

MY FIRST YEAR IN A WOMEN'S PRISON

After 20 years in a male prison system I was moved to Women's prison. How and why that happened may be of interest to you.

I was sentenced to a term of Life with out parole for Bank Robbery, Assault, and Weapons convictions. During my trials it came out that I was a Transgender Woman and had been living a secret life. But I was sentenced and sent to a male prison as was the policy back then. I struggled to get treatment for my gender dysphoria, but prior to 2012 I received nothing. In 2012 I started receiving female hormones and anti-androgens , and began the long process of transitioning from male to female. I developed breast's and lived openly as a woman,as part of that process. Living as a woman in a male prison presented many problems and rules and policies prevented me from living a " real life experience" as required for consideration for gender reassignment surgery. I was slowly given some items that female prisoners received like bra's , panties, and some simple basic makeup.

I ended up being transfered several times because the prisons I was in could not handle me living full time as a woman so they got rid of me like a hot potato. The last place I ended up before the women's prison really could not handle me living as a woman, but I asserted my rights and would not back down one bit. They harassed me for wearing my makeup , they confiscated the shower curtain and tried to make me shower in a way that I was visible to other prisoners. And they gave me cellmates who were a threat to my safety in that they were either sex offenders , Gang members, or were so much bigger then me that I could not be able to defend myself against them if they tried to sexually assault me.

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It was suggested to my psychologist that I be put in for a transfer to women's prison. So the transfer was requested through official procedures. I did not expect for it to happen, but I figured it would be a good idea for it to be requested in case something bad happened to me as I expected.

As I was walking the track on the recreation yard, I was summoned to the Lt.'s office. Enroute I was met by a couple of guards and taken to the special housing unit. No one told me what was happening and after I raised hell I was put in a cell by myself and told I would be told in the morning why I was in the SHU. I was very upset, but could not do anything about it.

The next day I was told to get ready to transfer, and it was going to be a women's prison that I was going to. I ended up staying in the SHU till the following Monday because the paper work had not been completed.

Monday I was dressed out and transported by a Male and a Female officer in a car to a women's prison about 90 miles away. I was processed in and placed into the SHU in a cell by myself. I could see and hear the other women so I knew that I was really in a women's prison. I was told that I was going to be transferred to a Women's Medical Center in about a week.

The next week I got on a prison plane and flew to the transfer prison and placed into the women's section, a week later I rode a prison bus to my new home the Women's Medical Center.

I was processed in and placed into the general population with any further ado. My first roommate was a very nice older Lady who had no problem with my being transgender. So I just went about my business as any new prisoner would do. I met a few people and talked to the people who came on the bus with me. People were very welcoming and curious about me.

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The next morning I went to the laundry and received my prison issue clothes including my first official prison dress, bra's , panties, slacks, etc. and I got to take a good look at my new home. Part of it was an old military Hospital, there was housing in the Hospital and a building they called the " Highrise" that had four separate housing areas in it. There was a walking track, and other indoor and outdoor recreation areas, a dining room under the Hospital building, A special Maximum Security unit, work shops and some other multipurpose buildings.

I was to say the least very glad and excited to be in a real women's prison. The first thing I noted was how much safer I felt. I also noticed how differently the women interacted with each other. I will explain more about that in detail later. But the way people related to each other was just not the same as in a male prison, lot's of hugs, and I love you's and terms of endearment .

People sought me out because of my status as transgender, and I started hearing about another Trans-Woman who came to be there but did not do very well and who requested to be sent to a male prison. (they were). I was very cautious about what I did and how I acted. For instance I got very early in the morning so I could shave in the community bathroom without having to many people around. I also changed my clothing in such a way that no one could see me nude. And I respected every one else's privacy in that respect. I tried to answer the many questions people had about me but still retain some of my own privacy.

On My first trip to the commissary I got as much makeup as I could, and I wore my lipstick, blush, eyeshadow all the time for the first time

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... I was able to do so without being harassed about it. As I got used to my surroundings and could see who was who and what. I started making new friends, some of who are still very close friends. I even met someone who knew my best friend from another prison. I will call her R. she is my B.F.F.

R.gave me not one but two Birthday parties,the first one on the day of my B-day, and another one The Weekend of my B-day, I came back to my room after work for count. At first I did not notice anything,but I looked up and saw a huge Banner with a Painting of me all dolled up in a Kimono ,that read " Happy Birthday Bella Donna ". I was so overcome with joy I cried. R. and my new friends gave me a huge party,with lots of gifts and food. I had barley been there a month and a half and I was accepted by most of the Women in my housing unit and the prison as a whole.

But not by all as I soon found out. A couple of weeks after the party I was suddenly moved to another housing unit. I was told that allegations of a sexual nature had been made regarding myself and others. The staff did not believe the allegations but moved me to a unit that had cameras to they said" protect me from false allegations" . They also did some blood testing and spoke to my gynecologist , the results being I was not capable of doing what I was accused of. I kept my old friends and made new ones in my new unit. R. and I still spent a lot of time together away from our separate units. I was working in the plumbing shop at the time doing a lot of hard physical labor in the heat. Not very Lady like but I needed the money. I learned some valuable lessons doing that job, not everyone will admire your skills and some feel threatened by them. Some women will smile in your face and bad mouth you behind your back,this was happening on my job,

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...a couple of other work issues led me to change jobs. I started working on my unit as an orderly. A job that took up less of my time.

A couple of other Trans-women arrived, one decided to remain undercover and one was more open about it. I spoke to both and offered my help and friendship to both. One ended up on the same unit as myself after having some problems. I became more aware of the small but busy minority of anti-transgender persons who amounted to less than 5% of the overall population of women. The bias was across all ethnic, age, and political groups. But it was mostly from people who were not very well liked in the first place due to their own bias's and intolerance or some other major character flaw on their part.

I also notice that if I got into an argument or dispute with some of these people their first and default reaction was to go at me gender wise. That is to say they made a reference to my birth sex, my legal male name, or some other gender related slight. This included people who at first were very friendly and supportive then did a 180° turnaround and became anti-trans.

As each day, week and month went by I became more used to living every day, and every way as a woman. I kept my appearance at it's best at all time and was complemented about my hair and makeup a lot. I also took a lot of pictures to see how I looked so I could refine my appearance. I made a lot of progress.

My interactions with staff for the most part were positive. And most problems I had did not deal with my gender, but were the usual prisoner-officer stuff. The few things I did raise with staff were resolved quickly.

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At least at that time, that did change later but during my first year everything in that regard seemed ok.

I was able to get my hair dyed (same color just to cover the gray), I had it cut and styled several times too. I took a lot of pictures to help me perfect my look and style. And the other ladies helped me out with my hair and makeup. I got so good at it myself some women even came to me for advice on makeup.

The interaction between women does differ significantly from that of men in prison. Women tend to become parts of extended families with each playing the role of Mother, Nana, Wife, Husband, son and daughter. Often these families cross ethnic, and social boundaries. We tend to look at each other and make relationships based on where we fit in that family structure. There is some level of violence among the women, but nothing like you see in a male prison. There is a lot more snitching and tattling and sneaky stuff. There is a lot of hugging and kissing that is not sexual or romantic. And yes women do have sex with each other. And without the hang ups men have about same sex relationships. And a lot of women are "strictly dicky" meaning they only want to be with men, and some are "gay for the stay" While there is a pecking order and unwritten rules of conduct within the prisoners it is not as rigid or strict as among male prisoners. I am still learning a lot about how to act but it seems to come easier with each passing day.

As **I** go into my second year in a women's prison I am confident that I will fit in and that I do fit in. I am also aware that a lot of Transwomen may not like it here and should not come if they prefer to be among men in prison. And that not every one in the LGBT community is going to be a friend, and some may even become your enemy. I will be cautious and correct in all that I do so others may come if they feel that they need to be here.