

I thought my 22 yrs to life sentence was going to be my biggest emotional and psychological struggle to overcome. I was wrong. The relentless punishing didn't start until after the judge sentenced me.

I spent four years in Orange County Jail. For four years I was fed food that was delivered in boxes labeled "NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION". Countless times live cockroaches were served to me on my tray. During the weekly clothing issue I had to check the crotch of my pants to see how stained they were; we called it bufferscotch stains. It was very seldom we received un-used panties. If we happen to be issued clothing that was mis-sized, too bad! We would just have to endure the ridicule of the officers when we went out to court. We were forced to strip out for inspection prior to court or for raids. This included dropping our panties, not only in front of other inmates but also in view of male staff and officers. Our shower privacy consisted of a waist-high partition and a clear shower curtain, no doubt a show for the male staff on duty and for anyone else that just happen to be walking by. One January morning at about 1am we were woken up for a raid of our tier. We were brought outside and instructed to remove every piece of clothing except our t-shirt which covered my private parts by barely an inch. We were then told to face the wall with our arms and legs spread for a female officer to pat us down while male officers "observed". We were then left outside with nothing but our t-shirts on in what was about 40° weather for about three-and-a-half hours. All this before I was sentenced. Now I was going to prison. An attorney once told me "prison is going to show you just how strong you are." At the time, I

had no idea how loaded that statement was.

Prior to officers being required to wear body cameras, I would endure sexual harassment on the regular, being told "nice tits wanna show em to me?" doesn't happen nearly as often. Now it's just mouthed to me with a hand over the camera. I've been invited to step into the restroom with/by an officer, I've been told "I like your sexy ponytail, I would love to pull on it." One officer asked if I would do jumping jacks for him with no bra on. In order to avoid retaliation, it's best if I just smile and giggle as if I'm flattered that this predator with a cold sore on his mouth thinks I'm worthy of his "compliments". I could go on and on but I fear some stories would reveal who I am. The repercussions would only make things worse and prolong me getting home to my children.

I am not an isolated case. Not only have I experienced it, I've witnessed friends being mocked, ridiculed, and humiliated for assumptions, false accusations and rumors started by and carried out by staff, both male and female. I've comforted women that just sit and cry because they've been physically and/or verbally violated. The safest thing for us to do is "shut up and act as if you like it or as if it didn't happen at all."

A message I would like to send is; yes, I've made bad decisions. I am and always will be a work in progress, but I am still a woman, a daughter, a sister, and a mother. I am a human being; and maybe, just maybe constant abuse, objectification and dehumanization is not the answer to rehabilitation for women.