

My Third Year in a Women's Prison

(By: Bella Donna Langan)

I would like to say hello to all of my sisters and brothers in the LGBT Community. Wow three years in a women's prison, it has been quite an experience. As we say here " Living the Dream", just remember dreams can turn into a nightmare if we are not carefull. All in all I am glad to be here and if I could sum up the number one reason for that is, " **I AM SAFE** " !, I can go to sleep and not worry about some predatory roommate or passerby trying to rape me. It just ain't going to happen in here. In fact it is probably safer for women in prison then it is on the street as far as sexual assault goes. The biggest threat to women here is male staff. I don't have the exact figures, but the overwhelming majority of sexual abuse done to women in prison is done to them by male staff.

It has not been all sugar and spice, and everything nice for me or for my transgender sisters. WE have had to endure false allegations by some inmates who tried to exploit our being here for gain and to advance an agenda of hate by anti-LGBT groups on the outside. There has been some legal action by the haters to have Transwomen removed from women's prisons. And some transwomen did not like it here and requested to go back to male prisons. And I am sorry to say some Transwomen have acted very badly towards our cis-gender sisters, and given all of us a bad name. I have had to do a lot of fence mending and public releations work to make up for that.

I am happy to say that I am a very well respected member of the Community of Women here. I give a lot of respect and get it back. I am as far as possible on good terms with my peers . I live, work and play as a woman and don't have any major issues with the vast majority of women here. Now of course not every one approves of me being here, but I have won over many who did not like us to be here. The bottom line is we are here and will stay here on a case by case basis. I do my best to make sure other transwomen can come here too. It is not easy to get here, and the rules have been made more stricter due to the bad behavior of some transwomen that gave the powers that be an excuse to crack down on us and discriminate against us.

I do want to share the good news and tell you what a joy it is for me to be able to express my self as I am. I get ^{up} early in the morning as I still have to shave. I put on my makeup, do my hair and my clothing for work or play.

As I get ready for breakfast, I check the computer or get my area in order.

During the week after I eat, I get ready for work, I do a mix of clerical and physical labor in my job. I do my best to do my job well. I have to interact with a lot of Staff and other inmates in my job, and I go all over the prison.

The vast majority of the Staff give me a lot of respect and don't talk down to me or make an issue of me being transgender, or being here. I am called Ms. Langan by staff, and Donna by my peers. As I go about my work day I have to do many tasks for my job and for myself.

Once a week I can shop in the Commissary and I can buy all of the female oriented items on sale here. I can buy makeup, Jewelry, clothing, feminine hygiene products, etc. I can & do wear prison issued dress's, slacks, blouses, and or sweats and shorts. It is all according to what I am doing or where I am at.

I eat a lot of my meals in the dinning room, I try to sit with my friends especially with my BFF. I am welcome at almost every table, and most people will come and sit with me if they want to. I have a lot of acquaintences, and a good number of friends some closer than others. I have Sister friends, I have a prison daughter, a Best friend forever, but due to my age I have no prison Mom.

I am active in a lot of areas, I have participated in prison plays, talent contests, and activities in the Religious services areas. I also like to get outdoors and walk or just enjoy the weather. I spend a lot of time watching DVD's with my BFF or just hanging out.

This is still prison and we have to go through all of the usual things any other prisoner would have to do. But I don't feel unsafe or harassed on a daily basis. I would never ever want to go back to a male prison, I would rather die then face that again.

I would tell any transwoman who wants to come to a womans prison, don't ever stop trying. And remember you will be watched extra closely and can't be a screw up. Don't make the rest of us look bad or think that you can come here and be a bully or get over on these ladies. Cause you can't and they will put you in your place right away. Thats all for now.

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