

MY SECOND YEAR IN WOMEN'S PRISON

As I come to the end of my second year in a women's prison, I wonder if it will be my last. I am doing very well here and have made the change with out to much trouble. I am very well liked and respected by my peers and part of the Community of Women here.

But there is a very small and bitter minority that wants me and the rest of the transgender prisoners out of here. They have filed a law suit in the Federal Court, and obtained representation from some right wing anti-LGBT hate group. A lot of people myself included did not expect the suit to go very far. But it did and it is causing me and the Transgender Community problems. I think the Male to Female preoperative persons are most at risk. But the Hater's have targeted all transgender persons in their complaint, M to F, F to M, pre, and post op. In fact they may even try to get the whole LGBT Community.

The person who started the legal action, is a very bitter and twisted person. She has a history of predatory behavior against people, and files bad legal work for people, charges them a lot of money for it and has in many instances extorted people. She files frivolous legal motions and has been threatened by the Court with sanctions if she does not stop. Why she came after transgender prisoners is a good question. More importantly is how to stop her and her ilk. I have and will try to counter her and her attorney's in Court to the best of my ability, and still live my life as a decent and respectable woman.

I know that not every one wants us (Trans-people) in the same prison with them. It was the same in a male prison. And I know that I am ashamed of the behavior of some of my fellow trans-persons. Whose actions have been used to

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...try and justify the removal of all transwomen/men from women's prison's.

The official policy that allowed us to come here in the first place, calls for a " case by case basis" in considering where to house transgender prisoners in male or female prisons. If anyone needs to be removed due to bad behavior or unsuitability their actions should be used against them only. Not against us as a whole. Also the screening or veting process should be examined to see if there are problem areas that need to be taken care of.

I have always been very aware of how my actions are viewed by others. And I have acted accordingly. I go out of my way to be polite and act like a Lady. I have also followed my own natural instincts and treat people like I want to be treated. It is really just common sense.

One of the things I have done is I have asked my fellow women to sign affidavit's attesting to my good behavior, and demeanor . People have also come to me on their own and let me know that I have their support. This does include persons from all ethnic backgrounds, religions, and walks of life. I have participated in community activities, Including a very well liked performance of Shania Twain's " Man I feel like a woman" which I lip synched . People came up to me weeks later and told me how much they enjoyed my performance. I also wrote a Christmas play based on Dickens " A Christmas Carol " which won our unit 3rd place in a contest.

I keep my distance from known trouble makers, including one's who claim to be transgender. I don't use drugs or drink, nor do I have sex. It may sound like a dull life. But as we like to say at Carswell " I am living the Dream", some say it in a sarcastic manner but for me it is true. MY life is so different now

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... from what it used to be, as a woman in a male prison. And even as I write this there is a fresh rumor that Myself and some of the other transgender women may be transferred. It gives me a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach just to hear or think about it.

I have also been getting the the runaround about my gender reassignment surgery request. I have had several recommendations since 2015 for that surgery by the Clinical Directors of the Prisons I have been in including here. I meet all of the criteria. I have no health problems that would preclude my getting the surgery. But it is all about politics and I will have to go to Court to get my surgery most likely. But if I do it will render moot all of the efforts to have me removed from here. I just can't picture them sending me to a male prison with a vagina (even a neo vagina).

My day to day life is really a very normal one, I still get up early, I get cleaned up, put on my makeup and do my hair. I go eat breakfast and sometimes I am joined by my friend or friends. Then I go to work, though some days I go for a walk outside first. My current job is very challenging I do clerical work, apply pesticides, distribute chemicals to the units and various department. I try to have lunch with my friend at least a couple of days a week. Then I go back to work after lunch. There is some heavy lifting and stocking of materials and supplies. We also check on the safety equipment. I make a decent salary by prison standards and I earn it. I have also earned a high level of trust and respect from my supervisors. My job takes me all over the prison and I have gotten to know most of my fellow women prisoners quite well.

My social life varies according to the weather, and what programs are

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... available. I attend programs in the religious services area, most movies and video viewing. Me and my best friend watch at least two movies a week. I also go outside weather and time permitting, I enjoy taking walks as much as I can. Sometimes I just sit outside by myself or with a friend.

This year I have had to spend alot of my time doing legal work to try and deal with this anti-transgender case. It takes a lot out of me to have to deal with such hate and lies. But I owe it to myself and my friends to fight back in a leagl and proper way.

At the end of the day usually recall at 8:30pm I go back to my housing unit. I get a shower, make a snack,check the computer, and get ready for bed after the 9:30pm count. I don't watch much TV. I do do video visits which are sort of like skype you can see and be seen by the person you are visiting with they last about 25 minutes and cost \$6.00. My family lives far away so it is a good alternative for me to use.

I live on one of the smaller units in the hospital, we have dialysis patients who have kidney failure, cancer patients who are on chemo,radiation, or have completed their tratment. We also have able bodied persons who live on the unit, either to work or to fill the top bunks the others can't use. There are a couple of us transpersons on this unit too(M to F and F to M) and we all get along well with each other and everyone else. :

I sleep well and soundly knowing I don't have to worry about being raped or attacked because I am transgender. And the people I live with have no fear of me doing any thing bad to them. We all just try to live and let live, we also help each other alot. I have found women who have collapsed ,and or have passed out due to their illness.And some who had other problems and needed to

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... go to the emergency treatment area. I have also provided an ear to listen, and a shoulder to cry on. And I have received back the same, that's how we roll here at this Women's prison, we help each other for the most part.

Now I have had problems and issues with my fellow prisoners, including some transgender one's. But I managed to deal with them as a Lady and in a way that no one got hurt. There is some violence here, but no where near the level of violence that you would see in a male prison. And in my position I have gone out of my way to avoid violence, and I do not seek confrontation.

Even the people who may not care for me being here are for the most part cordial and respectful towards me. I have proved many times over that I can make it here, that I belong here, and that Transgender Women have a place in Womens prison. That we are not a threat to anyone just because we are transgender. And if any transgender woaman does become a credible threat to any women here they can be isolated and removed to a more appropriate setting. Nothing in this world is perfect. But I have proven myself in all the ways that matter.

I hope that I can continue to live in a Women's prison as long as I am a prisoner. I hope that those in charge of Prisons the world over can come to see that **some** of us(Transgender women) do belong here and can be safely housed in women's prisons.

I am not sure what the future hold for me and those like me, we are the step-children of the LGBT community, and the hate mongers seem to have a special hatred towards us. And they know we are more vulernable to back lash and have less support overall. I think that the ALT-Right is still angry over Gay marriage and other recent losses for them. So they are coming for us. Maybe

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...they will make us wear rainbow patches in prison so every one will know we are LGBT, or the Transgender Symbol, who knows? One thing for sure is that we are not done fighting for our rights, and a place in society (even prison) that does not degrade us or make us have any less rights than the rest of society.

I am not second class anything and my rights matter to me, I will not be put upon anymore for sure.

I want all of our supporters, allies, and families to know the struggle is not over and if we want to move forward and protect what we have already won . It is time to get to work again cause the hate mongers are not done with us just yet.

I do want to close by saying that I want to thank everyone who has helped me and my people along the way. Who support us know, and who will be joining us in the future. There are a lot of LGBT people still hiding in the closet, and many who have take baby steps out. To only be scared to stay or come back out.

Nothing good comes easy, and you only get the rights you earned and fought for. Till we get rid of prisons altogether, we have to make them safer and transgender safe.

Yours Truly in Solidarity

Bella Donna Langan

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