enquiry, and thereby, few will ever understand the way in which CSC in truth metes out “justice” in our prisons.

I have a personal stake in Madame Justice Arbour’s findings. Four years ago I married a man who has been, since 1985, serving a federal prison sentence, also in Kingston. My husband and I met when I entered a prison as a journalist. I had long lived near this city that houses eight of Canada’s federal prisons, but I knew little about them, media coverage having focused primarily on high profile cases. For five years previous to my first visit to prison I had written a weekly column for The Whig-Standard, the highly-respected Kingston daily. In April 1992, I was a columnist of some renown, and Joyceville Penitentiary administrators rolled out the red carpet when I entered. I met dozens of staff, administrators and prisoners, among them a man who was then Chairman of the Inmate Committee. The Committee was, then, politically active, the Chairman vocal about administrators’ illegal acts; acts resulting in grave consequences for prisoners and, by extension, the public. After this man and I had talked to each other for just under two weeks, the red carpet was suddenly jerked from beneath my feet. CSC officials directed the publisher of The Whig to censor me. The publisher complied, forbidding me to write about the prisons, instructing my editor to carefully scrutinize each column I wrote. One month later, when I wrote a column about a former junior high school teacher’s abuse of power, the publisher warned me that I was, “treading too close to the line.” Two weeks after that, a new editor cut my column to twice monthly. Three months later the column was abruptly cancelled. I was, at the same time, removed from my position as editor and writer of a feature I had created for the paper, which had been syndicated to eight other papers. I no longer had work in my hometown.

I sought work elsewhere. I tried, briefly, to tell the publisher and other journalists about the administrative cover up in the works at Joyceville, but no one listened. And besides, by then I had begun to understand that I would never be able to write truthfully about the institutions which employ so many of Kingston’s denizens. I applied to become a personal visitor of the Chairman of the Inmate Committee. I was approved after the standard “investigation.” He and I fell in love with each other, and meanwhile we spoke openly to each other about illegal and demonstrably harmful acts. He and other Committee members continued to challenge administrators with paperwork and in meetings
about many of their more heinous acts. He and I decided to marry. During the months following our application to marry, prison officials consistently "lost" those papers which required the warden's signature. These were "discovered" very suddenly, five days before our scheduled wedding, one hour after my husband had been transferred out of that medium security prison to a maximum security in what is known in the Service as an Emergency Involuntary Transfer.

We should not have been surprised. Over the weeks preceding the transfer, several prisoners released from segregation had told my husband-to-be that a member of the prison's oligarchy had approached them with offers of transfers to minimum security if they would tell him something damning about my husband. My husband's Case Management Officer warned him to get off the Committee if he was serious about his marriage. He did not have time to heed warnings. Five days before our wedding, officials shipped him off to a maximum security institution far from our home. There we did, ultimately marry. Since that time, nearly every decision taken in my husband's case has been based on the allegation which prompted transfer. "One Informed source" (who we learned was a prisoner who was a diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic, had been taken off his medication, and owed thousands of dollars to other prisoners for drug debts) informed the prison's Internal Preventative Security Officers (IPSO, the prison's secret police) that my husband and another prisoner, also transferred, were "conspiring" to "seriously injure" a third prisoner. Five days after officials at Regional Headquarters rubber stamped the transfer, the alleged victim-to-be, a friend of my husband's and a relation of one of the IPSO officers, wrote an affidavit stating that there was no animosity between himself and my husband; ten days after that the "one credible source" recanted his story in another affidavit. A year later we learned that the informant had, in fact, never even mentioned my husband's name to IPSO officers. To cover their tracks, IPSO officers searched for more "proof." Two months after my husband had been removed from the Institution, a "second credible informant" surfaced; the next month, astonishingly, a "third credible informant" appeared. A third inmate was offered a transfer to a minimum security if he would add his name to the list; he refused and sat in segregation for two months, after which he was transferred to a prison in British Columbia. The transfer prevailed, and the wholly invented story about my husband enabled officials to label
my husband dangerous and to ensure additional punishment. Beyond that, "news" of our marriage and "news" of my husband’s alleged "conspiracy" were published anonymously in Frank Magazine, though there the conspiracy turned into "conspiracy to murder." No one at the magazine ever contacted me to check facts - most of which, including my husband’s sentence, were wrong. No matter. Apparently a lot of people read the "news." My husband’s security ratings escalated to the highest levels possible, the invention remained on file, represented as truth, and my husband sat in his cell in maximum security for nine months while we fought for an investigation. I, meanwhile, struggled to find work, emotionally distraught by the bumpy landing I had taken when the red carpet was pulled away.

My husband and I have, for three and one half years, tried to redress in all legal ways available to us, the unlawful acts committed against us. Redress has been impossible. Few people believe a word either my husband or I say, and that includes many of my former colleagues. Meanwhile, nearly everyone who works for the Service, and everyone who does not, believes the word of Service employees, particularly those who choose to speak against us, or against most any prisoner.

As a result of my experience, I am acutely aware of and distressed by the absolute power of CSC and by its vividly apparent goal: to protect not the public, as mandate proclaims, but to protect itself in whatever manner possible, no matter the cost, in both dollars and lives. I am made aware daily of the fact that the Service, at nearly every juncture, disregards policy and law in its treatment of prisoners, and in its treatment of their families, and that the use of "informants." The privileges granted informants in return for their stories (true or false), puts the public at risk, for the ability to spin a yarn in exchange for favours does not a reformed criminal make. Though I have long shied away from the term "victim," I know that my husband and I are but two of thousands of victims of unimpeded abuse of power, victims of the way in which suspicion, rumour, and innuendo guide the manner in which the Service determines, in its recommendations to the National Parole Board, who will be set free and who will not.
PART TWO

My husband and I have friends and family. We had become especially close to Claire Culhane, one of the few stalwart prisoners’ rights activists who has, in her four books and more than twenty years of outspoken activism, tried to make the public aware of the heinous abuses by “the system,” and the way in which the evil running rampant in our prisons harms us all. Our family survives, but sometimes only barely. We have written to every official, including MPs of every political stripe, to two Solicitor Generals and to their critics. We have submitted grievances and have hired lawyers. In nearly every instance our attempts to redress wrongs have been met by the Service’s stonewalling and protection of its own. It is stonewalling, lies, innuendo, and threat which often hobble me. The abuse of power, when employed behind closed doors, will destroy whomever it must.

When CSC’s unlawful acts are made evident, as they have been at the P4W Enquiry, Service officials must rationalize these. It did not startle me to hear officials at the Enquiry explaining away their actions in exasperated tones. The public, they reasoned, could not begin to comprehend how dangerous these women are, how at risk his staff was at that prison, and by extension, the public is. Innuendoes focussed on portraits of dangerous women with violent records and untamed impulses. Officials claimed that these women had engaged in unceasing violent attacks on guards for four days prior to the strip search and justified the womens’ subsequent eight months in segregation. Journalists and readers swallowed whole the story officials told, despite the images we saw on screen. On video we watched small women, chained and stripped naked, manhandled by club wielders. We were told that these women had, prior to this search, thrown urine at guards and lit fires, though no one had explained how these women managed to do this while locked in segregation cells emptied of all belongings. On screen we saw that none of the women resisted when the Emergency Response Team entered their cells. Some were asleep. And still, letters to the editor which followed the public airing commended guards for their bravery and courage in handling such a life-threatening job.

I do not know any of the women prisoners personally, but I do know that implications, innuendoes and lies told to my publisher about me and about my husband resulted in the publisher’s swallowing whole the
notion that what I might write would be not only untrue but might be
dangerous. At first the publisher seemed concerned that I could love a
"con" (whom he has never met or talked to). Later I came to be
perceived as a possible Bonnie to my husband’s Clyde. Unfortunately,
we have no videotape of our own actions taken prior to allegations lev­
elled against us. The Service’s word sufficed. If a prison official said we
had done something wrong, in the absence of proof (beyond our word)
to the contrary, it must be true.

Prisoners and their families are nearly always portrayed as capable
of any and all criminal acts, and not to be believed, unless of course it
is other prisoners or prisoners’ family members against whom we allege
transgressions. For instance, the former Police Chief of Kingston went
so far as to state in a letter to The Whig-Standard that one explanation
for Kingston’s crime rate was the influx of prisoners’ families into this
community (as if we move here to bring heavy arsenal and criminal
intent rather than to maintain contact with our partners and to offer love,
stability and hope). Although such slander, had it issued from any
disempowered source, might well have resulted in criminal charges
under Canada’s new Hate Law, not one word of dissent met Chief
Rice’s letter. In 1993, The Assistant Deputy Commissioner of the Cor­
rectional Service in Ontario gave a speech in which she explained that
when she was a warden, the prison’s visiting room broke her
heart; for
there, she said, she saw the children who would be the next generation
of prisoners. Members of her audience sighed dejectedly at this thought.
No one pointed out that the statistics do not bear out her beliefs or that
she had just labelled our children and all prisoners’ parents. Those who
do not sigh, instead lock their doors and shudder when they hear we are
near. If our children do let others know where their fathers or mothers
reside, they are on occasion forbidden to visit “the good people’s”
homes, and so, they often keep their parents’ whereabouts a secret,
protecting themselves from castigation. Nonetheless, trauma they experi­
ence is never attributed to society’s rejection and labelling. When sym­
pathy is given a prisoner’s spouse or parent, we are assumed to be un­
lovable wretches whose only hope of finding love sent us to prison or
whose parental failures sent our children there. Those wives I have seen
appear on daytime talk shows enliven this caricature. Why, after all,
would Rolanda wish to interview a calm-voiced, intelligent and deeply
loved prisoner’s wife?
The despoiling of our images has been effective. With no credibility and almost no political support, we have few avenues left for addressing abuse committed against us. We can, of course, go to court, but few can afford the lawyers’ fees necessary for mounting a case against a system with its plethora of “file material” (sometimes wholly invented) and the Service’s stable of lawyers. Besides, on those few occasions when a prisoner or family member has taken a case to court (where secret IPSO sources must be revealed) and has been awarded compensation for crimes committed against him or her, vocal critics make political hay: “Look!” they cry, “its only the criminals who are protected! What about the victims!” “Those prisoners are spoiled!” Crimes committed against us are considered, simply, our due.

Those crimes include the petty, such as the theft of prisoners’ personal belongings (a daily occurrence) and disregard for policy and mandate. But they include heinous crimes as well. Consider, for example, that in October 1993 a black prisoner named Robert Gentles died in Kingston Penitentiary after six guards visited his cell. Whatever those six guards did inside that cell was not videotaped, though prisoners in the cellblock alleged wrongdoing by guards. Those prisoners were, of course, deemed incredible because they are prisoners, though in my husband’s case, as in thousands of others, the word of one prisoner sufficed as proof enough to proffer devastating punishment. Prisoners are, all the time, punished on the “word” of other prisoners whose words are set in stone in IPSO files. Because informant prisoners’ identities are cloaked by IPSO confidentiality, we seldom know what their privileges might be, but we know that any stories told about us will be believed, if necessary. On the other hand, prisoners’ allegations against guards are deemed irrelevant as Robert Gentles’ mother pursued justice. The Attorney General of Ontario refused to press charges in the death of her son. When a coroner who is not employed by either CSC or the Attorney General’s office found the cause of death to be asphyxiation, a Justice of the Peace did find cause for pressing charges; it seemed the guards might have their day in court. The Attorney General dropped the charges. Mrs. Gentles presses on, though most of us suspect that she has no hope of finding justice.
PART THREE

As Carmelita Gentles has discovered, the public’s argument against pursuing allegations - even of murder - against the Service, goes like this: “Prisoners have committed crimes. That’s why they are in prison, and there they deserve whatever punishment the Service deems appropriate.” And, further, because we are their loved ones, we too are suspect at all times, deserving of whatever we get. One small example might help illustrate.

In March of 1995, my husband was a prisoner at Collins Bay Institution, a medium security institution. While there, the Institution introduced a new machine known as an Ion Scanner. It appeared in the entryway one day, without warning or explanation. That day I came to visit my husband as I do regularly and frequently. Members of the community and employees of the Service who know me and my husband well are well aware of the fact that neither of us indulge in either alcohol or drug use. Despite our “clean” record (the exception being the “suspicions” lacing my husband’s IPSO file), every prisoners’ visitor is required by policy to submit for “inspection” all of our belongings. Items we are allowed to bring into visiting rooms include I.D.’s, change, diapers and, sometimes, depending on the Institution’s whim, letters and photographs. That day in March I handed over an envelope containing both a manuscript my husband and I were working on and a letter his son had written to him. The routine had heretofore been this: I would take the envelope into the vestibule outside the visiting room. There I would place it in a mailbox where guards would extract it, check for “contraband,” and finding none, deliver it at some later time to my husband in his cell.

The ion scanner added a new hoop. I was instructed to hand over the envelope to the guard manning the contraption which looked benignly enough like a microwave. The guard placed the envelope inside the machine’s belly where it was electronically scanned. A beep sounded. The guard withdrew the envelope, and, pen poised, she asked for my name.

“For what”? I asked her.
“I have to record this.”
“What are you recording?”
“I can’t give you that information, ma’am. I’m required to record all information received.”
“What information did you receive?”
“You beeped. That means you tested positive.”
“Tested positive for what? How? And who gets this so-called information?”
“We haven’t yet devised our policy on that.”
I persisted. I asked what the guard was writing down for inclusion in my file, or in my husband’s, or in both of ours, for I knew from past experience that sooner or later this “information,” however false or misrepresented, might come back to haunt us. The guard persisted in her refusals. She informed me that if I wished I could take the matter up with the warden. No, she would not contact the warden. “There are people in line behind you” she said, and then she handed me the envelope to take inside. “But,” she warned me, “once policy is established, a beep might result in your losing visiting privileges or in a strip search. A beep might necessitate police laying criminal charges on you if we do find contraband.”
I am well aware of the fact that because I visit a prisoner in prison, everything I carry, say and do is at all times subject to search, scrutiny, recording and to interpretation as to meaning or implication by any and every CSC employee. My husband and I have been accused of all manner of “inappropriate” behaviour, though no charges have stemmed from any of the innumerable “suspicions” which lace our files. These suspicions include the belief by some that my husband and I sometimes argue; that he might, one day in the future, commit an illegal act; that we might write something damning about “the system;” that we might have behaved sexually prior to our marriage; that my husband’s changes might be “superficial.” A young officer recently asked us to explain an argument we had three years ago in what is called a “Private Family Visit.” Nearly all of our personal information has been made available to any and all members of the Service who wish to avail themselves of my husband’s file. Our telephone and visiting room conversations are subject to electronic eavesdropping, and again to interpretation. Our letters and manuscripts cannot, by law, be read by Correctional Service officers, but two years ago our “privilege” to write a novel together was withdrawn after a guard “chanced” to read one of our manuscripts. He thought our book was inappropriate. We were writing a thriller. Two
weeks later, after the exchange of many phone calls and letters, our “privilege” was reinstated. We requested a letter stating precisely what we were permitted to write and how we were to exchange manuscripts. That letter never surfaced, despite four further requests.

And now this “beep” from this electronic nose. The machine, I learned, measures in nanograms (billionths of a gram) for traces of cocaine, heroin, amphetamines and marijuana. I had and have still no idea how many nanograms my envelope recorded which prompted the machine’s hideous squawk and the recording in a secret file (so secret that I was refused a copy or even knowledge of its contents). I do know that my envelope had, prior to that day, passed through both U.S. and Canadian postal services, through U.S. Customs, through my postmistress’s hands and, too, because I had used the same envelope prior to that day, it had passed through the Institution, through many guards’ hands, and possibly many prisoners’ hands as well. I was, that day, permitted to give the envelope to my husband.

National Headquarters later informed me that the Ion Scanner is used, frequently, by U.S. Customs. I learned, later still, that researchers have found that more than 65% of U.S. currency tested by the ion scanner measures positive for illegal substances. I also heard that when a Service official visited Collins Bay Institution, his $50.00 bill beeped. I doubt very much that either his name or this information were recorded anywhere, and as I understand it from people witnessing this “test,” observers laughed to think that a man of means and circumstance might ever indulge in any form of substance abuse -- or even shake the hand of someone who had.

Over a period of several weeks, I sought, with the help of the John Howard Society, more information pertaining to my beep. The Institution informed us that at some point in the future those individuals bringing in items which tested positive in some measure (as yet undetermined) would or could be denied visits with their incarcerated loved ones. As the guard had told me, it was possible that we would lose visits altogether, or that we could be charged, and that we most certainly would be asked to submit to a body and cavity search if we tested positive.

Over the ensuing months I often stood in line awaiting “testing” while watching guards and other “Official Visitors” enter and leave the Institution, without scrutiny. In most cases these individuals carried some kind of bag. In one case a guard entered carrying a duffle bag, and
as we waited impatiently in line, he waltzed inside. “Isn’t it possible,” I said to the guard doing the testing, “that some individuals other than prisoners’ visitors might smuggle contraband inside? In a duffle bag, for instance?”

“He’s staff,” she laughed, “Why would staff bring in contraband?”

I politely suggested that financial gain was the goal of those who traffick in drugs and that even those individuals who are not prisoners sometimes seek such ill-begotten gains.

“You’re paranoid,” she said.

I watched one elderly father who spoke little English break down in tears after his I.D. beeped and he was sent away without seeing his son. I listened as family members pleaded with guards to let them know what this machine was saying about them. On occasion I asked about the way in which the testers sometimes neglected to change their gloves, or to clear the desk on which a tainted item had just lain. I was deemed a troublemaker, a label given to all those who challenge the system in any regard and to many who simply ask rational questions. Consider, for example, the case of Dr. Bob Bater, who, on viewing the P4W strip search asked what the Institution could have been thinking in ordering such a horrendous act. In return for his question, he was forced to resign from the Citizens Advisory Committee, a group designed to serve as “liaison” between the community and the prisons, but a group that is forbidden by policy to “advocate” for prisoners in any regard.

For the first several months, the women who were assigned by the warden to take responsibility for the Ion Scanner testing were polite and even, on occasion, outspoken in their compassion for us. However, the guard’s union protested the warden’s decision to place only certain individuals at this post, and thereafter, on occasion, a less-than-pleasant guard greeted us. Some guards are, frankly, less equipped than are others to meet and greet the public, which contrary to popular opinion and to portraits painted, we prisoners’ visitors are.

“I don’t do drugs!” became the cry heard most often in that vestibule after the sound of the beep, even though we all were well aware of the fact that few would listen to or believe anything we might say in our own defense. Sometimes a woman we all knew would test positive and cry out for help; to our despair and shame, we sometimes turned away from her. Association (that is with others alleged to have committed an offense) is a punishable crime in prison, and if we spoke with her, we
could, by suspicion, be considered “associates.” We grew more and more depressed.

**PART FOUR**

Ultimately, in efforts to unearth my secret file as it pertained to the beep on the Collins Bay Institution Ion Scanner, CSC officials informed me and the John Howard Society that on the day that I beeped, they had not yet determined “levels,” and that, therefore, the “information” collected about me and my envelope had been destroyed. I sought written confirmation of this destruction of records but never received such, though three John Howard Society representatives were told the same thing. We were also promised answers to our questions: how were these tests being conducted? on whom would the experiment’s findings render judgment and what would the judgment be? what were the levels considered too high? and what punishment would follow? The Service never did provide this information. Warren Allmand, the single MP who did attempt to aid me in my quest for information, wrote to me to say that the Solicitor General had advised him that the machine’s purpose was to help to stem the flood of drugs into the Institution.

I contact the Civil Liberties Association as it seemed clear that the civil liberties of prisoners’ visitors were being violated. Despite numerous calls, faxes and letters sent to the Association, I received no response of any kind.

And meanwhile, other prisoners’ visitors and I would often wait up to forty-five minutes to enter the building for our two hour and forty-five minute visits, now reduced to less than two. We were told that staff and/or other visitors were also tested, but only once in eight months, in five visits weekly, did I observe such an occurrence. A volunteer teacher’s wallet beeped. “I don’t do drugs,” she cried. “How can this be happening.” I’ve never ever done drugs!” Some wives lost their visits for a day. A few women lost their private family visits when their suitcases beeped. Some women were strip searched, and then - when nothing was found - they were granted their visits. Our denials of wrongdoing met with smug disinterest and the continuing recording of “information.” I suppose in some cases charges were laid, and I suppose too that in some cases some individuals were stymied in real attempts to smuggle in contraband.
Nine months later, I learned one end to which my beep was to be employed. My husband had by then been transferred to a minimum security institution. One day his new Case Management Officer - a thorough and apparently fair man whose primary interest seems to be in keeping me from writing him letters (“it makes so much more work” he told me) - informed my husband that in reading through his file he had come upon an Incident Report written in early March. (Any and all staff can provide for any and every prisoner’s file Incident Reports which are not necessarily shared with the prisoner). My husband’s Incident Report alleged that in March 1995 an (unnamed) visitor tested positive for traces of cocaine and when informed of this fact by the officer challenged the officer’s findings. My husband’s new Case Management Officer said he thought the report must be referring to Amy. He smiled knowingly, for by that time he knew that I was someone who would likely challenge, and he half-believed me when I told him the facts, though it was obvious a shade of suspicion remained in his mind. “This is what we mean,” I said to him, “when we talk to you about the innuendoes and suspicions - meaningless misrepresentations that are used against us to increase punishment.”

“Oh, c’mon.” he said, “you’re overreacting.” And then he stipulated that my husband’s Correctional Plan include regular urinalysis tests (costly affairs). And besides the newest implication now embedded in my husband’s file, we know that if necessary, some day in the future, an overzealous official might infer from this little “beep” that my husband had a visitor who was bringing him drugs as late as March 1995, an “inference” that would be useful if and when the Service chooses to produce another “credible inmate source” with a story about my husband and drugs.

My husband’s new Case Management Officer calmly told us to “put the past behind us.” Their past, not my husband’s, that is.

If I have learned anything over the past four years, it is this: challenging the system is a most heinous and punishable offense. It is a fact made clear at the Arbour Commission hearings to anyone who listens with an eye and an ear for the truth. At that hearing, the Deputy Commissioner grew red, then white, at the lawyer’s questions as to whether he believed his “investigative” staff might have prepared an investigative report about the strip search (a report which neglected even to mention that male guards had stripped women prisoners) in an effort to please
their bosses. The Deputy Commissioner waxed indignant. He talked about how easily the Service would be “found out” were anyone to willfully lie. When Jackson pushed, asking how they might be found out, he said that, for instance, all prisoners have, at all times, access to the public.

This statement was so painful and demonstrably false to me that I ran at once to one of the only two reporters covering those final days of the Enquiry. After all, one aspect of the Enquiry has to do with the established fact that the P4W women were denied access even to their lawyers for seven days after they were locked in segregation cells and to the fact that in order to release the tape to the public, one of the women had to take the matter to court. The statement was personally painful to me because it had been this same man - the Deputy Commissioner - whose letter to the publisher of The Whig Standard called for my censorship and resulted in my losing my job.

“There,” I said to the reporter who had once been a colleague of mine at The Whig, “That’s the gist of it all. If all prisoners at all times have access to the public, why was I censored?”

The reporter looked suspiciously at me. “I never understood what happened back then.”

“What happened was this. I spoke to the man who is now my husband. One official told me I was not permitted to speak to him, but I continued to talk to him. And then the Deputy Commissioner wrote to the publisher and informed him that I had behaved inappropriately and was, therefore, denied access to any of the prisons.”

“Why did you speak to him after they told you not to?” the reporter asked.

I felt bereft. “Look,” I said, “you’re covering this Enquiry. If I tell you that you can interview anyone you wish here today, but you cannot speak to the Deputy Commissioner, what will you do?”

“I won’t speak to the Deputy Commissioner,” he said flatly.

“You won’t ask why you can’t speak to him?”

“Well, yeah,” he wavered. “I’d ask.”

“And if I told you, you couldn’t speak to him because he’s dangerous?”

He shrugged, and I - too wracked by emotion to walk this man down the logical path - left the room. It felt hopeless, for I had already listened to the testimony of the woman who had led the “internal investigation”
into the “P4W incident.” Listening to her, I experienced a terrifying déjà vu. This “investigator” (promoted days after the finalization of her report) was the same woman who three years earlier had been the Deputy Warden at Joyceville Institution, the woman who approved my husband’s transfer and supplied this same Deputy Commissioner with whatever lies she found necessary during the course of the same kind of spurious in-house investigation into my husband’s emergency involuntary transfer.

Later I learned that even if I had been able to encourage The Whig reporter to understand that statements are not facts, particularly when those statements issue from individuals who have discredited themselves in later testimony, it would not have mattered. On that last day of the Enquiry testimony - before final arguments and recommendations - The Whig ended its “prison beat.” From mid-December on, coverage of prisons in Kingston at least will be done on an ad hoc basis only.

During cross examination of Correctional Service officers, much evidence of illegal acts and cover up of those illegal acts was made available to those few members of the public who attended, and to the only two reporters who covered the event to its near conclusion. The Whig reporter reported as fact that the women prisoners had staged a “riot” prior to the strip search, despite the fact that proof of this depends upon the veracity of the officials’ word, and many of these same officials have been shown to have lied about other salient facts. The reporters fell victim to the images and stories about all prisoners that have been branded on the public’s mind.

Each time I realize that so many otherwise intelligent, educated and reasonable human beings are so easily convinced that all men and women in prison, and nearly all of their families and friends, are incredible, criminal to the core, never to be believed, I grow more frightened and sad. It is certainly true that there are many members of the Service who lawfully and in some cases humanely attempt to protect all members of society, including prisoners and their friends and families. It is certainly true that there are prisoners and family members of prisoners who do engage in illegal activities, just as it is true that some individuals in the community at large do so, even if undetected and unpunished. It is also true that thousands of prisoners and their family members, and the public as well face horrors in a thousand different
ways because a few members of the Service choose to abuse their unchecked power.

Prisoners and their families seldom speak out or challenge openly. When we do, we are sometimes severely punished. We are frightened of a press and a public which has labelled us so thoroughly, and we know that the prison officials hold the keys to our very lives. Our fear has allowed us to permit the deceptions and misperceptions about us to go on. We can only hope that Madame Justice Arbour has begun to see that internal investigations and the dependence for such on suspicions, lies, innuendo, rumor and implication, will not only harm prisoners and their families, but will harm us all.

ADDENDA

On March 31 1996 Madame Justice Arbour issued her 300-page findings. She found the Correctional Service to be systemically unlawful and adjuged the culture of the system to have no regard for the law or for human rights. The Commissioner resigned. A clone has been assigned to take his place.
LETTERS

A Call to Conscience: A European Mirror of Truth

Marion Wollersheim

When we hear in the Netherlands of the justice system in the USA, it begins to clearly and rightfully evoke a deep-seated fear. For in many ways, it has begun to sound like the old Germany, which was never able to stop the rise of the Nazis in tormenting and attempting to eradicate their so-called undesirables; much like the United States appears to have never been able to fully let go of the concept of slavery. If you do not believe me, look at the States of Alabama and Arizona, where they flaunt the image of chained human beings whom a court has declared undesirable or enemies of the state, herding them under muzzles of guns along their roadways.

Next, look to Texas, where they all too proudly like to show visitors their museum that demonstrates the process used to kill that state’s prisoners. I am talking about Huntsville, Texas’s largest prisoner detention centre. How truly morbid it seems, to find a civilized nation in this day and age, callously boasting of a newer and alternative version of Dachau, with the only difference being the execution of human beings one at a time. I can only stare in horror at the mind-set behind such a phenomenon.

Aside from the prisons and guards there, we also hear that the Texas Correctional Industries aspires to be the third largest corporation in the United States. Not only do they have their license plate, license plate sticker, engraving, and records and conversion plants, but also, box, mattress, furniture, shoe, soap, canning, and brush factories, all making big money utilizing prisoner labour with no wages. Are they too, some new alternative to something else, such as a pre-civil war cotton field? And do all those industries give prisoners any skills that will allow them to move away from a life of crime, or do they just perpetuate another future pool of cheap labour to help Texas realize its corporate dream? In the end, hopefully someone will realize that when that misleading corporate dream has been achieved, it will have been achieved at the human cost of another future taxpayer being victimized, because the prisoner who will eventually be released has for years and often decades, been shown nothing meaningful; other than the fact that s/he was hopelessly trapped in the cycle of a social dilemma from which only
a few knowing people could have or really wanted to release him or her. Look at how little prisoners are allowed to financially prepare themselves for their release, and you will soon realize this claim substantiates itself.

We were also thinking long and hard, as to why the United States was not allowing China to sell things in America that political prisoners in China had made. In looking more closely at that fine line between what the United States considers acceptable for its own prisoners, and that which intrudes upon a Chinese prisoner’s rights, from a realistic perspective that distinction eludes us. But also, we wonder if the United States could meet those same standards and purported objectives of such laws, if they were applied in an unbiased and factual manner against its own prisons and prisoners? When we hear and read, that in Texas, homosexuals and burglars can be shot and killed without the judges handling those cases as killings, we, as thinking and compassionate human beings, become even more fearful of your nation touting itself as a world leader. For what is the message being sent to other nations who have succeeded in moving forward with time, truly showing and respecting equality among their people, when the United States moves toward accepting public acts of hostility on the fringes of decadent barbarism for the sake of extolling discriminative selection? It is not a good message at all my dear American neighbours!

Here in the Netherlands, we often perceive the United States’ justice system as just being the same one slavery was; only slightly evolved from a time when blacks were allowed to be killed, raped, and have their children sold. The only difference being, that today the system includes Hispanics, Native Americans, poor whites, and all those who lack the intellectual or mental ability to end up trapped in that broad scope of revenge hidden in the name of justice. It is a startling and cold truth to face.

How ironic it was to have watched the United States seek the freedom of former prisoner Nelson Mandela, when that same United States created the situation that made Amnesty International have to begin collecting information regarding racial discrimination in the application of its death penalty. Although the freedom and eventual election of Nelson Mandela was a beautiful thing to see, I could not believe my eyes when President Clinton and Hillary were in South Africa celebrating Mandela’s election, when I knew fully well that President Clinton
had previously approved the execution of a black man, who had undergone a lobotomy and had the mentality of a five year old child.

Here in the Netherlands, people who commit crimes are punished also. But here, we think that it is quite enough to send them to prison, to reflect upon whether or not money is worth the price of their freedom. As you may have guessed from the preceding sentence, most of the crimes here, are to basically get money. But, never does it occur with the frequency that it does in the United States; nor do people become so aggressive from the feeling of having been made worthless, that they hurt or kill others. Here, they are handled with the basic respect every creature needs to live a normal life. For some, this may seem like a strange concept, but it has worked extremely well in making the Netherlands one of the least violent nations in the world.

It is surely another point to discuss, regarding exactly how severe prisoners need to be punished or treated, in learning that they have done something wrong. Here in the Netherlands, we wonder how some people could end up receiving sentences as long as 133 years. In saying this, it is meant that someone who perhaps needed such a lengthy sentence, may have instead needed the services of a doctor to help him function in society as he should have. That someone could perceive giving another such an unbelievably long sentence, perhaps is in need of a doctor too! In truth, it denotes that there is something basically wrong, and it is being overlooked in the hysteria of seeking revenge, i.e., the causes of crime.

All crimes have some reason(s) for their occurrence, but if no one attempts to address those reasons, there can never be any solutions. The abuse of prisoners does nothing to address reasons or causes, for it only works to diminish their self-respect and create a deep seated hostility, from which little or no respect for their tax-paying tormentors can ever come. This is one fundamental flaw in your justice system, that desperately needs to be realized and addressed.

For the United States will otherwise embark upon a journey from which it may never be able to return to a progressive path. It has already nearly surpassed the staggering numbers the former Soviet Union had in imprisoning its citizens before its demise.

Although some answers may never be easy to initially accept, perhaps it is time to look to the progressive nations that have justice systems that work; for the fruits of today’s American justice system are
not the legacy you will want to leave children of the next millennium. For in time, that legacy will only eventually begin to look more like those of the old Germany and the no longer existing empire of the Soviet Union in the eyes of all those yet unborn children and the rest of the world.

Is that what people truly want for America?
The headline of a recent Watchtower, the Jehovah Witness magazine, asks the question, “Can Government Stop Crime?” The Ontario government, in 1994, did not stop crime but they did take steps towards stopping criminals from writing about it, or, more to the point, stopping them from profiting from their writings. Victims’ groups had lobbied hard for years to bring in something like Bill 210 and just as it appeared stalled, it was suddenly introduced on December 8, 1994, given all party support, all three readings, and kicked upstairs for Royal Assent, all on the same day. The government’s sudden turnaround, the concerted effort, and successful passage of this bill was described by one MPP at the time as, “being like the ending of a Frank Capra movie.”

The government’s action came on the heels of a phone call to the Premier’s office from the mothers of two of Paul Bernardo’s victims. Bernardo had boasted, if ever caught he would “write a book and make a million.” The Premier summoned his Attorney General and within 24 hours Bill 210 was cobbled together and presented to the legislature.

But the Frank Capra characterization has proved all too apt. This bill, like his movies, bears little relation to real life. In the years since, Paul Bernardo has not written a book, or, if he has, no one is interested. Nor has he tried to strike a deal à la Clifford Olson - cash for information. Neither has Clifford Olson written anything in the fifteen years since his imprisonment. In fact, in the past fifteen years the published books written in English by prisoners in Canada can be counted on eight of your fingers - three books of non-fiction, three books of poetry, and two novels. The advances, in total, come to less than eleven thousand dollars. None of these stories “celebrate” the criminal, rather they illuminate the issues of racism, misogyny, child abuse, substance addictions, poor choices, bad experiences and harsh confinement.

Prison writers do not profit from their crimes, they profit from their willingness to re-enter the wounds of their life with the unflinching conscience of a writer. If they do that with extraordinary ability, they might be published, and receive payment. To have them forfeit their earnings is to discourage most from even trying, and further diminish those in our society who are most diminished already. We threaten what is for many the single most important rehabilitative tool there is. To write is to establish a moral relationship with the world.
So why are we studying the Ontario bill for a national application? One reason is that too many of us ask our legislators a question quite different than the one posed by *Watchtower* magazine. We ask, *Why Can't Government Stop Crime?* They can, some of the crime, some of the time, but if there is to be a genuine movement to heal victims and reduce crime it will not come from more and more laws, nor from lobbyists, or even mass media. This movement will rise out of our communities.

At a recent White House conference, U.S. President Clinton emerged from a breakfast meeting with eighteen moderate church leaders. Their joint announcement was, essentially, that the Christian Right did not represent all Christians. In the Canadian political scene, although we have nothing as formidable as the Christian Right, our politicians need reminding that victims’ rights groups, the organization of anger, do not represent the views of all victims’ rights advocates.

There is another groundswell in the community - people who are committed to the process of restorative justice, healing circles, victim-offender reconciliation, recovery programmes, community policing, transition houses, et al. The welfare of victim and offender need not be at cross purposes, and in fact are not. Only when we place a Paul Bernardo or a Clifford Olson in the crosshairs does all the retributive legislation make emotional logic.

I will be directly affected if this bill is adopted nationally. I wrote my first novel while in prison. Now, ten years later, I continue to rise every morning at six to write, and I continue to write from experience. I make a marginal living from writing and teaching creative writing both inside and outside prison. To commit the act of writing every day is for me an expression of my willingness to participate in an orderly society.

In writing, I found a way out of hate. Legislation like Bill 210 takes us all deeper into it.
About The Cover

The cover art, entitled *WOLF WOMAN*, is by James V. Allridge III. Born to African American parents on November 14, 1962 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, James attended school in Fort Worth, Texas. He was found guilty and sentenced to death for a robbery slaying on June 9, 1987. This was his first and only criminal charge and conviction.

On death row he became a self-taught artist and now has over 300 works in private collections. His pen and ink illustrations have appeared in numerous newsletters in the USA and Switzerland. The USA national organization, Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (C.U.R.E.) has used several of his illustrations for their line of all occasion note cards. Since 1993, James has produced his own line of Christmas greeting cards. He also provided the cover art *Piano Wave* for volume 6:1 of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (1996).

As a consequent of his confinement, James is a "copy artist", who relies on photographs and magazine illustrations to provide his subject matter. *Wolf Woman*, drawn in coloured pencil was exhibited at the Prison Art Show and Exhibition in Huntsville, Texas. A large exhibition of his art is scheduled for 1997.

James V. Allridge III is also an accomplished writer and has recently published a book of poetry and prose entitled *Deadly Executioner* (1996).

Ronald K. Allridge, the artist's brother, was executed by the state of Texas on June 8, 1995. In November 1996, James V. Allridge III was granted a stay of execution pending a final appeal. Support is desperately needed and may be provided via the Fund For Life, Postfach, CH-4002 Basel, Switzerland, Tel/Fax 061 332 16 59

James can be contacted directly at: 870 Ellis One Unit, Huntsville, Texas 77343 USA
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