

SET ME FREE



An Open Letter to the State Legislature of Oklahoma

There is
overwhelming
evidence to prove that
the riot at Oklahoma
State Penitentiary in
December 1985 was
orchestrated by the
Warden and his
Security Major
and not by the
inmates, as
most had been led
to believe. . . .

SHARON
HAMILTON

. . . The then Director of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections sanctioned it. Is it possible that the Governor also knew? The safety of prison officers and inmates was compromised in the face of the main objective at that time, to place Oklahoma's maximum-security prison on permanent lock down.

Since then the ODOC has grown into a very powerful force. Regional Director Bobby Boone can order his personnel at Oklahoma State Penitentiary to disregard prison policies and procedures, state and federal law because when it comes to selected prisoners; he has immunity - there is no one to police the police at OSP. One inmate that has experienced systematic punishment and retaliation for decades is Jerry Hamilton. I have used my own experiences, Jerry's prison records, letters, emails, telephone conversations and first hand accounts by retired prison officers, one of whom lost the sight in one eye during the riot; to write this book so that I may tell his story. I've written it because for years Jerry has been deliberately prevented from making any kind of positive progress. I have done everything possible to try to help him, but my letters to the ODOC make no impression. This is why I am addressing all of you. Without the intervention of someone with influence, a person with an impartial eye willing to investigate our claims nothing will change. Jerry is 55 years old, he is probably the only prisoner in Oklahoma to have endured over 28 years in maximum security that has never been on death row, raped or caused physical injury to anyone. It has been impossible for him to show any kind of improvement, a pre-requisite for parole consideration that would sanction his reintegration to society. Something he has been told to work toward so many times by the very people who have prevented him from doing so.

It's not just inmates who have been subjected to retaliation and discrimination by those with overall control of OSP. Personnel who are not 'team players' are bullied into resigning or are dismissed or got rid of one way or another. Tami Wagoner worked at OSP for over 16 years until she was forced to leave in 2007. She filed a successful lawsuit against the DOC for unfair dismissal. For legal reasons she is unable to discuss her case in public, but that doesn't stop me from telling you that she lost her job in retaliation for helping me with this book.

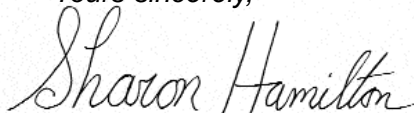
In July 2007 the leadership of the Oklahoma State Legislature requested that MGT of America conduct a comprehensive performance review of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. MGT recommended that the, "DOC should lock down maximum-custody inmates... ONLY... for administrative and disciplinary purposes." Let us hope that after 22 years of the continuous lock down at OSP of its general population prisoners ODOC will implement this recommendation.

In 2006, the Commission On Safety And Abuse In America's Prisons listened as Jack Cowley, former Warden of the Joseph Harp Correction Center, Oklahoma gave his evidence. He told them, "When we're not held accountable, the culture inside the prisons becomes a place that is so foreign to the culture of the real world that we develop our own way of doing things." There are prison personnel and inmates, present and past that could tell you what it's really like at Oklahoma State Penitentiary, but they have no voice because they know that those who are in positions of accountability are protected and therefore have no fear of exposure. It doesn't have to be this way; all it needs is for the administrative rules to be applied correctly and without prejudice for everyone.

In August 2007, I wrote to you, Governor Henry. My letter informed you that, "Today, conditions for inmates at OSP are deteriorating. It is far worse now than it was before the riot of '85. There is random deliberate depriving of personal hygiene and exercise, mishandling of the heating system, water and air conditioning, along with misappropriation of food. These are just some of the torture and punishment used as a means to maintain control. The limited jobs that exist are given with favour creating an atmosphere of elitism and immunity from punishment for a minority whilst the majority is threatened with physical abuse and retaliation that is condoned and encouraged by the OSP administration. The grievance system, the only means a prisoner has to officially air any problems within the system is non-existent for some - these prisoners may use it at their peril. This places men like Jerry in a potentially life threatening situation. But who will believe that this is happening at OSP today? How can it be proved to be happening? For the last 12 years Jerry has managed to keep from being forced into receiving a disciplinary despite constant harassment. However, we are fully aware he could get crossed out at any time - they have that power."

As a prisoner, Jerry has very few rights and some will no doubt point out that he is a convicted criminal and is only getting what he deserves. Before any of you pass judgment, please read this book. We are asking for your intervention.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharon Hamilton". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Sharon Hamilton

SET ME FREE

BY

SHARON HAMILTON



“WHEN WE’RE NOT HELD ACCOUNTABLE, THE
CULTURE INSIDE THE PRISONS BECOMES A
PLACE THAT IS SO FOREIGN TO THE CULTURE OF
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WAY OF DOING THINGS.”

~ JACK COWLEY,
FORMER WARDEN OF THE
JOSEPH HARP CORRECTION CENTER
OKLAHOMA

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*“In loving memory
of Chris, a true warrior.”*



~ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ~

I'd like to express my deep thanks to my family for your wonderful love and support, to Ray (The General), to Noel for your help and encouragement, not forgetting Katja, Beatriz, Joanna, Kay, and all those who've written to Jerry.

Thank you so much Bindy, my First Mate and Aussie pal.

Very special thanks to Eddie Morgan, Jerry Holt and Tami Wagoner - Oklahoma's finest.

Also, my grateful thanks to Rodney Briggs of Briggs Printing, McAlester for not turning me away and to Ronda Talley, Graphic Artist, for her kindness and patience.



Introduction



I was on duty in Garreg Fawr, that's Welsh for Big Rock by the way. I unlocked the heavy, metal studded door of the sixteenth century farmhouse and opened the wooden shutters to let in the light. The sunbeams hit the dark oak table standing in the middle of the large panelled room. It was a beautiful morning much too nice to stay inside and with the warm weather I decided not to light a fire, instead I thought I'd sit outside on the nearby bench in the bright sunshine. The museum wouldn't open for another half hour and once it did, it would take a while before any visitors reached me. The air was filled with birdsong as I opened my bag and taking out my pad and pen I paused for a few seconds to gather my thoughts, "Dear Jerry", I wrote.

"Sharon" I looked up and there stood Jimmy, a fellow workmate. "What are you doing?" he asked. "You'll never believe this, I'm writing to a prisoner in America", I said. "Hey, you'd better be careful, or you could end up falling in love" he replied. I laughed out loud at such an absurd idea. "Why are you writing to him then?" he continued. Screwing my eyes against the sun I squinted up at him not knowing what to say.

This encounter took place in August 2002, a lifetime away, well that's what it feels like. So much has happened since then, so much in fact that I've ended up writing this book. I believe I'm correct when I say that of its kind it's unique. Oh, there's hundreds, probably thousands of books about prisons and prisoners in the United States, it's a huge subject, but I bet none of them are like this one. Of course, I'm not asking you to take my word for it, but I am inviting you to read our story and see for yourself.



The Beginning



Jerry Hamilton
Letter number 1, August 13, 2002
Wynne Unit, Texas
Tuesday

"Thank you for writing Sharon, it was such a pleasure to hear from you. How to begin? Back in 1971 when I separated from my wife, I hit the streets and fell-in with the hippie scene. Next thing I know I was on my way to prison for the sale of L.S.D. or rather as 'they' put it, "unlawful distribution of a controlled substance". I was a naïve kid and more or less just wanting to fit-in and so forth. For a grand total of \$10 I'm sentenced to 2-five year sentences at 19 as a drug dealer. For years since my first trip to prison my existence was all about drugs, crimes and partying and then me trying to find myself, and my place in life, if that makes sense?

I just discharged a twenty-five year sentence in April this year for armed robbery of a pharmacy. Plus I still have the following sentences to serve - escape from penal institution: 2 years. I have a 5 year sentence for another escape plus larceny of an automobile; next came robbery of a pharmacy with firearms, I got 115 years for that offence. I escaped again and robbed a supermarket at gunpoint; I ended up getting 2 years for this escape plus 25 years for the robbery. In 1986 I was sentenced to 20 years concurrent for kidnap, assault and injuring a public building. This kidnapping and assault sounds terrible, but what it really consisted of was telling a guard to go into a cell during a prison riot. We never even locked him in the cell.

All these crimes were committed in Oklahoma and were drug related or motivated more or less. I am not violent or dangerous and have never hurt anyone physically in any of my crimes. These are all Oklahoma crimes and convictions that happened in the early 80's. I have been locked up since January 1980 and still cannot see any daylight. I buried myself with so much time I'll probably die in here.

I will not attempt to justify my past or place the blame on anyone or anything. And yes, I do feel like we, as human beings should be made accountable for our reckless lives and disrespect for the laws. Even though while I was out in the free world I stayed in a drug-induced state constantly, I still knew the difference between right and wrong. Anyway, I guess the best way to describe my younger years is that I was a maniac out of control. I didn't care about anything or anyone, including myself. I thought life was all about being born, dying and love in between. So I lived as hard and as fast as I could. I was a stupid, hardheaded kid whose whole world consisted of drugs, crimes and partying. I never ever thought about my life or future. Like the old saying goes,

"As we grow older we all have a tendency to settle down and mellow out", I'm sure finding this to be true in my case.

Sharon, I'm not a good letter writer. I'm spontaneous and write as if we were just sitting around talking. My letters are boring and repetitious, but I do the best I can with what I've got to work with.

Taking a persons freedom is one thing, but then to deprive them of basic human contact is a terrible thing. That's double punishment. They may not be using the death penalty for everyone, but they try to kill us by other means. They try to kill our sense of spirit, our sense of hope, and all of the good qualities that make human beings what they are. To keep prisoners locked up for a long length of time is purely punitive and serves no purpose to society. I try to face my situation with some kind of dignity and character. How does one fully accept and come to terms with the possibility of dying in a place like this?

A little about me! I'm 49 years old, 6ft tall with straight silver and brown hair; I have blue eyes and regular features. Both my parents have passed away and even though I do have siblings I'm more a stranger to them than anything else. I haven't been around them since we were teenagers. I was born and raised in the state of Oklahoma. I was married once, back when I was 18-19, the marriage only lasted about a year. I've been divorced since 1972. I have one son, Mike, we never write.

Sharon, I'm all written out so until the next time be well and stay strong. I wish you health and happiness and peace of mind.

Yours in friendship

Jerry"

Chapter

1

Letter 4, October 7, 2002
Wynne Unit, Texas
Sunday

"I received your number 4 along with the pictures. Upon my word partner, I'm hard right now as I re-read your letter discussing sex 'fucking' with me. And yes, I think I understood where you're coming from Sharon and I'll abide by your wishes by not coming to you with nasty talk. I knew I was going to miss sex - but I had no idea I'd miss it so much. Again, I won't bring up the subject unless you do."

My heart missed a beat. Why was he writing like this? My embarrassment was tangible as his words hit me like a slap in the face. I could feel the colour creeping up from my toes to the top of my head and I knew my whole face had turned beetroot red. I paraded up and down the hallway and into the kitchen trying to figure out what had gone wrong? I couldn't read any more of the letter. What on earth had I said to trigger such a reaction? I had three grown children and didn't consider myself to be a prude but this was too much to accept. We'd been getting along fine and I was beginning to enjoy writing to him. I'd had a female penfriend when I was in my late teens, she lived in Boston, Massachusetts but we'd run out of steam after a couple of years and lost contact. With Jerry I felt from the beginning that our pen-friendship would last. It was such a strong feeling that in only my second letter I told him I would continue to write for as long as he would like me to and I had meant every word. "I will not abandon you or get bored", I said. It felt important that I make this commitment from the start because he was a prisoner stuck in a tiny cell 24 hours a day. I couldn't grasp the true meaning of this, but I had a strong feeling that someone in his position needed a reliable and consistent penfriend. Now here I was after only two months uncertain of whether I would be able to continue with our correspondence.

As soon as Ray got up for work, I asked him for his advice. Ray and I had been living together since 1985. He already had three sons when we met and I had two of my own. We'd got on well at first, but our relationship began to develop serious problems. Instead of parting as most couples might we stuck it out through the miserable times and gradually we grew to like and respect each other again, but the love that we'd shared had been damaged beyond repair.

He laughed at my confusion. "What shall I do?" I asked him. "How on earth should I reply?" That wasn't his problem, he said, as far as he was concerned, I was crazy for writing to a prisoner in the first place, especially a Yank! I should have known this would be his reaction. I'd tried to tell him how Jerry lived, the fact that since his

transfer from Oklahoma to Texas he'd spent most of his time in solitary confinement in a tiny cell. "Don't look to me for sympathy, he said, "He probably deserves it."

I glanced at the rest of the letter; there was no more talk of sex or the F word. I know it may sound old fashioned but I'd never used the term myself to describe the act of making love. I disliked it intensely; I had no particular reason for feeling this way except to my ears back then it sounded like an insult.

I'd thought at first his outburst had been triggered by a very innocent photograph I'd sent him of myself with Gareth. It had been taken inside a capsule of the London Eye on a day trip to the city from our home in South Wales. I couldn't accept this kind of behaviour from anybody, even if they had been locked away for most of their life. It wasn't until I read his letter again, that I understood the reason for his outburst. He'd misunderstood when I'd described how Ray and I slept in separate bedrooms and hadn't had sex for years. I'd gone on to tell him how we pooled our wages, sharing bills and expenses. We made joint decisions about most aspects of our practical daily life together; yet we no longer regarded ourselves as a couple and were not in love. Gareth was still at home while the others had flown the nest and were living independent lives. To the few people who knew of our living arrangements, I'd made the statement many times that I had no intention of touching another man with a barge pole. I was very content for us to live together in friendship.

I consider myself to be a very honest person, I'd told Jerry how we lived, but he'd taken it as a sign that I was sexually frustrated. I'd not made a conscious decision to find myself someone in his position to write to. I wasn't bored with my life, I was very happy and did not feel sexually frustrated or lonely at all. The opportunity to write presented itself when I'd read his appeal for pen friends in a monthly book review called *Cygnus*, I'd placed an order and acting on a whim I'd asked them to send me his contact details. I wrote but doubted very much that my letter would reach him, and if it did, I thought it would take many months before he'd be allowed to read it. When I received a reply just two weeks later I felt a mixture of surprise and pleasure that caught me off guard.

His first three letters held enough information for me to begin to build a picture in my mind of how he lived. Apart from being allowed to take a five-minute shower each day, he spent his time alone in his cell. He ate in his cell; his toilet was in his cell. He was able to exercise in a small fenced enclosure for one hour a day but declined to do so as each time he did meant having to undertake a visual strip search and wear shackles, a routine he found stressful and not worth the physical or mental effort. He had a small radio but no television. He was in Administrative Segregation for reasons I didn't fully understand. He called it Ad Seg, but this meant nothing to me at the time other than another term for describing solitary confinement. He explained how he spent most of his time writing to pen friends. He had a few who lived in the US, but most were from the UK, Australia, some from New Zealand and one or two other places around the world. He'd begun writing on a regular basis at the start of 2000 and had formed several close friendships. I felt no real curiosity about these others - my main priority was to concentrate on building our own friendship. I emphasised that he could trust me, and assured him that I never told lies. This is a very strong part of my character and I wanted him to understand how important it is to me that I am truthful to myself as well as to others.

By his third letter he'd sent me a copy of the most recent photograph of himself that he possessed. It had been taken around the time of his 33rd birthday, in 1985. He was wearing a light blue shirt, had medium length brown hair and a muscular build. He warned me that he'd changed a lot since the photo had been taken just before a riot had taken place at Oklahoma State Penitentiary. The riot had been the reason for his eventual transfer to Texas. Since then his life in prison had taken a turn for the worse and a combination of time and stress had left its mark on his appearance or so he said. His

friend in Australia, one of several living in that continent had made copies of the photo for him so that he'd been able to send one to me, not that this mattered, as I no longer thought it appropriate for us to correspond.

I went to bed that night with the intention of writing the next day to inform him of my decision. As soon as I got up in the morning I set about the task. I read his letter through once more and putting it to one side, I picked up my pen. As I began to write something strange happened, a tidal wave of love rushed through my whole body. A white light accompanied this feeling of love; it engulfed me for a brief second then disappeared. A sudden realisation hit me like a thunderbolt that I was writing to a real person. It had not dawned on me until that moment that he was real. A real human being spending year after year of his life locked in a steel and concrete cell. The cell had no window to let in natural daylight or fresh air. He was confined in the most desperate of circumstances with no prospect of release unless someone would come forward to help him. I felt tears well up and spill down my cheeks. I kept repeating to myself, "Oh, you are a real man." I was overwhelmed by this thought. He was made of flesh and blood with sexual urges that most healthy males enjoy and a basic need for love that every human being is born with and his only way to express his humanity was through his letters. I knew from that moment I would not leave him. I found myself writing this in a new letter having ripped up the old. "I will move mountains for you", I proclaimed. Why such grand words? I had no idea but the conviction I felt was so strong I did not doubt my sincerity. I made the decision there and then to write back in a sexual way. This was something I had never attempted to do before for anyone, but the love I suddenly felt and the need to reach out to him overruled my natural embarrassment and resistance. I wrote of an imaginary encounter between us as though I'd simply walked into his cell and we'd made love. I could not bring myself to use the course language he'd used in his letter to me. Thinking back now to all I wrote, he must have found my flowery expressions of our love making amusing or even downright hilarious. I used the only words I was familiar with from my memory of the romantic novels I'd read in my youth.

The next two months we exchanged letters on a regular basis and some of our writing was sexual. I felt that if we had met in the flesh and shared a liking and respect for one another, as two consenting adults with no commitments, nobody would condemn us if we should sleep together. The written word was all we had to get to know each other in an intimate way; it wasn't very private as the mailroom staff could read everything we wrote, but there was no other way.

Common sense told me early on that if Jerry was writing sex to me, then it seemed likely he'd be doing the same with other female pen friends who gave their consent. He didn't deny this and I liked his honesty. I felt that a man in his position, with so little pleasure in his life, was entitled to sow a few wild oats in the only way he could. At a later date I would come to know some of the women he was intimate with and they were all willing participants in these sexual exchanges. He would explain to each of us that until he met the woman who could commit to him and be his wife, he saw no reason why he should not have fun and I agreed with him, after all, I had no claim upon him as I lived thousands of miles away in another country. As far as I was concerned he may as well have been living on the moon for all the chance I had of ever meeting him face to face.

He sent me six letters in October and seven in November. I told him about my employment at the Museum of Welsh Life near Cardiff. In 1999 rather than leave work completely, I'd began to job share in order to give me more time to help my mother look after my sick father and younger brother. Chris is autistic, has Downs Syndrome and a serious heart defect that restricts his lifestyle forcing him to use a wheelchair a lot of the time. My father passed away the following year, but I continued to work just two days

a week so that the rest of the time I was able to help with Chris's daily care. This allowed my mother some freedom to enjoy her life. I introduced Jerry to my family and was soon giving him regular updates on happenings surrounding home and work.

I learnt a little about his family. His sisters wrote every so often keeping him up to date as much as they could, although months, even years would sometimes pass between their letters. He'd lost touch with his brothers. He'd not had physical contact with his siblings since before his transfer to Texas, and his incarceration from an early age had made it impossible to maintain a normal relationship with them. His niece Tania wrote fairly often. She lived in Oklahoma City with her husband, Jeff and their three young sons. They'd been writing on a regular basis since she was in her early teens.

His father and stepmother did their best to visit him in Texas occasionally but the last time he'd seen them had been back in 1994 five years before his dad's death. His son lived with his wife and two children in North Carolina. Mike was just four years old when they'd last seen each other. This separation meant they'd not had an opportunity to develop any kind of a father/son relationship.

Jerry put me in touch with Bindy in Australia. He gave me her email address and asked me to check out her website that was dedicated to him. I had little knowledge of computers but I had taken a short course in basic word processing in my first year of a Humanities History degree and had learnt to touch type. I didn't know at the time just how much I would come to value this skill. I had no idea how to connect to the Internet so I asked Ray to show me the website. It contained his thoughts about prison life, a brief account of his first experience of being locked up at the age of 19 and some observations on his incarceration in the Texas penal system. There was a selection of photos from his childhood through to his twenties.

Ray sent an email on my behalf to congratulate Bindy on the website and to introduce me as a new friend. We got on well from the start. She'd been writing to him for two years and during that time he'd put her in touch with many of his other friends. She guessed he was probably writing to around 25 people of all ages and sexes at any one time. This figure fluctuated as some lost interest and faded away while new ones took their place.

By November, I wondered if he believed deep down the description I'd given him of my home life. I asked Ray to write and confirm that all I had told him was true. I did this for my own peace of mind as well as for Jerry's. Ray had taken a mild interest in the website and I kept reading him snippets of prison life from the letters I received. Gradually he began to show a little sympathy compared to his initial belligerent attitude. He was no longer so cynical or judgemental. He wrote a friendly letter and asked me if I'd like to read it before it was mailed. It touched me to the core because in an indirect way, Ray apologised to me for some of the unkind things he'd put me through in the difficult years we'd experienced. His letter helped to heal the last of the deeper wounds between us. From that point onwards, Ray and Jerry began to correspond on a regular basis.

The love that had swept through me in October may have lost some of its intensity but was still there. I decided to write and tell him how I felt. He wrote back pointing out that I was probably suffering from some kind of infatuation. I replied that I was fully aware of the difference between love and infatuation and asked him to allow time to prove this to him. He told me he loved me but that he also felt love for several other women who wrote to him. He admitted that his feelings confused him. He said there was no significant other but that there were 3 or 4 who promised to be there at the prison gate if he should ever get out. He never hid this fact from me. It didn't concern me though, I felt love and that was all that mattered.

My main point of focus was his welfare. I longed to help him. I'd offered to send

him money to purchase stamps, but he refused it stating that he was doing okay. I asked if I could send him books or a magazine subscription. He told me not to bother as he already had two or three books he'd not even begun to read and each month he received the National Geographic and other magazines, subscribed by his various friends. "Don't worry about me partner, I'm doing just fine", was his usual reply. He finally asked for my help in December 2002. He wanted to find out the name of the Interstate Compact Coordinator for Texas. This was the person whose main responsibility was towards those prisoners who'd been transferred from Texas to prisons in other states. Their other function was to act as a kind of liaison officer between states with prisoners housed in Texas, as in Jerry's case. The mailroom had given him the name and telephone number of a man working for the Parole Board in Texas. He'd been told he was the person to contact in order to obtain this information. It never crossed my mind at the time to question why he didn't just write to ask for this information himself, it would take a while to learn that the likelihood of him receiving a satisfactory answer was very slim indeed. He explained to me that since his arrival in Texas, he'd been trying all ways to get himself transferred back to his home state. He wrote, *"As long as I am in limbo like this, I can't work or enrol in programs that will help me make a parole someday. I'm out of sight and out of mind. All the decision-making on my life and future must come from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. Texas are just custodians over me, they are warehousing me for Oklahoma."*

I was able to speak with the right person at the Parole Board but once I explained to him that Jerry was on an interstate transfer from Oklahoma, he told me whatever I needed to discuss was a matter for the Coordinator of the sending state and not Texas, which was the receiving state. After several diverted phone calls, I was given the number of a Mr. James Vanlandingham, at the Lexington Assessment and Reception Center near Oklahoma City. I was very nervous and unsure of what to say when I eventually got through to him. Forgetting all Jerry had asked me to do was to find out the name of the Texas Coordinator, I introduced myself and gave him Jerry's name and DOC number. His immediate response was to let me know that my letter was on his desk in front of him. I was slightly taken aback as I had never sent him a letter, but I continued to speak. I asked if there was anything I could do to help get my friend transferred back to Oklahoma. He took control and in an authoritative voice asked me if I knew Jerry wrote to other women, he then went on to name one. Listening to the way in which he delivered this news it seemed obvious he was hoping I'd be surprised and shocked. I was able to assure him I knew of his other pen friends and that I was in touch with one of them. Innocently, I told him about the website. He seemed very interested and asked me for the address. I gave it to him. I am amazed now at my ignorance but back then I had no idea of the kind of people I was dealing with or the situation Jerry was enduring. Without any hesitation, he told me I was being conned and began to pull his character to pieces. He said if only I knew of the kind of things he'd done since he'd been in Texas, I would not want to continue our friendship. I asked him to tell me what he meant by this, but he said he couldn't discuss it because it was classified information. "Has he killed anyone", I asked? "Oh no, nothing as serious as that", he replied.

In the next breath, he accused Jerry of being a con artist. He told me he conned money from people who wrote to him. For a second my blood ran cold at this thought, but I regained my composure quickly. My instinct told me this accusation was not right. I began to defend Jerry. I told him that in the months since I had known him, he had never asked me for financial help. Bindy who'd been writing to him on a regular basis for over two years assured me he was above board and genuine. I searched my mind for something that would give me any reason to doubt the kind of person I was writing to, but there was nothing that made me suspicious or uncomfortable. I asked him why Texas could not return him to Oklahoma, reminding him that he'd been stuck in that

state against his will for almost fifteen years. He told me it was not possible for him to return because if he did his life would be in danger. When I asked him the reason for this he refused to elaborate any further. He then contradicted himself by explaining it was out of their hands because Texas must make the request for his transfer and so far they'd not done so.

"Jerry is playing on your sympathy", he told me. "He is leading you all to believe that he is being treated worse than every other prisoner in Texas. He is not willing to take responsibility for his past or able to accept his punishment and try to reform. He has hidden his crimes from you", he said. This time I knew for definite his accusations were not true and told him so. Jerry had sent me a copy of his Consolidated Record Card and this listed all of his crimes and the sentences he received for each of them. I believed this was something he did for each new penfriend. He'd told me how sorry he was for his past and that he accepted the fact of his imprisonment, but questioned why he should be held in a state of limbo unable to show how he had changed for the better. He'd not been able to work or place anything positive into his prison records for many years and was being denied the hope of ever being released one day. Mr. Vanlandingham listened but made no comment. I was beginning to flounder because my knowledge was very limited. I realised I was out of my depth and it was unlikely he would listen to me or try to help. I thanked him for his time and ended the call. Later that evening I wrote to give Jerry an account of our conversation.

Chapter

2

Letter 21, December 18, 2002
Wednesday

"I got your letter 23 last night - needless to say I appreciate what you did by calling up and trying to find out the name of the Texas interstate coordinator. Sharon, you were given what's known as the run-around, you paid big money on expensive phone calls just so James Vanlandingham could try and turn you against me, try to make me out to be a con artist. Let me fill you in on a few things. You start off by saying the first thing he said was that he had your letter on his desk in front of him. This should have put you on your guard. His whole conversation with you turned into HIM trying to make you think I was a con artist and you trying to defend my case. Everything he said was his fishing for information. Like him asking you if you knew I was writing to other women. He was hoping you didn't know, as though you were a love-lone sweetheart. What exactly am I supposed to have done since being here in Texas to make you or anyone else believe I'm a con man? I'm not going to waste my time trying to explain to you what's going on, as I know I'll just be wasting my time. Sharon, NEVER give my website address to anymore prison authorities. Now this James Vanlandingham will put I don't know what into my records about this website, but you can rest assured it will be used to try to make out I seem like a con artist. Sharon, I know this system, I know who these prison people are and who I'm dealing with. I know just how sorry they are, NOT YOU! I'm sitting in this cell, it's my LIFE on the line, not yours. I know you only want to help me and you mean well, but use your common sense, hell think! I asked you to try and find out who the Texas Interstate Coordinator is, I know who the Oklahoma Coordinator is!

Since I've been here in Texas, almost all the old guards and prisoners are not even in the Oklahoma system anymore. They've gotten out, died or retired. We're talking about something I did around 18 years ago. There is no threat to my life or anything like that - never has been. I wish you would write a letter to the Oklahoma Director and send a copy to the Oklahoma Governor's Office and inquire into why the Oklahoma Interstate Coordinator makes these allegations about me? Tell them you want proof that I am a con artist. State that I will sign any necessary forms to release all documentation shedding light on the things I've done since being here in Texas and the ways in which I'm conning people. Why didn't you ask him for the names of the people I have conned?

I'm sending you some addresses of people I write to, please tell them about your conversation with James Vanlandingham and his allegations. They need to know all this so that they can see what the Oklahoma and Texas prison people are really like and hopefully people will finally start believing me when I tell them how they lie, how cor-

rupt they are and how they always try to make people think the prisoner is lying or trying to manipulate the system. Please make copies of the paperwork I'm sending you and include it with your letter, then send the originals back to me. I just need to make you understand how these prison people will lie to you. This is why I will never make it out on a parole! This is why it does no good for folks to write prison people or the parole board. Tell me this, would a prisoner who is out to con people who write to him, hook up those same people with each other? No he would not!"

This letter arrived on Christmas Eve and shocked me greatly, making me feel physically sick. I feared my actions would get him into trouble with the prison authorities. Was it illegal for a prisoner to have a web site? How must he have felt as he read my letter? The thought that I had upset him made my toes curl with embarrassment. I've never been very good at receiving a reprimand, especially if I'm to blame and should have known better. In that moment, I felt such a failure. I had tried to help but had only succeeded in making things much worse or so it appeared. I slumped over the kitchen table wondering if he'd want to continue writing as confused thoughts whizzed through my head. I glanced at the paperwork; to my untrained eyes it looked very official. There were letters from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) some from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (ODOC). I tried to read them but I couldn't concentrate. "No", I thought, "No, everything will be okay". A conviction that had been growing inside me burst to the surface, I was certain that even though it seemed like I'd made a big mistake by talking as I had with Vanlandingham no matter how wrong things appeared something positive would come of this. I would do all I could to help. I would find the ways to move that mountain. The love that I felt for him was so strong in that moment. I sat upright, I wasn't helpless, I could photocopy the paper work, contact the people whose names and addresses I now had and above all I could write a letter to the Director of the ODOC asking him to provide me with the evidence that would prove the accusations made by Vanlandingham. I'd always considered myself to be a person of action. It was time to act!

To my surprise, Ray offered to drive me to the office so that I could use the photocopier. He'd finished work for the Christmas holidays, but this wasn't a problem because he was office manager and had his own set of keys. Jerry had sent me the names and addresses of six people, two men and four women. They all lived in England, except for one lady who lived in Uruguay. Two hours later we'd made enough copies for everyone including myself. I would mail the original documents back to him as soon as the post office re-opened after Christmas.

Later that evening I sat on the sitting room floor sorting out the paperwork, stapling documents together wherever necessary. There were letters from clinical psychologists in Texas, these had all been written between December '92 and October '93 when he'd been assigned for two years to PAMIO, a programme for aggressive mentally ill offenders. I wondered if he still suffered from a mental illness? He didn't appear to be ill; rather he seemed an intelligent and caring human being with a good sense of humour despite the fact of his years of confinement. There were six letters in all; I picked one out and read it, "It is highly recommended that Jerry Hamilton be considered for release from Administrative Segregation. He has made continuous progress in the program. He demonstrates model behavior through appropriate interaction with staff and peers and has been described as a role model inmate by numerous staff personnel. He has demonstrated, for a significant period of time, that he is able to control his behavior and function within the institutional rules". I read through the rest, they were from different members of staff and were similar in content. This didn't sound like the behaviour of an aggressive mentally ill person to me?

There were lists of jobs he had done whilst confined to Michael and Hughes Units in Texas. These covered a period of two years up until December 1990. He'd worked

in the officer's dining room and as a craft shop orderly. He'd also completed several Bible study courses.

Amongst the papers were letters from Gayle Krien, Interstate Coordinator for Oklahoma, Vanlandingham's predecessor. The first had been written in 1991 informing him he would not be allowed to return to Oklahoma until he could show an improvement in his behaviour. Three years later, she confirmed he was to stay in Texas because his behaviour had improved?

When I'd finished I had six neat piles of paperwork that I placed in separate envelopes, all I had to do was write a covering letter so that a copy could be sent with each one. I also had to write to the Director, but who was he? What was his address? I didn't know the name of the Governor of the State of Oklahoma either. The only person I could ask was Bindy. With Ray's help I sent her an email. I told her how stupid I'd been and how upset Jerry had seemed. It was getting late so I decided to call it a day, I would write my letters as soon as I could. "What an unusual way to spend Christmas Eve", I thought as I got ready for bed.

I woke around 5am after a restless night and began to write to Jerry. I knew I wouldn't be able to mail my letter for a few days because of the holidays, but I needed to find some relief, I was still feeling terrible that I'd upset him. I tried to tell him how difficult it had been for me to get the information he'd asked for because each time I explained the reason for my call, not one person had been willing to deal with my request and as a consequence, I'd been sent from pillar to post. It had taken me two days to get to speak with Vanlandingham and by that time, I'd forgotten the original reason for my making these long distance calls to America. I was so naïve, it had been my belief if I offered my services, I would be told what he needed to do in order to be returned. With one phone call I thought I would sort out all his problems.

In the evening, Ray checked his emails; there was a reply from Bindy. I was so pleased when she told me not to worry too much about Jerry's response. She explained that this was his usual behaviour if he felt the need to put a person straight about something. He'd behaved the same way towards her once, it had hurt and shocked her just as it had me and she'd warned him to never do it again. She told me how everything was exaggerated for him because he was stuck in his cell and this meant that he could sometimes overreact. She also explained that when his next letter arrives he'd be fine. I decided I would have to chalk it down to experience. She gave me the names and addresses I needed and assured me she would write and complain to the Director. She told me that after almost three years as Jerry's friend she felt she knew him well and did not believe for a second that he had ever conned anybody.

I wrote the best letter I could emphasising that Vanlandingham in his position as Interstate Compact Coordinator was the Oklahoma representative responsible for Jerry's welfare. Bearing this in mind, what chance did he have of release from Ad Seg or of securing his return to Oklahoma? How would he ever gain his freedom one day when his character was being tainted by these false allegations? I also asked him to explain why Jerry's life would be in danger should he return to Oklahoma?

Turning my attention to the letter for his friends, I told them about my telephone conversation and enclosed the contact details of the Director and Governor. "We need to tell the Director how we know from first hand experience that Jerry is not a con artist", I wrote. "We must ask him to produce evidence to substantiate any allegations made by Vanlandingham. In what way is he conning us? Who is being conned? I'm sure you'll agree after reading through the documents I've sent you that we need to complain about his living conditions and stress the fact that he is reformed." I ended my letter by apologising to those who had been writing the longest as they may have already written to voice their concerns regarding the conditions of his confinement. I explained that I was a new pen pal trying to understand his situation and all he had to endure.

I felt great relief when my local post office re-opened after the Christmas break. It didn't matter that it would cost me over £11 in postage; the main thing was, I was making amends for my mistake that had caused so much upset. I was sure I would turn something negative into something positive. As I walked back to my house, a nagging thought popped into my head and I did my best to push it away. This had been happening quite a lot since the arrival of his letter on Christmas Eve. Raising my eyes skywards I called out in my head, "Oh no! - Please don't ask me to do that!" In a flash I knew without a doubt I would have to learn how to operate a computer for more than just simple word processing and this was something I'd shied away from with a passion. But desire is a very powerful force and I had such a strong determination within me to help that if it meant my having to use a computer then that's the way it would be.

Chapter

3

Letter 24, January 5, 2003
Sunday

"You felt like I hurt you and came down on you too hard. But Sharon, you must remember my environment and the people I have been forced to relate to and deal with all my life. Sure I know my aggressive speech can confuse and even frighten someone like you, but the truth of the matter is sometimes I'm hard and stern with people to get a point across to them so hopefully they'll let it sink in and understand. Don't you think I know what you did was only with my best interest in mind, that you would never intentionally do anything that would hurt me or jeopardize my chance of ever getting out? Sure I know and all I ask is when it comes to prison issues you've got to confide in me and let me give you my input on the best course of action. After all I know the workings of the system and within the system it's all about you cover my back, I'll cover yours. Just like writing the prison Director and State Governor will do no good at all except it will let them know I have people who care about my welfare and what the state and system is doing to me. To ever get these prison people's attention is by an attorney writing them and enquiring or if enough people complain and keep complaining to the state politicians who in turn will come down on the system. All out of control-corrupt systems try to avoid being exposed which in turn can cause audits and investigations, that's the only thing that gets their attention. They don't give a damn about me you or 100 people complaining within the system because they will cover up for each other.

I'm truly sorry for putting you through so many changes but Sharon; you've got to listen to me not these prison people. They will bullshit you and mislead you. I know and you know I'm not a con artist but that's not the issue. The issue is the System falsely tries to make me out to be a con artist to continue punishing me, and most of all turn my friends from me. Ask yourself why they would do this? It doesn't take a genius to figure out what their objective is and why.

Thank you for doing all that photocopying and writing those letters. Please let Ray know I appreciate his helping us in our endeavors. I appreciate everything you have done and are continuing to do for me. Never think or feel like I don't, because I do, even the misunderstanding and confusion with this damn Vanlandingham, you've never done anything wrong or done anything that could hurt me any more than I'm already hurt. Matter of fact, it's good that your contacting Vanlandingham came about because now I know what he's doing. If it weren't for you I'd probably have never found out about it. So yes, it's helped, and the most important thing is I hope it has opened your eyes to just

what we're dealing with and now you'll be aware of their deceitfulness."

Reading his letter, I felt a mixture of relief and disappointment. I was pleased to see he knew I'd not intended any harm, and had only wanted to be of help. But I'd put such a lot of effort into writing to the Director and Governor and I was expecting to at least receive some kind of reply from them. Yet Jerry was sure I would be ignored. Still, it made perfect sense that he would know about these things as he'd been in the thick of it all for so many years. I could see how important it was to him that those in authority should be made aware he was not alone and that he had the support of his "free world" friends as he called us. I believed him when he said from his experience the prison system was out of control and corrupt although my understanding was very limited. I didn't know just how limited it was in those early days but I trusted him instinctively and felt there had to be some truth in his allegations. I must admit I didn't understand what the objective was of those who had authority over him, but the reaction I'd received from Vanlandingham was enough to convince me something was not right in the way he was being prevented from returning to Oklahoma. I'd been raised to respect authority so it had not been easy for me to speak as I had especially as I was not an American citizen; I was a foreigner defending a convicted armed robber, a man who'd been in prison almost all his adult life. Not only had I decided to believe in someone most people would despise and condemn without the slightest hesitation, I felt love, respect and a deep affection for him.

I received a positive response from his friends. Some contacted Bindy to ask if I had an email address, she gave them Ray's and he passed their messages to me. It soon became apparent that I would have to bite the bullet and learn how to send and receive my own emails. It wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be but Ray's computer was a lap top which he took to work each day, as a result, I was restricted in how often I could use it. Everyone I wrote to agreed that Jerry had not asked them for anything but their friendship and each one was up in arms at his falsely being labelled a con artist.

He kept sending me names and addresses of more of his friends and I wrote to each one in turn making sure to include copies of the paperwork. In the end I was in touch with around sixteen people from all walks of life, some working, some retired. Most of them lived in England. Those with computers I was able to email, the others I kept in contact with by phone and letter.

From as far back as I can remember I'd always helped to look after Chris. As a family we had learnt to adapt to the restrictions his disability placed upon us and accepted that his needs usually came first. Once I was old enough, I'd often stay in rather than go out with my friends so that my parents could have a break. Then I met Terry at the local youth club and he would baby-sit with me. I was just seventeen when we married and seven months later I became a mother with the responsibility and hard work motherhood brings. With Terry in full-time employment and Marc less than a year old, I took on an evening job making cassette tapes for EMI and within six months we'd saved enough for a deposit on our own house. We moved into it a couple of months after my nineteenth birthday; I was five months pregnant with our second son. Terry worked hard, accepting all the overtime he could. When work was plentiful we lived well and could save but he was employed in the coal industry and the seventies and early eighties was a time of industrial unrest with frequent strikes and no wages. All our savings would be eaten up during these lean times with the result that we could never really get on our feet and stay there.

Terry wasn't to blame for the break up or our marriage; it was my fault. Once our boys had started school I enrolled in a two-year university course to learn Welsh as a second language. I enjoyed the challenge and stimulation and loved meeting new people. I felt I'd missed my teenage years by marrying so young and in a lot of ways I suppose I tried to recapture what I felt I'd lost. This led to my romance with Ray and the

inevitable split with Terry. We began divorce proceedings during the yearlong miner's strike of 1984-85. Moving to a new home and starting all over again with Ray had not been easy. From the word go, our relationship hit many unforeseen problems. Somehow we muddled through the bad times and made the most of the good. Daily life was hectic, especially when Gareth arrived. Ray had moved from his home in the North of England to be with me. He left his job as a machine fitter in a woollen mill, but the decline of industry in South Wales and high unemployment meant he was on the dole for the first two years we were together. Despite this, we managed to keep a vehicle on the road so he could make the 400-mile round trip every other weekend to visit his sons, a routine he stuck to religiously for years. Every school holiday, his sons would come to stay with us for the duration. During these times, just keeping up with the cooking, washing and ironing for six boys was a full time task. Added to this, my eldest son Marc became a father at 16 making me a grandmother at the age of 34.

My decision to take a full time honours degree was partly down to my interest in social history and partly to financial needs. The government paid all my tuition fees and gave me generous grants to cover my expenses. I lived at home and travelled to the university on a daily basis leaving a surplus of funds to supplement Ray's wages. Once I graduated in '95 I found employment with the National Museum of Wales adapting family routine around a work pattern of six days on and two days off.

When I began writing to Jerry, I didn't have a social life to speak of outside of my family. I didn't have a wide circle of friends either preferring to spend my free time walking our dog in the surrounding hills or gardening. By January 2003 this had changed completely as I found myself in contact with lots of people all with the same thing in common, our friendship with Jerry and our desire to help him. I was also in love even though I'd promised myself I would never let that happen again. It felt like my world was turning upside down.

During my first year in university things had finally come to a head and Ray and I reached the point of no return as far as our relationship was concerned. It had been a very difficult road we'd been travelling together for every emotional reason under the sun. Desperate times call for desperate action and I was longing to find a way for us to at least live with each other without my resentment destroying us. Deep inside me I knew the only way forward was to find forgiveness. I had to learn to forgive myself for all the mistakes I'd made in my life, and for the people I'd hurt. I felt responsible that my wanting to be with Ray had caused the break up of two marriages. Terry and Kate re-married very soon after our divorces were finalised and considering everything that had happened, the four of us had managed to remain on good terms, but I still felt guilty about the children and the changes they'd been forced to endure. I also had to forgive Ray for putting me through some very difficult times. I had to let go of my anger.

If I were to write of everything we experienced in our early years together, it would be a story in itself. We both went through the mill in our own ways, and I'm sure living with me must have been hell for Ray at times. The end result of all of my anguish was that my asking to find peace within myself was answered by my discovery of books of a spiritual nature, one book leading onto another until I looked upon the world with different eyes. As a direct result, our relationship improved tenfold and we found a way to live together in friendship. I know I have changed for the better because of the teachings I discovered. This is why I found it easy to accept that Jerry is no longer the same man he once was, in my understanding, great pain and suffering has made him a better person.

It wasn't long before I had my own laptop. Ray's boss allowed me to have a long term loan of an old Apple Mac that was no longer in regular use. Within a short space of time I found myself interacting with my newfound circle of friends. Each day I'd download my emails, there were always several to reply to. There was so much love and

affection for him. He had a way of making each person he wrote to feel special. Some people told me how they gained strength from the way he coped with his imprisonment affirming that this helped them to carry on with their own lives. They revealed how they would confide in him and off load their problems. It was also pretty obvious a few women were in love with him sharing an intimacy that I also shared although each of us avoided discussing this for the most part. He never hid the fact that several women professed to love him and had sworn to stick by him until he gained his freedom. I wondered what would happen at that point? Would there be an orderly line waiting their turn to greet him as he walked free or would there be a mad rush to be the first to plant a kiss on his lips? This picture amused me a lot and I often joked with him about it in my letters.

Lots of people, including myself sent him verses from spiritual teachings and told him it was in his power to change his world if only he could change himself and feel love towards his "keepers" as he called those in authority who kept him imprisoned. I even found myself having discussions along the lines that maybe it was his fault he has been kept in segregation for all these years? Perhaps if he cooperated more, agreed to work they would let him out? Maybe he was too aggressive, too anti-establishment? I was still very ignorant of the real reasons why it was impossible for him to help himself.

We discussed ways to raise money to hire a lawyer. A male friend came up with the idea that we should write something that could be sent to the media in the US to highlight his predicament. Those of us who felt able sent him our literary efforts so that he could put together some kind of article that would show our support for Jerry and voice our condemnation of the way he was being treated. The article never materialised, it fizzled out to nothing. I became the person who took on the role of liaison officer or a kind of coordinator/group leader, with the idea of keeping everyone informed of any new developments and news. Most of us sent contributions for the website, each of us giving our thoughts about him and what his friendship meant to us as individuals. Some of us sent photos of ourselves so that Bindy could create a gallery of his friends from around the world.

I was in contact with a variety of his pen friends yet each one had a personal relationship with him that was different from my own. Almost immediately I sensed a possessiveness bordering on jealousy from a few even from some of his male friends and although it remained hidden for the most part, I could feel it lurking just beneath the surface. I was the one who'd phoned Vanlandingham giving impetus to the gathering together of a group of supporters all with the same goal in mind to find a way to help him get back to Oklahoma. But this was not the first time that such a group had been organised. Something very similar had happened two years before I came on the scene. Jerry had written to a magazine called Nexus in December 1999 with the hope they would give him a free subscription. For most of the time he had little or no money, writing to magazines was a way to try to find new reading material for nothing. He had no idea the editor would decide to publish his letter along with his address. Dozens of readers saw it and wrote to him. This is how he began corresponding with so many people from other countries.

One way of filling his days was to enrol in Bible study correspondence courses taking advantage of the fact that they were free. He passed many modules and was given several certificates. A lot of the people who'd replied to his letter in Nexus held spiritual beliefs. He felt they didn't judge him because of his past, but accepted him for the man he had become and this gave him comfort and hope for the future. Every prisoner needs to hold onto hope, without hope, prison is unbearable.

Like so many men, he cherished the idea of finding someone to love who would become his wife. When these people entered his life he began to search amongst them

to see if he could find her there. He grew close to one woman in particular and love blossomed between them. She seemed to be that special person he was searching for, she was genuine and willing to take the huge step of marrying him even though she lived thousands of miles away in Australia. He wrote and told the others of their plans. Bindy had been part of this original group of supporters; she explained how his decision to marry upset some of his female friends. One of them became very jealous and turned against him and other group members, causing a great deal of confusion and upset. She had been one of his staunchest supporters, yet she ended up slandering his character to all and sundry including the prison authorities. In the turmoil that ensued, his bride to be got cold feet, their relationship soured and they stopped writing. He wrote a little about this to me when he could see a similar pattern emerging because of my gathering together another support group, "Do you know what's weird about all this? It's a replay from the Nexus friends. We all went through the exact same stuff. Ask Belinda. She was there. I was tripping on this earlier. The different girls, the sex letters, the support group, the getting serious with one girl, it's strange how everything is playing out just like before."

With this letter, he revealed he was getting serious with one woman in particular, mentioning her name for the first time. She was the same woman Bindy had spoken of in a recent email. Through my work with the support group I eventually made contact with her. We got on well together but this was not difficult bearing in mind we shared a mutual interest in wishing to help Jerry. During one telephone conversation, she told me she had decided to marry him. Her words had a deep affect upon me that took me by surprise. I felt pain and loss but I did my best not to show her my upset. I kept my feelings to myself and because I lived with Ray the group assumed we were a conventional couple. At that time Bindy was the only one who was aware of our living arrangements, she knew I was free to form an intimate relationship with Jerry if I so wished without being accused of unfaithfulness.

Any personal pain I felt about another woman marrying the man I loved paled into insignificance against the one thing I wanted above everything and that was for him to find happiness, for his life to improve in every way possible. I felt such deep love, but it was impossible for us to marry and I knew that he longed for a wife. He made this plain to all who wrote to him. Although his new fiancée lived in England, she was single and had no children; she was a free agent. Yet the more I spoke with her, I couldn't help wondering if she was being true to herself and Jerry or whether she was caught up in the huge emotion and drama his desperate situation evoked. Then again maybe the same could be said of all of us females who'd been drawn into his world?

Jerry and I grew closer as the letters passed between us. I did my utmost to listen to him and take in everything he told me about his situation. It soon became apparent from my contact with some members of the support group that not everybody listened as I did or maybe they just didn't ask the questions I asked? When he explained that he'd been falsely labelled as a ringleader of a serious riot that had taken place in 1985, had been sent to Texas three years later as a direct consequence of that riot and kept there for almost fifteen years, prevented in every way from making positive progress, I believed him. He'd escaped from Oklahoma State Penitentiary with four other prisoners. He'd committed an armed robbery of a supermarket whilst on the run before being captured and returned to the prison. When the riot happened six months later, it was seen as a chance by certain individuals in authority to get even with him for his having escaped. This was my basic understanding at the time.

In 1987, his mother was dying of cancer; she asked him to promise just before she died that he would mend his ways and get off the destructive path he'd been following for so many years. She begged him to stop taking drugs, to clean up his act and become a better person. She feared for his life and future so much. At nights in his cell, filled

with worry, tormented by guilt and ashamed for all the things he'd done and the pain he'd caused his parents, especially his mother, he decided he would turn his life around. He has stayed true to this decision and has been clean of alcohol and drugs ever since. However, for those in charge, this positive change came way too late to save him from the punishments in store. They would do everything in their power to make his life unbearable and make sure he would never gain his freedom. In their eyes his fate was sealed, he would languish in a prison cell until his death.

The more I heard, the more I became convinced of his sincerity. I had no reason to doubt him when he told me he was more than willing to be released to general population, that he would love to work, would love to join in with any self improvement programmes. I kept explaining this to a number of people he wrote to who would insist that it might be his poor attitude and aggressiveness towards prison and prison staff in general that was the real reason for his inability to progress and why he had spent so many years in solitary confinement.

One letter I received from him in particular brought home to me his frustration, it was written on February 14th, 2003, *"Sharon, the Keepers, the prison employees cannot tell you what it's like in my shoes to do 'Time'. They'll read off paper reports, for instance, my last disciplinary case and they'll say something like I just received a disciplinary infraction for an assault on an officer October 2001. Because it comes from an 'authority figure' it automatically makes me wrong, guilty, it makes me, in the eyes of your regular citizen seem like a hard case, a person who refuses to adjust and go along with the program. And naturally, I'm the bad guy; they're the good guys. In reality, this assault on an officer disciplinary case was a bogus bullshit case. A guard enters my cell while I was showering and goes through the letter I was in the process of writing, confiscates this letter as escape plans.*

The bottom line is, both Texas and Oklahoma work hand in glove to justify their continuance in keeping me transferred out of state. To justify their allegations of con artist, prisoner with an attitude, they must see to it I continue getting disciplinary cases. You have no idea how I duck and dodge the bullets being fired at me and the only reason they don't just roll me, set me up outright is because they know I do have a few friends who'd raise hell, inquire.

So sure they'll tell folks who call like they did with Jenny, "Oh Jerry just caught an assault on an officer." They told her it was January 2002 or 2003 knowing it would confuse her, make her wonder if I'm playing games. And of course, it would take an idiot to believe I could throw a clipboard and hit a guard in the knee. In all my years of incarceration I have never thrown or spit on a guard or inmate. But when it comes to a guard or the system, they can set a prisoner up at any time. Many, many prisoners have even got more time because of guards claiming a prisoner assaulted them, threw something at them, had a knife hid in their cell.

The last legitimate disciplinary case I got was for refusing to give DNA; I allowed them to take a sample at the second request it's just that I had my reasons for refusing the first time they asked. All the other cases, I think maybe 5, were bogus bullshit cases. Sharon, I do not get cases unless they are forced on me. I do not have a chip on my shoulder concerning the system- guards. I am the kind of person who fits in and gets along with everyone. Sure I know that's hard to believe because of my constantly harping on about the guards, system and so forth. But mostly I complain about all this prison madness to let people know what's really going on, and to give me something to talk about. I have been locked up for decades Sharon, it's hard for me to write a decent letter, find things to talk about except prison issues and sex.

All of a sudden an officer claims I threw a clipboard and assaulted him. Could this officer be following orders from the captain, who got orders from the major or warden? That's how it works. But I don't expect you or anyone else to believe me or understand.

However, I do expect you to give me the benefit of the doubt and until I'm proved a con artist, a liar, take me at my word, as I do you. If I seem to be an out of control maniac, with a big chip and attitude on his shoulders, well I'm sorry I can't help that. But no Sharon, I'm not a hard ass, I don't hate guards, I hate the bullshit, lies and games.

Do you really think I don't know how to be a model prisoner? Think about it, before Oklahoma and Texas started coming down on me, I worked and here in Texas every serious case came about because of my filing lawsuits trying to get back to Oklahoma, or writing letters. Sure I don't expect you or anyone else to believe me or understand. They told me work and keep a clean record and they'd consider returning me to Oklahoma, so I worked and kept a clean record. Then they told me I'm doing so well in Texas they think I should remain here! What I'm trying to show you, is all my years in Texas I have been played with, lied to. If I went out to population tomorrow here in Texas, within six months I'd be locked up again for an assault case or whatever. I know this, I know how Texas and Oklahoma play and in my own way, the only way I can avoid these ole things here in Texas to keep me from getting a bogus free world case is by doing what I'm doing. Sure I have tried to go back out to population. I would go to population right now if they'd let me and trust they'd leave me alone. I'm sick and tired of this bullshit. I have just about given up on ever getting out of prison. I'm tired of being punished with my food, my health.

Yes, what you understand about Vanlandingham's asking for improvement is something I am unable to give. Since being here in Texas, it's been lies, double talk. I'm not refusing to work. I have filed grievances, written letters to both Oklahoma and Texas trying to get released out of Ad Seg and to be able to work. Even though I get nothing for working. I get nothing, no incentives for being a model prisoner except every time I turn around I get a guard threatening to write me up, lock me up. I can NEVER make a parole.

I need a pro-bono attorney who wants to help me, one who will do extensive research because that's what it's going to take. I do not trust paying a lawyer big money unless we know he or she is willing to do the work."

This letter had a profound affect upon me and made me wonder what a person should expect when he or she is imprisoned? My father had always been a staunch opponent of the death penalty, but apart from this I'd had no real opinion of how a prisoner should be treated because I'd never given it any thought. So many times I'd hear people say the government must get tough on prisoners, life should mean life, that they get good food and too much of it, have a roof over their heads, a clean warm cell at the expense of the tax payer and they can watch TV to their hearts content! "Hanging is too good for them!" was a popular term I'd heard many times. "Stick them in a cell, feed them bread and water and throw away the key!" was another favourite. But my contact with Jerry had opened my eyes to the fact that prisoners are real people, they are sons, daughters, husbands, wives, and there are many reasons why people commit crimes. Most prisons are full of drug addicts, alcoholics, men and women with mental health problems. Jerry had been a hopeless drug addict who'd loved to live the "character life", as he called it. He lived to pull a crime to fund his drug habit, he wanted to party, get stoned, and have sex with every available female he could get. The women he mixed with while he experienced this fast life were strippers and prostitutes. He lived in the world of the small time crook and pimp. He loved it because his drug addiction and 'don't give a damn' attitude to life meant that he fitted in. Given this kind of background and his prison record it would be easy to think he must be a man of the world having had so much experience of life in all its rawness. In reality, since the age of nineteen, he'd spent as little as fifteen months out of prison and during these short bursts of freedom; he'd been stoned out of his head on drugs and alcohol most of the time.

Contact with his friends meant we exchanged information and in this way I was introduced to some of the thousands of websites dedicated to prisoner issues in America. I was amazed to discover there are over two million prisoners in the United States. More people are imprisoned there than any other country in the western world. Prisons are big economy boosters with towns vying to have the next state penitentiary built on their doorstep because it's guaranteed to bring much needed jobs to replace a lost industry or cushion the effects of decline in agriculture.

I think the one piece of information amongst such a vast subject that made me think the most is the fact that nearly all prisoners will eventually be released. With this thought in mind it made sense they should receive help to make positive changes to reform so that they do not resort to crime when they are freed. This made me realise that prison was not just a means of locking a person away from society, but of helping them to change for the better with the aim that once freed they can earn a living honestly and never be a menace to themselves or others again. It made sense that prisons should be places where people are given the chance to turn their lives around for the better. I knew deep in my heart Jerry was reformed. He was no longer a threat. Decades of imprisonment are punishment enough; after all, he'd never physically harmed anybody in any of his crimes. At the very least he should be encouraged to work, learn some positive life skills and have the opportunity to move forward.

Chapter

4

Letter 35, February 26, 2003
Wednesday

"OK! The deal with all the papers I have been circulating amongst everyone. It was not just for the sole purpose of proving I'm not a con man, I was trying to point out and show you and others how deceitful these people are we are dealing with. The bottom line is THEY are using their same ole tactics and games to make people believe and think I'm the problem. I'm the reason why things are as they are because I refuse to reform, work, yet here I have sent you papers showing - verifying I have worked, I have requested to be released out of administrative segregation. This is why I keep saying as long as I'm stuck here in the Texas prison system it doesn't matter if I force the system to release me out into population I cannot better myself here! So when you talk to others, please explain to them, point out to them what I have just explained. Ron and others seem to think unless I make some kind of changes and work to better myself all their time and efforts are wasted, and I agree 100%. But I also know as long as I'm stuck here in Texas I cannot accomplish shit.

When I first drove up here in Texas I kept a low profile, worked, was a model prisoner with hopes that I would get sent back to Oklahoma so that I could be closer to dad. For two and a half years I kept a perfect work and disciplinary record to no avail. Then I started filing lawsuits trying to force Oklahoma and Texas to send me back. Because of this I all of a sudden find myself in a situation where I catch an assault on an officer and am slammed down on Ad Seg. This was in December 1990. So I took the incentive to enrol in all the Bible study courses I could because I was into studying religion and it was free. I then heard through other prisoners about that P.A.M.I.O. program which was supposedly for aggressive prisoners but yet you had to play the nut roll and get on medication before they'd consider letting you go on it. This was the first psychological program - evaluations I have ever had. You would think someone with my case history of drug abuse and crimes would have been evaluated lots of times?

So I go to this P.A.M.I.O. program in hopes of bettering myself, in hopes of getting back to Oklahoma and in hopes of being released to population so I could work and move forward. I stayed there for two years and you've seen the evaluations from the psychologists, psychiatrists and guards I worked for, how positive they are. And the only way I was allowed to get these evaluations is because it was a psyche evaluation. They would not let me come back to Oklahoma nor release me to general population.

However I cranked up another lawsuit and low and behold I catch three major disciplinary cases, get tagged as gang related and so forth. The getting tagged as gang related was my last attempt-sacrifice in hopes of my getting back to Oklahoma before dad died.

The passing around of these papers was to show everyone I have tried to get out of Ad Seg. I'm not a hard ass, I have worked and kept a low profile but here in Texas it makes no difference."

There was something new to take in all the time. He would write me letters and their content would baffle me. What did 'gang related' mean? What kind of lawsuits did he file? I didn't know it, but it was going to take time, dedication and a lot of hard work by the both of us before I could begin to truly understand the reality of his situation and the extent of the psychological and physical torment he'd been made to endure for so many years.

Despite my obvious ignorance I pressed on and continued my work with the support group. Jerry kept insisting that writing to the Department of Corrections, the very people who were responsible for his being stuck in limbo in Texas was important but only because it let them know he was not alone, he had friends in the outside world who cared about what was happening to him. He would emphasise to me the need to look elsewhere for help such as finding a pro bono lawyer, organising letter campaigns to senators and representatives. From the time of his first criminal offence as a teenager up until 2001, he had not known the luxury of hiring his own lawyer. Like so many people in America he couldn't afford one, as a result, he was forced to plea-bargain, admitting his guilt in return for a negotiated sentence or face trial by jury. Most offenders would rather plea-bargain than throw themselves at the mercy of the court for the simple reason their defence would not be the kind O. J. Simpson enjoyed. The number of wealthy people in prisons in the US is tiny compared with the poorer masses.

When his original group of pen friends had offered their financial help and enough money had been raised to hire an attorney Jerry had been optimistic. The lawyer was chosen by the woman he'd hoped to marry. She was a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Australia. Burns was also a Seventh Day Adventist, an American living in Texas. He was the man she decided should be hired to help him return to Oklahoma. Burns was a drug store proprietor and part time lawyer. A controversial decision when considering the fact his client was in prison for robbing drug stores!

I wasn't familiar with the term 'pro bono' but discovered it would mean finding a lawyer who would take on his case for free or for a nominal fee. I spent hours searching the Internet, phoning various organisations, but it appeared an impossible task. There didn't seem to be a chance of finding a lawyer who would be willing to help. Most lawyers or charitable organisations that do this kind of work wouldn't consider helping a prisoner in his situation. I wasn't alone in my quest, a few of the others joined in the search without any positive result.

Not everyone had the use of a computer. I did my best to keep each person informed of what was happening even though it meant a lot of my time and resources was spent writing letters and phoning which wasn't productive at all. I tried to accommodate everyone. Sometimes this resulted in my getting sidetracked from the real issue, the need to find ways to get him returned to his own state. This was the driving force behind everything I was doing, but keeping so many individuals focussed and informed was turning out to be a bigger task than I had imagined.

In the midst of all this activity, the love we shared continued to grow. He joked about me being the best personal secretary he'd ever had. He said I looked after him and related to him exactly as he imagined his wife would. He would tease me by insisting that once he was freed he'd make me wife number one and it would be my job to keep all the other wives from quarrelling and getting jealous of each other. I accepted this

role and suggested we work out a timetable so no wife would feel less favoured than another. It was a game we played yet we both knew if things were different, we might well have been able to discuss our marrying for real. I didn't deal in fantasy though, I dealt in fact and the fact was I had my family to consider. I lived thousands of miles away in another country and he was stuck in a maximum-security prison with no release date in sight. It was not practical for us to discuss something as serious as marriage and be real about it.

Of course I wondered what it would be like to meet him in person. I longed to be able to have this experience. How could I feel so much love for a man I had only seen in photographs, the most recent of which had been taken eighteen years ago? I'd never even heard his voice. I'd sent him recent photos of myself and had actually spoken to him. This happened in early March 2003 after Bindy discovered a two-hour programme that went out on Texas radio every Friday evening and Jerry listened in. The first hour of the programme was devoted to prison issues and the second was given over to receiving calls from family and friends hoping to send a message to a loved one. Bindy managed to speak on the programme and Jerry heard her. She gave me the information I needed to try to phone in myself. I was apprehensive, the thought of speaking on live radio didn't appeal to me but if it meant Jerry could hear my voice then wild horses wouldn't have stopped me from making it happen. The programme was broadcast from 9 to 11pm and with the six-hour time difference this would mean I'd have to start phoning in the middle of the night. In the early hours of Saturday morning I sat in my cold kitchen and began punching in the long distance number at exactly 4am. I'd hit the receiver each time I heard the 'engaged' tone, pressing the redial button straight away. It took 40 minutes for my call to be answered. I was so relieved as I'd almost given up hope of ever getting through. A lady asked me for Jerry's details and told me I'd be on air next. I could hear the person in front of me; her voice lacked any emotion as she talked about the kids and how they were doing at school, how they all missed their dad. She had to keep talking continuously or the silence would have swallowed her up in her one-way conversation. Her time was up and suddenly it was my turn. The presenter asked me my name and shaking with nerves I managed to answer. He was surprised when I told him I was phoning from Wales. "That's great, Sharon", he said, "Jerry's waiting to hear your message" with this short introduction the airwaves were all mine. I tried to sound relaxed and could only admire the lady who'd just spoken before me, she had seemed so laid back without any hint of nerves. Still, I managed to keep talking for a few minutes. My shyness in having to speak on live radio was tempered by my pleasure at being able to send him my love even if he couldn't answer back.

When my time was up and the call ended I was buzzing with excitement. It would have taken a blow from a 10lb hammer to send me back to sleep so I stayed up and wrote to Jerry till it was time to start the day. For hours I felt I was floating on cloud nine hoping against hope that he'd heard me. A week later I received his letter. He'd tuned into the programme and had been very surprised and pleased to hear my voice for the first time even though he'd failed to understand a lot of what I'd said. In my nervousness I'd spoken very fast and coupled with my strong Welsh accent it had been difficult for him to catch every word. Throughout March and early April four of us managed to get on the show. One week both Bindy and I got through within minutes of each other. The show's presenter was amazed because as he pointed out, many local Americans tried on a regular basis to get through but failed, yet four women, one from Australia and three from Britain had defied the odds and got onto the programme in turn seven weeks in a row. I managed to get through on four occasions. I know it gave him a big boost to receive our messages of love and support after his many years of isolation.

"Get a passport!" These words kept invading my thoughts. There was only one

reason to get a passport and that was to visit Jerry, but how could that happen? I had about £200 in savings and that was nowhere near enough for a trip to America. Yet the thought was very strong and I couldn't keep ignoring it so to quiet my own mind I applied for one. I felt a huge sense of relief when it arrived and was convinced that one day I would meet him in person. There was a growing belief within me he wouldn't be in Texas for very much longer. I could picture his return so clearly in my mind that at the beginning of April I wrote and told him he'd be leaving much sooner than he realised.

One thing he was firm about, he didn't want anyone to visit him while he was still on the interstate transfer and stuck in Ad Seg because visiting would be strictly non-contact. Visitors would have to speak with him via a telephone and a thick sheet of toughened glass would ensure complete physical separation. He didn't want anyone to waste their money flying out to see him with restrictions such as these. Yet a few of us kept expressing our desire to meet him in person, including myself. He told me how insecure this made him feel because he believed he looked old and fat. He worried that nobody would like him once they met him in person. I told him it didn't worry me how he looked, pointing out to him at the same time that I was no oil painting and had plenty of wrinkles. I tried to put him at ease, convince him his worries were unfounded. He wrote, *"Remember, I haven't been with a girl intimately since January 1980, so just the fact that I haven't been around one in all those years will be a trip. You get stage fright speaking on the radio, well enhance that feeling a thousand times or more and then you'll have some idea how I'd feel just having a visit with a girl."* I smiled to myself when I read this, wondering what had happened to the confident Casanova who had three or four "wives" lined up waiting for the day he'd get out?

I asked him how he thought he would handle his intimate relationships under normal circumstances? I pointed out that what he was doing wasn't real. It would be courting disaster to behave the way he was if he was free, as no sane woman would put up with his behaviour. I was aware that if he had wanted he could have kept his love interests secret and made each one of us believe we were alone in our love for him and in his love for us. Yet he went out of his way to be upfront and honest about what he was doing, he never tried to be deceitful. I had a picture in my mind of how he gave me his love and full attention as he replied to my letters but he would then do exactly the same with the next woman he wrote to if they shared that kind of relationship. His feelings of love were genuine even though it confused the hell out of him as he often confessed. I could see how unreal it all was. It was pure fantasy, yet I felt I understood why he did it. It was the only way he could find a wife, how else could a man in his position find someone to court, to fall in love with and marry? He couldn't go out and socialise or join a dating agency so even though he knew deep down to be involved with so many women at the same time was unreal it was all he had to work with. He lived with the hope that one day, he would find someone special who would love him as he loved her, someone genuine who could make his dream of marriage come true.

Each person within the group had their own understanding that sometimes conflicted with mine. In one letter I must have voiced my frustration because his reply was, *"I have tried and tried telling them in different ways how parole is a privilege and as long as I'm under this interstate compact transfer because of my behavior and my being singled out as a ring leader during a prison riot, in other words transferred under the interstate compact as punishment, I haven't a chance in hell of ever making a parole. When a person has several convictions and sentences running consecutive you have a set parole date on each sentence. Say I was going up for parole on a 5-year sentence but I also had a life sentence, I may make parole only to have to start serving the life sentence, does it make sense to pay a lawyer to help me make a parole only to begin a sentence that keeps me in prison for the rest of my life? People are focussing on a*

parole yet hiring a parole lawyer is just like throwing money away, unless the lawyer can guarantee us he can get all my sentences paroled at one time.

Just as I have explained things to you, hell, I have done this explaining to everybody I write. This is what I mean when I have told you how it all starts stressing me out. I explain and explain and it's as though everyone is keeping in touch, exchanging thoughts and ideas of what to do, how to help, but yet none of my explaining is being considered?

I do realize how hard everyone has tried to help and how many have strived to stay focussed and motivated. I have attempted to divert people's efforts in the right direction and so forth only to use up all my energy constantly explaining things that seem to go unheeded. It's stressing everyone out, including me. We're getting burnt out writing letters to parties that cannot help the cause or writing prison authorities that are actually the reason I'm under this interstate transfer and remain transferred out of state. I'm getting to the point where I'm just about giving up on myself."

Not everyone had written to the Director and Governor, it was the same when Associate Warden Chance threatened to confiscate his books. There was no desk or chair in his cell so he used his books to create one in order to be able to write in some small degree of comfort. During any shake down or search of a prisoner's cell, possessions that failed to fit into one small storage container could be confiscated. Jerry was concerned that there would not be enough space in the box to store everything at the next shakedown. When Chance walked by his cell one day he'd asked if he could be allowed to use the extra storage boxes above his cell door. In the United States, the warden is the highest member of staff in each prison with a role similar to that of the governor of a British prison. Warden Chance refused the request. Jerry then asked to be supplied with a desk and chair on which to set his meals and write his letters. The Warden took offence at his attitude informing him that they were only obliged to supply him with writing materials. Fearing his stance might lead to the loss of his books, he warned him he would write to ask his friends to complain on his behalf about this basic lack of comfort.

When his letter reached me, I could sense his desperation and frustration so I let everyone know about his problem immediately. Some promised to write to Warden Chance and the TDCJ but didn't get around to it; others seemed to brush it aside as unimportant while some of us wrote straight away. The attitude of those who failed to write baffled me somewhat. Surely they realised how important it was that he could rely on our support? After all, most asked him on a regular basis if they could help improve his life. Some time later I read a report by Amnesty International condemning the lack of a chair and desk in prison cells in Texas describing it as inhumane treatment that violated a basic human right to dignity and comfort. When a person lives in a tiny cell for years on end without even a chair to sit upon a situation that may seem trivial to most will become an issue of extreme importance that can make an intolerable living condition tolerable. The reply I eventually received from the ombudsman confirmed what Warden Chance had told Jerry, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice was not obliged by policy to furnish an inmate with a desk or a chair. But once again the importance of writing such a letter lay not in the content but rather in the fact that those in control should know that he had friends looking out for his welfare, that he was not alone. The psychological boost this gave him could not be measured. I also believed that such a campaign of support must surely have a positive effect and influence his eventual return to Oklahoma.

Coordinating the group into an effective tool was a constant headache. Due to the various egos and personalities, members sometimes acted upon their own initiative without consulting him. One woman, having spoken to a staff member at the Parole Board in Texas believed he was hiding the fact that he had a Texas parole date in 2005,

but as he explained to me, *"Texas doesn't even know how much time I'm serving. They cannot bring me up for consideration for a parole. For 15 years the Oklahoma and the Texas Department of Corrections have not so much as coordinated closely enough to even know where I am assigned, what unit I am in. Texas doesn't know my complete list of convictions and length of time or even my medical history. Texas and Oklahoma disregard the law – they have never followed the guidelines controlling the Interstate Compact. So from now on be sure and let the others know they cannot make comparisons with the records and dates of Oklahoma and Texas. It's been like this for 15 years, I'm just out of sight and out of mind until I start complaining and making waves then they put their foot on my neck a little tighter by making sure I catch a disciplinary case. They expect me to accept all this, to grow old and finally die. I tell people this all the time but they refuse to accept it. Like I have said, where does Texas ever reflect all my sentences? They don't even have an idea of how much time I'm doing and they don't care. After 15 years you'd think they would have at least figured out how many sentences I am doing and how much time I have to serve."*

I contacted the others and suggested we must listen to him and not question his knowledge because he was weary of having to defend himself. I argued that surely he must know what he's talking about?

An important discovery emerged when Bindy sent us a small section of the Oklahoma Interstate Compact Agreement that she'd found on the Internet. How I struggled to understand it. I had to read it several times before I could turn it into plain English. In lay mans terms, Jerry was an Oklahoma prisoner at all times and was entitled to the same legal rights he would have if he were in prison in Oklahoma rather than hundreds of miles away in another state. He also had a right to be looked after in a reasonable and humane manner, cared for and treated equally with all other prisoners in Texas. Confirming he did have legal rights, seeing it in black and white only deepened my resolve. It also strengthened what I already believed to be true about him, he wasn't blowing hot air, he knew what he was talking about when he kept emphasising that many aspects of the transfer and his being kept out of state for so many years were illegal.

I received a copy of a lawsuit he'd filed in 1994 against the Director of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections and the Oklahoma Compact Coordinator. My ignorance of the law was such that I even had to look up the words plaintiff and defendant before I could begin to suss out what was what. I kept reading and re-reading the pages until I felt I had a reasonable understanding.

It was such a revelation to receive the lawsuit because it confirmed his allegations of having been placed in a "Catch 22" situation. The Interstate Compact Agreement assured that all prisoners sent out of state would not be deprived of any of the legal rights they'd have if they remained in the state where they'd been sentenced. Before his transfer, he was using the law library at OSP on a regular basis; he had an appeal in the Oklahoma Courts and was hoping to be able to initiate post-conviction proceedings. All this had ground to a halt when he'd been transferred. He couldn't use the law library in Texas because the laws in that state were different. The law clerks couldn't help him because they were only knowledgeable in Texas law. Writing to Oklahoma for research materials was a slow, frustrating and impossible task. How could he ask for copies of relevant cases, statutes, and treaties when he had no access to any legal material and didn't know what to request? During his visits to the law library at OSP, the law librarian, paralegals and law clerks would suggest material that might be relevant and helpful. He had been able to ask questions and receive guidance. None of this help was available once he arrived in Texas.

I re-read a letter he'd sent me around the time I received the lawsuit because one paragraph in particular kept running through my thoughts, *"What really fucks with my*

head is where some folks have it figured out and know what is the best way for me to help myself. Yet they refuse to acknowledge where I have already done all this before and just got shafted by Oklahoma and Texas. But I understand where Jenny and others are coming from and why they think they know best for me and what I've got to do to help myself because this is exactly what prison authorities tell them."

Despite our ignorance and his frustration a small number of us were dedicated and continued our writing campaign hoping against hope it would be of help. Letters and emails were sent to the office of Vanlandingham, no replies were ever received. We contacted Texas and they insisted that Oklahoma was at liberty to make a request at any time for his return. This conflicted with the information I'd been given when I'd telephoned Vanlandingham.

I decided to act upon the advice Jerry gave me and write to a senator. He was adamant I'd get nowhere if I kept expecting Oklahoma or Texas to help him. I had already decided that he knew best so it was important that I look elsewhere for help. I choose an Oklahoma senator at random from a list I found on the Internet. I put together a small package of information in an effort to convey his predicament, and to highlight the fact that he'd been prevented in every way from making any positive progress for years and years. She never replied. I also wrote to magazines and the New York Times hoping to gain the attention of the media. I even wrote to the FBI. I had no idea how ignorant I was in my belief that these people and organisations could or would help, especially the FBI! Nobody in the Federal Bureau of Investigation would be interested or able to do anything for a convicted criminal already serving his time in prison. I wanted to highlight the fact that his constitutional rights were being denied him, that the laws of the Interstate Compact were being broken. Jerry was in prison because he had broken the law, yet the Oklahoma Department of Corrections could break the law and nobody seemed to care. It was difficult for me to understand how they could do so and get away with it.

Within the group a small number of us were becoming very good friends. We kept in regular touch with each other by email often having four way conversations. Bindy and I had a comfortable relationship helped by the fact that she made the same effort as myself to listen to Jerry, as did another young woman called Katja. We chatted and joked amongst ourselves, we exchanged ideas and information. One or two others joined us including Beatriz in Uruguay. But it was not possible for all of the group to bond in the way we were for the simple fact that they did not have computers. As a result, around half of the sixteen became isolated; their only contact was with Jerry and myself on an individual basis. I did all I could to keep a sense of unity and Jerry played his part by spending his waking hours writing to everyone.

When I could, I would go for walks in the hills surrounding my home. It was during these quiet moments through the month of March running into April I'd suddenly be overcome with the feeling he would not be in Texas much longer. Call it a hunch, call it wishful thinking or a premonition, all I know is I was sure his return to Oklahoma was imminent.

I received an exciting email from Bindy. She was in contact with Julie, an American lady who wrote to Jerry. She'd been the first to receive a letter telling of his return to Oklahoma on April 15th. He had asked a prisoner in a neighbouring cell to let her know. The news spread like wild fire amongst the support group. My premonition had been correct. Our campaign on his behalf, our solidarity in wanting to help him had finally achieved the impossible and after 15 long, heart breaking years he'd been sent back to his home state. This was such a good sign; surely things could only get better for him from now on?

Chapter

5

Letter 2, April 29, 2003
"A Unit", Oklahoma State Penitentiary
Tuesday

"Now let me tell you all that's happened since I last wrote. On April 25, 2003 around 2.30pm Eddie Morgan, A-Unit Manager who happens to be a guard or rather I should say was a guard back in 1974 or 75, came out to H-Block. We were both happy to see each other and sat there for about 30 minutes just talking about some of the things that have happened since I've been gone, about old convicts and guards we know from the ole school.

I have known and worked for Eddie on and off since the seventies, he's the same guy who took me to mom's funeral and the same guy who transferred me to Lexington Assessment Center to be transferred to Texas. Eddie is one of a handful of old-timer convict guards that I have utmost love and respect for. He's a good man and like I said he more or less grew up with us old time convicts in here. Eddie is 51 years old, about a year older than me. Matter of fact in that same riot that I was transferred over, Eddie got an eye stabbed out and he never let that turn him sour or bitter. Like I said, there's few guards I can say I love and respect. I love and respect Eddie just as I do my partners and old convict friends. We've always had that borderline between us, he never would ask me anything about other prisoners and I never would ask him to do anything that goes against his job as a guard. If he ever wrote me up, had me locked up or whatever that never came between our friendship. All your old time convicts like and respect him because he's always been up front with us, has always treated us like a fellow man and human being. Many guards cannot do that. I asked him if he would get me off H-Block. He told me he'd go see what he could do. So about an hour after he left, I was told to pack my property because I was moving to A-Unit.

I was able to go outside with 28 other prisoners, the most prisoners I've been able to be around on a yard since 1990 and without handcuffs. That sun sure felt good on my skin. Eddie is going to help me get to level 4, the best level you can be. I'm no longer on Ad. Seg, I'm in general population, although ever since that riot, even general population is fed and locked in their cells 23 hours a day. That isn't a big deal to me since I was locked up on Ad. Seg. all those years.

We drove back from Texas in a car, them in the front seats and me handcuffed, belly chained and leg ironed in the back seat. No, they were not in uniform, one was wearing casual sports jacket, slacks and the other just had a shirt and jeans. They even gave

me a free world shirt and slacks to wear when I left Wynne Unit, I did not have on prison clothes. I was looking at the cars, houses, and businesses. Boy that outside world has really changed since I was last out. It looked beautiful and God willing some day I'll be out there a free man.

That's nice of you wanting to phone The Prison Talk show and thank Richard for writing Julie and letting her know about my being transferred back to Oklahoma, but Sharon, I took care of him before I left. I left him a lot of my property, store stuff. So I definitely don't want you or Julie to keep in contact with the guy, he's just a friend I met in passing. Hell, if people continue keeping in touch with Texas and what's happening there, it will distract them from what's got to be done here, more or less and as you know, it's difficult enough just keeping people focussed on the main issues. That may sound cold, but it's the truth. I just can't word it or explain it better than I did above, blunt and to the point. It's not that I don't care about Richard and his problems because I do, however, I have partners, friends I have known for 30 years and would like to help them and can't and the truth is if I don't concentrate on me and my problems and keeping all my support group and friends focussed they'll drift away or lose hope. Can you understand this? So try to direct them here to Oklahoma and forget Texas now. Don't get me wrong, I can't and won't try to tell you or any of my other support group who to write and who not to write, but I will point out what I feel and think and know to be obstacles in front of us that we must pay attention to."

I was so pleased to get this second letter. His first one, beginning at number one to symbolise a new beginning had been written on April 17th just two days after he'd returned. It had been very short telling me to throw away his Texas prison number and address because it was history. He'd asked me to bear with him while he adjusted to the changes and notified everyone of his good fortune. It was such good news that he was now in general population and that Eddie Morgan had taken him under his wing. Eddie had got him off H Unit, a chilling underground construction built after his transfer. H Unit has been condemned as inhumane by Amnesty International and other Human Rights movements. Prisoners facing the death penalty or punishment for disciplinary infractions and those in Ad Seg are housed there.

Eddie had come to his rescue. I felt thankful and relieved. It seemed a strange situation though, the prisoner, tagged as a ringleader of a serious riot is befriended by the unit manager who was stabbed in the eye in that very same riot? It didn't make sense, but then Jerry insisted what had happened to him since the time of the riot had been in retaliation for his having escaped six months before.

All of us within the support group were on a high believing we had succeeded where his lone campaigning had failed for so many years. When I'd heard he'd returned to OSP, my instinct was to thank the prisoner who'd taken the trouble to write to Julie so that she could let us know. I wanted to send him our thanks via the radio show, but for the first time I failed to get through. A sign perhaps that the door had indeed slammed shut on Texas.

My desire to help was so strong and coupled with the love I felt for him, it was difficult to accept we could never be anything more than very close and loving friends. Now that he was in general population, we would write about the day I would visit him. I had decided that nothing would prevent me from doing this and had already begun to talk with my immediate family explaining to each one in turn about the love I felt and my desire to see Jerry. To my huge relief I didn't meet with any objections, a few raised eyebrows perhaps, but nobody tried to dissuade me from loving him or from travelling to see him. He suggested I might be able to stay with his sister or his niece. I filed this information away in the back of my mind.

Jerry wrote about Anne confirming she'd agreed to marry him. He was worried she wouldn't be strong enough to leave her family, her friends and live in America. He won-

dered if it was unfair of him to ask her to do so. He was concerned that once the novelty wore off and reality set in she'd have a change of heart and abandon him. Then he confused matters more, *"Sharon, it's you who should be on my arm to start with, it's you who should be my wife. You know this, I know this, but you're there and I'll always be here unless a miracle could happen. I care for you, I love you and I never want to ever cause you pain and grief. I will follow your lead and I just hope and pray you can and will love me no matter what."*

I tried so hard to understand him. I asked myself how I would be if I'd spent most of my life in a prison cell? I could never find an answer. Nobody can know unless they have experienced it. I couldn't solve his dilemma, all I could do was be true to myself, to my family and Jerry and wait to see what would happen.

I was in regular contact with Anne, but I had genuine reasons for not revealing my relationship with Jerry and they were all to do with his future welfare. I realised he was confused but at the same time he seemed genuine in the love he felt for everyone. I decided that if Anne was determined to be his wife then I must step back and allow it to happen, not be the cause of his losing her. I knew at heart once she convinced him of her sincerity, determination and commitment he would then be faithful to her. He'd always said that when he found the woman he would settle down with and they married he would never cheat on her. In any relationship there is a point where you have to either trust in your partner or not. I believed he could be as good and as faithful a husband as the next man. I had no idea how they would go about marrying. I didn't know what was entailed or how long it would take.

As the weeks passed, he began to talk about the possibility of finding a way to gain his release, *"Do you know, if I could get that 115 year sentence cut to 25 years and then get those 3 or 4 other consecutive sentences running concurrently, there's a possibility if I can get all my good time - work time that Oklahoma owes me, I could discharge a twenty five year sentence and walk free."*

Up until this point we had not discussed in any detail the ways in which he could make it out of prison. Although he'd made me aware from the very beginning about the amount of time he was serving and the crimes he'd committed, I didn't know the full details of those crimes apart from the fact that he'd never caused actual physical harm to any person. We had concentrated on getting to know each other, my work with the support group and on our efforts to get him returned to Oklahoma. This alone had taken up most of my time and our correspondence. It was comforting to know that although he was sentenced to an outrageous amount of time it wasn't impossible for him to gain his freedom. I had a conviction that one day he would be freed and kept telling him so but I hadn't actually worked out how it could happen. I'm afraid I was guilty of an overdose of positive thinking. If a person believes enough then that belief has the power to make it happen. But at the same time even though I had held a similar conviction about his leaving Texas I'd also known it was no good sitting still and waiting for a miracle, something constructive had to be done to make his return possible. Hence the phone call to Vanlandingham, the forming of a new support group and the letter campaign that had led to such a positive result.

I had suggested to him just before he left Texas that something should be done to retrieve the money he'd lost to the lawyer hired by the original support group in 2001. I'd questioned him about all that had happened and it seemed to me the man had got away with daylight robbery. Burns had been retained in order to get his sentences to run concurrently, secure a time cut on the longest one and help him to return to Oklahoma.

Several of us wrote to ask that he do the decent thing and give back part of the \$12,000 we believed he'd taken under false pretences. Some of us telephoned, but were unable to speak with him. Not one amongst us received a reply to our letters.

While we waited for the response that never came, Jerry revealed to me more about

his disappointment with his lawyer, *"He told me he'd taken a trip by car to Oklahoma City and had spoken with a judge concerning the possibility of getting my stacked sentences to run concurrently. He told me he'd driven all the way to Enid, Oklahoma and spoken to the prosecuting attorney who was present when I was given that 115 sentence, again hoping to get a time cut. Both these trips accomplished nothing. But since I discovered what a shyster Burns was I have doubts that he made those trips or that he actually spoke to anyone. He probably lied about all this to just make me and the support group think he was doing something to earn the money he was paid. The S.O.B. never filed a single motion or paper on my behalf in the courts even to request a judge for a time cut.*

He came to visit me approximately 4 or 5 times at Wynne Unit for about 45 minutes to an hour each time. Finally I asked him not to come see me anymore as I felt as though his sole purpose in coming was not to discuss my convictions because we discussed the same shit over and over and he never did follow through on a course of action. I picked up vibes that he was only coming to visit so he'd have proof that we visited and discussed legal matters, him representing me and having proof of some time he spent on my case. The only thing he actually did for me was he emailed or wrote off to the Oklahoma and Garfield Counties and obtained photocopies of some of my past and present judgements and sentences. Hell, you could have done this yourself. Same thing about him taking those car trips to Oklahoma. Sharon, you could telephone or email and do the same thing.

Besides him getting photocopies of judgements and sentences, he wrote to the parole board members in Oklahoma, wrote to the Texas Governor. He's a fake, a shyster whose main objective was to milk us out of every penny he could get."

I have no legal training but it didn't take a genius to see that for \$12,000 it was doubtful Burns had proof of his having done anything of note for the amount he was paid. Leanne, the woman Jerry hoped would be his wife had made a substantial contribution to this first legal fund, as did his stepmother once she realised something constructive was being done to help him. A few donations came from retired friends; they must have been so disappointed with the outcome. Luckily, his friendship with most has carried on as strong as ever. Over the years he'd tried not to bother his family for money if he could help it, and there were long periods when he had nothing in his inmate fund to make his life in prison bearable.

I had no idea that prisoners are able to buy things but they can if they have money. There is a commissary or canteen run by each department of corrections that enables them to purchase toiletries, stationary, snack food, craft supplies, shoes, watches, clothing. It's big business if we remember there are over two million people in prison at any one time in the US. If a prisoner is allowed to have a radio or television, they can buy one from the commissary. I suppose society in general will see this as being soft on criminals, but from my understanding, without the ability to supplement what is often a poor and inadequate diet or have the luxury of TV life in the maximum-security prisons in particular is miserable beyond description. I never doubted his portrayal of prison life, but I didn't expect anybody else to believe as I did.

They say that love is blind, yet I knew what I felt for him was real and not a fantasy and as far as I was concerned I didn't have my eyes closed to who he was or where he was. I kept questioning my motives and tried to look at things in the cold light of day as much as possible. I promised to stick by his side, to give him my love and support and above everything to help him better his situation in whatever way I could. He would profess his undying love to me, and in the next breath write, *"Sure I know I could marry Anne or whoever and yes even be happy and content and truly in love with her, and yet, in my heart and soul Sharon, I know you're the one for me, you're that perfect wife I've searched for, it seems like forever. Life sucks, and all my life it's as though for*

me everything has caused me and those who care about me, heartaches and tears. If this is what true love is about then why do we need it? All the love and romance movies seem to have happy endings when two people find each other and fall in love. But in real life love seems to cause a lot of sorrow and pain."

Again, I'd ask myself how I'd feel in his position? I imagined what it must be like to be cut off from family, friends and society for years and years and then suddenly to have my world flooded with people who wanted to be my friend, to know about me, to pay me care and attention and to even shower me with their love, help and offers of marriage. How would I react? I'd probably be flattered, excited and very confused all at the same time. I knew he'd created worlds within worlds in his tiny cell with several of us he wrote to in particular. In his efforts to be upfront and honest with the women who were willing to be more than just a penfriend he was heading for disaster. He wanted a real wife, but his quest to find her and not let her slip through the net meant that deep down he wanted to keep his options open just in case his latest would be wife ended up getting cold feet as Leanne had done. This seems pretty ruthless until we sit back and think about the fact that he had nothing to offer but his self. Logic told me for him to plan a marriage, especially with a woman from overseas, someone he'd never even set eyes upon except in a photograph would take more than just words written on paper. It would take action and that action would have to come almost completely from his wife to be. He was asking for a lot to find a real wife from his prison cell. I loved him with a depth I cannot find words to describe. Could I put my love into action and set the ball in motion to marry him? I wasn't sure if I could make that commitment.

It was plain to see I was adding to his confusion. He would tell me how he could give up everyone for me, but he wanted me to give him an ultimatum, force him to do so. I'd reply, "Only you can decide what you wish to do. I will not tell you to give up anyone because I cannot guarantee that I can ever come to America to live even if I become your wife. Please don't put all your eggs in one basket, keep your options open. I will always be here for you, I know if I could marry you I would, but I can't give you any guarantees." I loved him so much but I couldn't take that leap of faith, to make words on paper become a reality. I was cruel, I couldn't disguise the pain I felt at the thought of someone else being his wife, he knew this and it upset him. Yet I can honestly say I had never felt the need for him to get rid of anyone he wrote to. I was in contact with most of them. We were on friendly terms even the ones he was intimate with including Anne, the woman he was supposed to be marrying. I did all I could to not let my feelings make me lose track of what I believed to be most important and that was my consuming passion to help him get out of that prison cell he'd been in for most of his adult life. I strived to keep any natural jealousy at bay. I asked for strength daily to be able to do this. We were riding a runaway emotional roller coaster and neither of us knew how to get off it.

We still bandied words about Mr. Burns wondering how he could be paid such a large sum of money for no return and get away with it? It was at this time in late May, when he told me he still had money in his inmate fund. One friend had sent him \$5,000 with the stipulation that they remain anonymous; the money was his to use for legal purposes or to make his life more comfortable. When he'd pulled the plug on Burns, \$4,000 of this money remained untouched. Many people who don't know him could say this is what he was all about, that he befriended free world people with the express desire to gain their sympathy and get them to part with their money. I would argue that there were friends he'd been writing to for years who had never sent him a penny and never joined in with either support group. He wrote to them because they were his friends, and he valued their friendship regardless of whether they had helped him in that way or not. One thing I know, he never asked anybody outright for money only friendship and respect.

Bindy, Katja, Beatriz and myself were in daily contact by email and had tried all ways to find a lawyer who would be willing to work Pro Bono but we'd found no one. We'd talk with Jerry and amongst ourselves about ways we could raise money to hire someone new. This was the reason why he revealed to me how much money was still in his inmate fund. He'd always told me he had money every time I'd offered to send him some, but it was a pleasant surprise to see just how much he had left. His idea was that if we could somehow recoup some of the money from Burns we wouldn't be far off the figure he thought we'd need to hire someone to help get a time cut and run his sentences concurrently. I wondered how on earth we could do this when he needed legal help now, not sometime in the distant future. I thought it was so simple, he needed a lawyer and all that was preventing him from getting one was money.

My life was hectic. My days were spent between my own home and my mother's, helping with Chris's needs and so forth. I was at work Thursdays and Fridays, while weekends were spent with my grandchildren. Each evening my time was filled with keeping everyone in the support group informed, emailing, letter writing, phone calls, or surfing the Internet looking for ideas, anything that would be of help. Of course, I also had to find time for my correspondence with Jerry. There was camaraderie within the group but more so between myself, Bindy, Katja and Beatriz simply because we were the ones who kept in touch the most and fired questions at Jerry in our letters in an attempt to know more. Bindy was very helpful, she'd been writing to him the longest and knew much more than we did. But some evenings I'd spend as much time having fun with my new friends as I did working on ways to help him. This made me feel a little uncomfortable about wasting my time.

Anne wasn't happy. She'd told me she was making plans to move to America and had already found a place to work in Oklahoma City. She seemed to know what she was talking about. She questioned why Jerry was still writing to so many other women. She told me she'd sat down and given him an ultimatum. In June he wrote to me, *"Anne asked me to put a message on the website to let everyone know that she's my girl, that we are going to get married. I understand where she is coming from. She needs reassurance as to how certain I am about her and our marriage. Because of the other girls I'm involved with and my being so open and up front with everyone about my loving them individually, my openness towards sex, she's confused and wondering just how faithful and for real I am about us getting married. I don't blame her at all for having twinges of jealousy, not knowing if she could count on me, on my love. So I've written a message for Belinda to put on the website and told her if she is willing to sacrifice her everything for me, for us, then I am too."*

Sharon, I pray to God that you'll remain in my life forever. My love for you is the strongest love and feelings I have ever experienced with anyone before. I'll never stop loving you and you know that. I just kept reading the things you've written to me how you tell me you could never be with me physically as a wife. I don't know how to deal with situations like this – after all I have experienced very little love, true love in my life and virtually know nothing about expressing or discussing relationships, marriage. I haven't experienced hardly any physical unions and relationships. I've spent almost all my adult life around men in prison environments, trying to express my love and feelings to girls comes hard for me at a time like this. Women are alien creatures since I haven't been around them much.

I expect some of my female friends will just stop writing straight away, one or two will continue writing for a while and then stop, this makes me sad, makes me feel like I'm doing the wrong thing by getting married while I'm here in prison. If I can't ever get out of prison, I'd prefer to have several intimate relationships with girls, reason being I'm trying to fit in and not become so alienated. My only way of stopping this institutionalization and alienation is through contact with the outside world."

Before I knew about these latest developments, I'd taken the initiative and hired an attorney! I'd had enough of looking here, there and everywhere for help and coming up against brick walls. I knew in my heart he'd get out of prison so if he felt that hiring a lawyer was the way to make it happen then that is what I'd do. Looking back I see how arrogant I was. I thought all I'd need to do was find a lawyer on the Internet and he would walk out of prison as if by magic.

I picked a name at random; a lawyer called Simon Wilson. I phoned his office and spoke with him. I was out of my depth, but did the best I could to explain what we were looking for. He took details and my phone number. On June 8th, 2003, I spoke with Simon again, he thought he could help but would need to do some background research. He asked me for \$3,000 and called this a retainer. I was thrilled that he'd accepted Jerry's case. Before this confirmation, I'd told as many of the support group as I could about my intentions to hire him and Bindy had researched into his background to discover he was a very prominent lawyer. I felt divine providence had a hand in my choice of legal help and was convinced Jerry was as good as free. The next day I went to see my bank manager and took out a lone for the equivalent of almost \$9,000, more than enough for the retainer. I put money to one side to be able to visit him and the rest I placed into a new account towards the start of a fund for his legal fees. We knew that once Simon had conducted his research, he would need more money to file through the courts for a time cut and to get his sentences to run concurrently. I can write this now and have some idea of what I'm talking about, whereas back then all I was doing was repeating what I'd been reading in Jerry's letters. I have no idea how I must have sounded to Simon when we spoke, all I remember is he seemed to know what he was talking about and felt sure he could be of help.

Chapter

6

Letter 22, June 15th, 2003
Sunday

"I got your number 24 with the emails to everyone discussing Simon Wilson and the information about him. He's definitely the right lawyer for what we need to accomplish. Needless to say he has the right influence, pull and connections. However, when dealing with lawyers it's wise to pin them down and try to get a clear understanding as to what they know, what they can do. As you know, my past experiences with the legal processes of the Courts, judges and lawyers, makes me gun shy and leery as hell towards them. I do know, as I have always said, with the right lawyer I can get out and I base this on what I have seen other prisoners accomplish through their lawyers through the years. Simon Wilson definitely knows the Oklahoma judges, prosecutors and politicians. But I don't like the idea of you borrowing money and going into debt like you're doing, what if you go all out like this and the end result accomplishes nothing? Please Sharon, at least try to pin him down and get some kind of a guarantee from him."

Jerry wanted to arrange for the \$3,000 to be sent to Simon from his inmate fund, but I'd written to tell him to hold onto his money as I'd already paid the retainer myself. It had been my idea and I'd acted alone. We had barely begun to discuss the merits of hiring a lawyer when I'd jumped right in and taken the initiative without his knowing. I'd done so before I'd received his letter telling me about Anne's ultimatum and the announcement of their engagement on the website.

As it turned out, he'd been right to voice his concerns and question her sincerity in wanting to marry him and move to America. In the following weeks she revealed her true colours. It emerged that the plans she'd made, the job she'd organised did not exist. She detached herself from the group basing her decision partly on my having hired a lawyer and her dislike of my dictatorial attitude, and partly on the fact that I'd ignored advice from Emma. Emma was the fiancée of an old convict friend Jerry had known since the 1970s. He was still housed at OSP but in a different area of the prison. Within a short time of his return they'd made contact via the prison grapevine and he told Jerry how Emma was the powerhouse behind his great hope of receiving a positive outcome at his forthcoming parole hearing.

Anne contacted Emma and told her about the support group and how we'd petitioned the ODOC. She warned Anne if we carried on with this gung ho attitude it would lead to his ruin. She said our interference would jeopardise his safety if we did not accept her advice and stop making waves. I refused to listen and voiced my opin-

ion loudly to the others telling them at the same time that they must make up their own mind which path to choose. Anne had taken this as a sign that I was unstable stating that Emma, as an American should know far better than I did. But I was adamant I would not go down the road of fear and paranoia. Once Jerry received my letters of explanation, he agreed with my decision.

As soon as Anne discovered he'd taken my side, and with several scathing letters, she wiped the floor with him. The love she'd so recently proclaimed disappeared like April snow and her vows to always be there, to help him get out of prison turned to hatred as she told him she knew he'd rot in his cell till he died. Her viciousness was an eye opener but a true gage of the extremes of emotion a man in his position can generate. One minute he's a human being of true character striving in impossible conditions to make amends and better himself, next he's a contemptible "convict boy". I resolved even more to make sure I did all I could to keep our relationship as real as possible. The last thing I wanted was to find myself in a world of maybes and half-baked promises.

Jerry had asked me to pin Simon down, get something from him in writing, but the truth is I was out of my depth. I was rather in awe of him, how could I, a complete lay person, a woman with no knowledge of British law never mind American pin him down? He was professional, confident and I assumed he'd know what was needed to help Jerry gain his freedom.

With Anne gone he decided the best thing for him to do would be to stay single and enjoy the relationships he had with everyone not just the women he was intimate with but with all of his friends. Although I couldn't commit to marrying him, he'd decided I would be the first one he'd be with once he gained his freedom so my vision of us waiting in an orderly line outside the gates or bearing down upon him like stampeding cattle as he walked free was replaced by another. We would be together for his first two weeks of freedom, and as I flew home on one plane whoever was next would be landing in another. It may sound crazy but at the time it was the only way he could make any sense of what he'd got himself involved in. He wrote, *"Does this make me a scoundrel because I told you about the others and how I promised them we'd meet up for some fun times when I got out? Should I have just kept my mouth shut and sneaked around behind your back? It eats at me knowing you'll know this is going to happen, me meeting up with 3 or 4 other girls. It's just that you and many others have recently told me I need to have my freedom when I first get out so that I can start anew out there in the free world with no ties. I think this is wise advice, the only trouble is, it's you I want to be with for the rest of my life."*

It was unreal and my way of dealing with it was to affirm what I felt was most important and that was to help him better his situation, everything else was insignificant in comparison. If he loved all these other women I would not be the one to take that away from him, only he could decide what he wanted to do, only he could decide what was fantasy and what was not. I wanted to be his wife but I knew if I did decide to go down that road then I wouldn't talk about it I'd act. I wasn't quite ready to make that commitment, the thought of one day having to leave my home and family made me feel uncomfortable.

Still, most of the group was enthusiastic that I'd hired a lawyer but there were one or two who were jealous and as time passed they would drift away. Katja decided she would do a sponsored walk. She managed to get enough sponsorship to raise over £300. In all around £1,300 was donated from friends, this included a substantial amount from myself. I placed this money in the account I'd opened. Some supporters apologised for not being able to make a contribution, he assured them their friendship was more important to him than any money they might give to his legal fund. If his friends wanted to give money to help him he was very grateful, if they couldn't or wouldn't for whatever reason that was fine.

On July 23rd I received a letter, *"Sharon, you have told me how Simon Wilson or someone from his office was on their way down here to see me. This was 2 or 3 weeks ago. No one's shown up yet. You have told me and I read his email to you stating he's sending me some legal papers, this was 2 weeks ago and I never received them either. All I have ever gotten from him is that photocopy letter of yours and he didn't even write to introduce himself. So what does this tell you!"*

You said how you called him and talked to that other guy who's supposedly researching my case? Let me fill you in on a little something. When you first wrote and told me about Simon I felt really good about him, but once you sent him that \$3,000 retainer the first thing a professional would have done was come here and discuss all my cases, sentences and especially talked to me about that 115 sentence and found out from me if any bullshit had taken place concerning my trial, the witnesses etc., if for nothing else then just to have an idea on what grounds he'd attack this. After all, all I know or can go by is what you've explained to me and now to tell you the truth I'm paranoid that you and Simon Wilson might be running up the wrong tree. I'll give you back the \$3,000, as you know I've got \$4,000 that was going towards some kind of legal representation but I'm giving up on all this. I now wished you'd have gotten a contract from him like I suggested but it's too late now. I would suggest you write him and try to get your money back. Of course it won't do any good."

I didn't know what to think. Once I'd sent the \$3,000 to Simon he'd appointed his associate David Richards to work on his case. I phoned the office and spoke with David, I asked him outright if he thought it was hopeless? He said it was not and that they were in the early stages of their research but they were finding it difficult to get hold of Jerry's trial transcript where he'd received the 115-year sentence. He told me he thought Simon was ready to contact me by letter to tell me how they should proceed.

David paid him a visit, *"A David Richards was here yesterday and to be honest I didn't come away with any positive outlook at all. The whole conversation was more or less directed at my transfer to Texas, we spoke about my appeal that was filed on that 115 sentence back in the 80's and all my past convictions. All I'll say is, hell David wasn't even aware of all my other sentences and past felony convictions. So needless to say I felt disappointed big time."*

You know the truth is every time I speak with a lawyer I come away feeling more helpless and hopeless than ever. It's hard to explain, it's like if you can imagine the emotions and feelings you'd have if you were standing in front of a judge and jury for sentencing and they tell you, well we sentence you to prison for the rest of your life, you're never getting out. How you'd see your life flash in your minds eye, you're crushed knowing all your hopes and dreams are gone. There's no hope, there's nothing but a dull feeling inside, you're dead, but you just refuse to lay down and let them throw the dirt over you."

I telephoned David again he was sympathetic to Jerry's plight and believed he'd been treated unfairly. At that point they were still searching for ways they could present his case to the court. We talked about Oklahoma State Penitentiary and he told me how he felt sorry for the inmates, "I wouldn't send my dog there", he'd remarked.

When Jerry moved from H to A unit his case manager Tami Wagoner, had raised him to level 4 the highest and best within the ODOC. The first time he mentioned his Level to me he was still in Texas, at the time I'd imagined it to mean the place where he lived on the prison unit. I was so green I pictured that it must be better to live on a higher level of the prison building than on a lower level. Today I can smile at my ignorance.

My proper introduction into the world of levels and earned credits was about to begin when Tami was moved and Eddie was rotated to work in another unit at the beginning of August 2003, *"My new case manager Jimmy Wilson told me I'm no longer level 4 status. I suspect before long he'll move me to a fucked up quad or housing area, take*

my T.V. and radio etc. See on level 2, the level I've been demoted to for no reason, I'm not allowed a T.V. and can only spend \$20, every two weeks which will put a real hardship on me just to keep up in postage stamps.

When I was transferred to Texas I was level 4 and when I left Texas I was their highest and best level, Tami verified this and spoke with Reading here at McAlester, he's over all case managers and they made me level 4. For some reason now Reading just ups and demotes me in level from 4 to 2. I'm now getting shafted on this level deal. I'm writing a letter to Lee Mann asking her to help me get this straightened out. This demotion in level makes my life in prison miserable as it determines my privileges. We need to do everything we can to expose what they're trying to do or rather have done. They're punishing me by this level bullshit for no reason because I haven't gotten any misconducts or anything here in Oklahoma since 1987. If I can't get this level back I won't be able to get a job, go to a medium security unit. But it's going to take a group effort writing letters just like you did to get me transferred back here. Read the Classification OPS governing levels. This is nothing but the powers that be using this level status to inflict hardships upon me."

Lee Mann, I soon learned was Assistant to the Warden and spokesperson for the prison. I took my time and read through the OPS or Operations, Policies and Procedures. These decide how each prisoner will be classified within the system. In simple terms, the OPS are the rules that govern the state prisons in Oklahoma under the jurisdiction of the Oklahoma Department Of Corrections. Their unfamiliar content confused me at first but I persevered until I gained a very basic understanding. According to state and federal law each inmate housed within the ODOC is classified at a certain level. Level 1 is the lowest and level 4 the highest. If a prisoner is level 1 he is unable to earn any credits, while at level 2 he can earn 22, level 3 earns 33 and those prisoners at level 4 receive 44 credits. Credits are given for every calendar month served in prison and are deducted from the overall amount of time a prisoner must serve on his sentence.

While a prisoner is serving his sentence, if he stays at level 4 he is able to earn 44 days plus the time he serves making an average of 74 days deducted off his total sentence each month. But of equal importance the level a prisoner is at determines the amount of privileges he is allowed and this covers a wide range of things from where he is housed, the amount of visits he is given, the type of visits he may have, frequency of phone calls, how much money he may spend, the opportunity to work or to join in self-improvement programmes, in short almost everything governing an individual's time in prison. Policies and procedures are the wheels and cogs of prison life for staff and prisoners alike and levels and earned credits form a very important part of the machine that keeps the whole system in motion. Policies and procedures should ensure uniformity and equal treatment. This is true when they are applied correctly but when they are misused or ignored the OPS becomes an effective tool for retaliation by an individual member of staff or by several members working in collusion.

I had decided it was becoming too complicated and time consuming to keep all those without computers updated with everything that was happening. Without the use of a computer it was very difficult for them to get involved to the extent that I was. It was also becoming obvious to Katja and myself that most, even if they did have a computer could not or would not dedicate the time needed to study the OPS or to listen to Jerry. I did my best to tutor people but some of his friends would disappear only to reappear days or even weeks later wondering if anything was happening. Added to this, problems cropped up, such as his demotion in level. It was impossible for me to spend the time in long discussions with an out of touch individual.

There were still one or two romantics who would shower him with their love and offers of how they would leave their husband or sell up their home, yet they were not

prepared to dedicate their time to try to understand how to help him in an effective way or to better his life. Someone might suggest something and I would disagree but only because I was sure my understanding was better than theirs and Jerry supported me because he was my tutor.

I wasn't alone in my drive to help him and my willingness to learn because Bindy, Katja and Beatriz were just as dedicated. Beatriz did her very best, but she was limited in her understanding as English is her second language. The four of us set out to discover why his level had been lowered and to try to get it restored.

Beatriz got the first breakthrough when Harry Reading Case Manager Supervisor replied to her email. He insisted that Jerry was the lowest level when he returned from Texas and that on May 1st they'd raised him to level 2. He told her that by policy this was the highest level he could reach. I wrote to Mr. Reading pointing out that Tami had classified Jerry as level 4 with his approval; unfortunately I did not get a response from him.

Lee Mann replied to Jerry's letter, with the statement, "Records do not reflect that you have ever been eligible for promotion to level 4." Yet in the same memo, she confirmed that as he did not come under the new policy he would receive benefits, canteen and such allowed under the old level system. If this were the case why would they prevent him from rising higher than level 2? It just didn't make sense, but at least they were not going to take away his privileges. Except that by the end of August he was told once again that he would no longer be allowed to have level 4 privileges.

All of this placed him under a lot of stress and he gave vent to his feelings in the only way he could, by expressing his frustration and disappointment in his letters. He told me he knew who was behind this change to his circumstances. When Eddie had moved, Mike Pruitt had taken his place as manager. He'd been in charge of the F cell house when Jerry escaped in June '85, same when the riot broke out on A and C units six months later. Ever since his escape and the riot, Jerry had been a marked man. He told me how Pruitt had been one of the main players behind his transfer to Texas and part of the reason for his inability to progress in any positive way since then. Lee Mann was his case manager at the time. Jerry insisted both of them were acting in collusion with a third and higher member of staff, the Deputy Director for the Eastern District of Oklahoma and overseer of OSP, Mr Bobby Boone.

He did his best to help me understand, *"I'm sending you some more legal cases to give you an idea how many times these level - security points have changed, get you familiar with reading this stuff so you can grasp what I'm trying to explain when I talk about good time - work time, levels, escape points. I fall under the OPS system that was in effect in 1980 when I first got that 25-year sentence. I'm governed by the OPS and laws that controlled prisoners in the 1980s not the new OPS, when they apply new Operations to me they cannot make my length of incarceration longer or take privileges away from me in the way that they are."*

I photocopied the legal cases to mail to Katja, and once she received them we struggled to understand their content. Bindy wrote to David Henneke chairperson of the Board of Corrections to complain that policies and procedures had been violated when they'd demoted him to level 2. I wrote to Ron Ward, Director of the ODOC, and Beatriz emailed Warden Mike Mullin. Once again I waited in vain for a response from the Director.

In the mean time, Jerry had other concerns on his mind, *"Why do I feel as though you have come to the realization of how hopeless my predicament is? Or is this just my negativity and paranoia seeping in? All I ask is for you to not keep anything from me that Simon Wilson might tell you even if it's bad news that you feel will only get me down and depressed. See, it's a lot easier for me to deal with and handle my situation or relationships head on knowing what's what regardless of how it might hurt me. It's the not*

knowing that keeps me on edge and stresses me out. At least by my knowing I will be able to psyche myself and get myself adjusted and in the right frame of mind to handle whatever and deal with it. The false hopes and dreams tear me up once I finally do snap to what's really the score."

As I received this letter Simon Wilson emailed to say he was very pessimistic that there was any judicial relief that would significantly modify Jerry's sentence. It wasn't looking too good. All I could do was write and give him this latest news. I'd been so positive Simon would be able to help but whatever the outcome it did not change my determination or resolve to find a way forward.

August 28th, 2003, *"Just got back from my first classification hearing or 120 day review which consisted of Jimmy Wilson giving me papers to sign and telling me you've got 16 security points because of your escape in 1985. Because of these points, you're stuck behind the Walls here in McAlester. He also made it a point that under this new level 2 I can never get promoted to a higher level. Sharon, as far as me ever getting approved for a job - that will never happen because it's my case manager who has all classification functions, meaning promotions in level, security status and approval for a job assignment. Their out to get me and there's no doubt he's doing his superior's bidding. I say this because I have never personally had contact with him, fallen out with him or ever had a heated argument prior to his first attempts to demote me from level 4. He personally has no reasons to come gunning for me like he is so this tells me he's being a puppet and carrying out instructions. That's how it works here.*

Anyway, I filed a grievance and will get a copy to you so you can see what I filed. It will do no good, hell they'll probably just ignore it. As soon as I get the papers I signed today concerning that kangaroo 120 review, I'll get it out to you."

He filed the grievance but it was returned to him as invalid. A grievance is the only internal process whereby prisoners may protest against unfair treatment or punishment. Before a grievance is accepted for investigation, the prisoner has to try to rectify the unsatisfactory situation at unit level. He does this by submitting a request to staff highlighting his complaint. Once Mike Pruitt took up the position of unit manager and Jimmy Wilson became his case manager the majority of Jerry's requests to staff were ignored, as a result, he was unable to submit a legitimate grievance to those in higher authority.

In a last ditch attempt, he wrote to the Grievance Coordinator explaining everything and re-submitting the grievance at the same time. Two days later, Beatriz received a reply from the Warden, he told her, "All policies are being followed; Jerry is on level II and is receiving level IV privileges." No doubt this sudden reinstatement of his privileges was because of the letters and emails we'd sent complaining on his behalf, but the situation was only half resolved because he was still officially level 2 and his earned credits reflected this. From our reading of the legal cases he'd sent us we were positive this was in violation of state and federal law.

I hadn't forgotten the attorney Mr. Burns. I contacted the State Bar of Texas the body that investigates complaints against lawyers. They sent Jerry a form for him to fill in and return to their offices. They wrote at the end of July to inform him they were satisfied there was a case for alleged professional misconduct. They would send a copy of Jerry's Complaint to Burns for his response and in accordance with the Texas Rules of Disciplinary Procedure there would be an investigation into the matter. They would notify him of the hearing date. This was a great breakthrough and our spirits were lifted, but it was short lived. He was given the date of the hearing, and told to send any additional information regarding the complaint immediately. They warned him he could not discuss the case with a third party so it was impossible for the State Bar of Texas to see our overwhelming evidence to prove Burns had done absolutely nothing to secure Jerry's return to Oklahoma, it had been down to the work of the support group, Burns

had long disappeared from the scene. We were sure any proof of effective legal work he'd undertaken on the case was so little as to be almost non-existent. Had we been given the opportunity to produce our evidence we could have proved emphatically his claims of success were pure hogwash. Leanne, the woman Jerry was once going to marry came to the support of Burns, I am allowed to reveal this much, and in doing so she proved that like Anne, her undying love had blown away with the wind.

What happened with Burns was a disappointment. We felt very strongly that he'd taken money under false pretences. But we had more pressing things to worry about. It wasn't looking good with Simon Wilson either.

I was struggling to write a letter to the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. I wanted to point out the unfairness and illegality of their having demoted him to level 2. I'd been studying the legal cases trying to apply their findings to his situation, but I had no one to ask if my understanding was correct apart from Katja and she was as much in the dark as I was. In early September I decided to phone Simon and ask for his advice. I wanted to know if a prison policy could come under a penal law. He said it could but it would depend on the policy. I explained I wanted to write a letter to show how the new policy they were using to keep Jerry at level 2 was "Ex Post Facto" and "retrospective". I then gave him an explanation of my understanding and was elated when he told me I was correct and that he'd like to see my letter when I'd finished it. However, in the next breath he said he was glad I'd phoned because he needed to talk to me. There were some developments and they were not encouraging. I wrote to tell Jerry of these developments. He replied, *"What Simon Wilson said to you about how he has discovered how he wasn't aware of my escapes and how with the law as it is now if a prisoner has escaped it kills all their appeal rights is confusing to me. All my escapes happened in the 1970s and 1980s. My last escape was in 1985 and that new law he's talking about does not apply to me because it is a new law. This law and appeal denial on escapes can only be applied to prisoners who escaped after this was signed in law. So what is Simon talking about? Does he even know what year my escapes happened? Evidently not."*

Indeed, Simon's comments did not make sense. He'd confirmed in our telephone call that to apply a new prison policy to alter Jerry's Level was, in his case, a violation of the law, the Ex Post Facto clause. If a person breaks the law in 1980 and is sentenced under the law that is in force at that time, it is illegal to apply a new law to alter the original sentence, to do so would be termed as retrospective. By keeping him from earning the correct amount of credits, the DOC was lengthening his sentence. Of course, I'm not a lawyer and neither is Jerry, yet it seemed so obvious to us; why couldn't the Department of Corrections or Simon Wilson see what we could so plainly see?

Jerry received a memo from Simon and his assistant, David in mid September, the last two paragraphs summed up their findings, "As to Mr. Hamilton's good time, his record on paper would make it very difficult, if not impossible, to get any court to review how the prison system both in Texas and Oklahoma has failed to credit Mr. Hamilton with significant good time. Good time is something that the jail system is not required to give unless an inmate has complied with all the rules. While Mr. Hamilton may be doing a good job in that fashion now, were a court to review his record and see all the escapes as well as his supposed involvement in the prison riots, which included an assault and kidnapping of an officer, his claim would be denied. Granted, Mr. Hamilton was not directly involved in the assault, but any involvement in such activities tarnishes the record, as inmates are not given the benefit of the doubt in such circumstances. Unfortunately, while we believe Mr. Hamilton is serving an excessive and disproportionate sentence, I do not think there is anything I can do for him."

While it may be correct to state that good time is something the jail system is not required to give, it is also correct to state that good time must be applied fairly and with-

out prejudice. I was about to discover the extent of discrimination that exists within the jail system.

Chapter

7

Letter 28, September 16, 2003
Tuesday

"Sharon I proposed to you in marriage because I truly love you. We are going to move mountains together and like I say, if there's a will there's a way. You and I will find a way to be together."

In quiet moments I'd think about what would be involved, what it would mean if I became his wife. I'd discovered the process for us to marry was not too complicated. It wouldn't necessitate my having to move to America before hand, neither would I have to apply for a special permit as I'd imagined. He still had a tiny number of women he was intimate with, but for the most part I wasn't concerned because what he shared with them I felt wouldn't amount to anything in the long run. I didn't believe there was one amongst them who could make a commitment to marriage.

Everyone loves to feel needed and Jerry desired with every fibre of his being to be liked and loved for the person he had become not the man he once was or the prisoner he'd been for so many years. He gave the people who wrote to him the opportunity to feel valued and appreciated. He had the ability to generate powerful emotions of sympathy, empathy and love. He didn't set out with this in mind, it was just something that happened in the natural process of getting to know him. He was searching for a wife. He'd been forced to bottle his love inside him for decades, having had no means to express it in a natural way. Once he began writing to women in the free world the flood-gates were opened allowing his pent up love and sexual frustration to flow out and bowl over Leanne, Anne and others. I'm sure to begin with they were genuine, but to fall in love by correspondence and to stay in love over a long period of time acting upon that love to turn the relationship from one of talk and wishful thinking into a marriage separates those under the spell of infatuation from those who have fallen in love for real.

I knew I was different from the others and so I decided I would take that leap of faith and become his wife. Why did I make this decision? I felt a connection I could not put into words as though I had known him in a past life. Although we'd never met face to face, I knew we were very well suited in our personalities. We'd more or less grown up in the same era and could relate to some of our childhood experiences. The love that had washed through me that morning in October was still there. All that had happened in my life prior to meeting him had been the most perfect training of my character and inner strength. I knew I was tailor made to be his wife even though it would need several miracles for us to be together in a real home setting. I also had the patience

and understanding to let him feel his way out of his intimate relationships without letting jealousy destroy us. I would give him time to grow up because when it came to women he was still the immature nineteen year old sent to prison for the first time in 1972. He would have to place his trust in me knowing full well I could walk away at any time, leaving him high and dry and all alone and nobody would condemn me, not even Jerry himself. I admired his courage for believing in me. Once I'd made my decision there would be no going back. I trusted that everything would fall into place as time progressed. I would do all in my power to make sure it would. I spoke one at a time with Ray, my mother and my sons; to my great relief they were very understanding. We could rely on their love and support.

Bindy had been searching through the Internet and had come across a newspaper report recounting the escape of five inmates from Oklahoma State Penitentiary on May 28th, 1985. The article didn't go into great detail but it named Jerry as one of those who had escaped. I mentioned her find in one of my letters and received this reply, *"About the escapes and especially now that I'm back here in Oklahoma I don't like to talk about anything pertaining to escapes because I assure you these ole things here are gunning for me and trying to get me to fuck up so they can bury my ass out there on H Block, Ad Seg and if they bust any of our letters discussing escapes, even though we're discussing escapes that happened 18 years ago or longer they'll try to say we're making escape plans and all that kind of stupid shit. Even though you and everyone else knows that is in the past and I will never escape again."*

This wasn't an exaggeration. When a prison officer in Texas had entered his cell whilst he was in the shower, he'd accused him of making escape plans. He'd read the letter he'd been in the process of writing to a friend. He ordered him to sign a form so that he could confiscate the letter for further investigation. Jerry refused this order asking to speak with the lieutenant. The form he'd been ordered to sign was attached to a clipboard. He placed it back into the bean hole. This is the slot that allows food, mail and other materials to be passed into and out of his cell without having to open the cell door. He turned around to put his spectacles on his bunk, and as he did so, he heard a noise as the clipboard fell to the floor outside his cell door. He looked back to the door to see the officer was standing smiling at him. In the next breath he said, "That's assault of an officer". He was charged and lost his level and privileges for several weeks. The paperwork for this assault states the guard was not injured. There was nothing he could do to prevent this punishment; a prisoner has little or no power when his account of events is disbelieved.

Still, taking a chance, he wrote that once all five of them were free of the prison walls, they'd split into two groups. He and another prisoner called Rick hid in the McAlester area for two days. Luck was on their side when they spotted a van with the keys still in the ignition; they took it and drove undetected to Oklahoma City. Rick had arranged for his cousin to book a motel room for them. They lay low in the motel staying high on drugs and alcohol. Through stupidity and desperation they funded their temporary freedom by robbing a supermarket at gunpoint. Two weeks later, they were captured without resistance after an anonymous tip off to the police, *"Sharon, why there was so much heat on that escape was because we were all doing outrageous sentences. Plus we all escaped at the same time from their maximum-security prison. The Oklahoma Bureau of Investigation placed a \$5,000 dollar reward on each of us. And yes, it is this escape and the riot that is behind why I was transferred out of state to Texas. It's why I'm continuously being harassed and retaliated against. The escape embarrassed the Oklahoma Department of Corrections and got big time heat put on them. The Administration here at McAlester, the Warden, Deputy Warden, Security Major and a couple of guards got fired and of course since we escaped from the F Cell House while Mike Pruitt was manager, he got a lot of heat and flack. Six months later,*

in December the riot happened and Mike Pruitt and others used this riot situation to really fuck over me and get even."

If I was reading this story for the first time I would question the sanity of a woman who sympathises with a man who has the audacity to complain about the way he'd been treated by the Oklahoma and Texas prison authorities for so many years knowing he'd committed serious crimes, had escaped more than once and been involved in a serious riot. Didn't he deserve everything that was happening to him? I would ask that you read on and listen to the story in full before you make your decision, there is so much more to reveal. It's my belief that just as my eyes have been opened, you too will see his world as it really is. I hope you will have a much better understanding than you do now.

Having made up my mind to marry him, I decided it was time for us to meet in person. At the end of August, he'd been able to send everyone an up to date photograph of himself courtesy of Bindy who'd made copies of the original. It was a small, full-length image. He had grey hair, parted in the middle and pushed behind his ears touching the collar of his pale blue shirt that was tucked into blue jeans. These were his regular prison clothes. He had a long white Mexican style moustache. He didn't appear very relaxed as he stood facing the camera, his arms hanging stiffly in front of him, one hand over the other. He wasn't smiling and there was the hint of a frown on his forehead, as he looked straight into the camera lens. He was more or less as I'd imagined him to look from his description in his letters. He was pleased when I wrote and assured him that I saw him as a fine, handsome man. He'd been worried I'd be disappointed and regret my decision to marry him.

In mid September I phoned the prison to enquire how I should go about being granted permission to visit. Jerry said I qualified for a special visit because I lived so far away. I spoke with a Miss Meadows and she told me I would be allowed to see him over a period of three days maximum. She took my details and said she would submit my request to the Deputy Warden for his approval. I didn't know it then but there is no way a person can be granted a special visit just by making a phone call. I have no idea why she would misinform me.

His remaining close friends had been told about our plans to marry and everyone accepted the news graciously giving us their blessing and support. I sent emails announcing my sudden decision to travel to Oklahoma. I'd written to tell Jerry of my decision to visit in October from Friday 24th to Sunday 26th. That way I would be with him for his 50th birthday on the Saturday. He was very happy and excited. He explained how he would need to submit a request to staff for the visit to be approved.

He expressed his concern that if I visited in October, would I be able to afford to return for our marriage the following March once it was approved? But I'd already decided in my mind to trust that the money would be there when I needed it. He filled out a request asking for a special visit and submitted it to Mike Pruitt. He also submitted one to the Chaplain enquiring how we could begin the marriage process. The Chaplain sent him a "Marriage Request Application" with instructions to submit it through his unit manager. He warned Jerry at the same time that it would be my responsibility to find a minister to marry us.

Two weeks passed and Jerry heard nothing about our visit or the marriage application, he wrote to ask me to find out what was happening. I phoned OSP and spoke with the Chaplain; he told me hadn't received the marriage application. I phoned Pruitt, he said he'd not received a marriage request from Jerry. I knew this was untrue.

I made several phone calls over the next two weeks until I heard at last that our visit had been approved. Pruitt had given me the impression from the start it would be denied so I was very surprised and happy. Yet I kept on getting letters from Jerry voicing his concerns about whether I'd be able to visit with him or not. No one took the time to tell him what was happening. I phoned to ask if the Chaplain had received the mar-

riage application, but he'd not seen it. I went ahead anyway and made an appointment to meet with him. He mentioned I'd need to see him three separate times before we'd be allowed to marry. I was unsure what he meant by this but guessed he'd explain more during our meeting.

It was official, I would fly to Oklahoma on Tuesday October 21st and return home the following Tuesday. I doubted very much I could pluck up the courage to drive in America. I'd only ever driven on British roads and the thought of driving on the right filled me with terror. It was arranged that Tania, Jerry's niece would collect me from the airport. I'd stay at her place with Jeff and their sons for one night. On Wednesday afternoon, they would take me to McAlester, a two-hour drive away.

As luck would have it, Beatriz had been surfing the Internet and discovered a place called Hospitality House. It advertised itself as a charity run establishment for those who were visiting with inmates at Oklahoma State Penitentiary. I phoned and spoke with a friendly lady who took my details, she emphasised that I needed to be sure I had a special visit in place. Once I gave her that assurance, she took my booking for five nights. Actually the only assurance I had was a verbal one. I didn't want Tania or Jeff to drive all the way to McAlester to collect me for my return trip once my visits with Jerry were over so I made enquiries and discovered that I could catch a Greyhound bus to Oklahoma City on Monday, the day before my flight home.

I'd only flown twice in my life, once when I was 11 and again in 1981, when Terry and I had saved flat out for almost a year to travel to Florida so that I could realise a childhood dream of visiting the United States. My car wasn't very reliable so to give myself plenty of time in case it broke down I decided to set off at 10pm on the Monday evening even though my flight didn't leave Heathrow until mid morning. I felt a mixture of emotions as I placed my suitcase in the car. I was over the moon to know I'd soon be in America and would meet Jerry, at the same time I also felt sick with guilt and apprehension about leaving my family even though everyone was supportive and assured me they would stand by any decisions I might make. They knew how much it meant to me to have their blessing. It felt unreal in lots of ways, as though it was happening to someone else. My life had been so quiet and apart from travelling to work and day trips I'd not strayed far and hadn't slept a night away from home in 10 years.

I knew Heathrow Airport was off the M4 roughly 190 miles away from the Rhondda Valley where I lived. Once I'd got three quarters of the way I decided to stop in a motorway café. It was much too early to reach the airport so I sat alone enjoying the warmth and rest as I supped hot chocolate while watching other travellers come and go. I felt a little out of place, but my resolve to continue my journey didn't waver. It was freezing with a heavy frost when I left the services thankfully I'd brought plenty of warm clothes with me. I got to the airport at 6am. Ten minutes later I was sitting on the courtesy bus amongst an assortment of excited holidaymakers and suited businessmen. When I'd travelled to Florida all those years ago, it had been with an organised tour so all we had to do was stay with our group. Arriving at the terminal, I felt like a country bumpkin. The environment was so foreign to me, but I read the notices, followed all instructions and before I knew it I was sitting on an American Airlines plane on my way to Chicago. I loved the take off and soaked up the unfamiliar atmosphere. I seemed to be the only one who found it all fascinating. I was amazed by the television screens built into the back of each seat for in flight entertainment. I loved the American accents all around me. I enjoyed every bit of the seven-hour flight. I even liked the food. Arriving in Chicago Ohare Airport, a self-contained city to my inexperienced eyes, I waited a few hours before catching a smaller American Eagle to Oklahoma City. By the time we landed, tiredness combined with the unfamiliar variety of food and soft drinks I'd consumed had taken its toll and every cell in my body was crying out to throw up. I charged off the plane and made it to the nearest toilet just in time.

Once I'd recovered from my airsickness, I collected my luggage and looking around at the mix of people I eyed a police officer with a gun in his holster, such an unusual sight. Thankfully, I didn't have to wait too long before Tania and Jeff found me. They were a friendly young couple and I was so pleased to meet them. I hadn't had a great deal of contact with Tania, except to speak over the phone a few times. As we left the airport building to make our way to their vehicle I walked into a wall of heat. It was late afternoon but hotter than the hottest summer's day back home in Wales. It was obvious I wouldn't need my warm clothes; I made a quick mental inventory of how many t-shirts I'd brought with me.

We whizzed along the highway and what impressed me immediately was the width of the roads. Driving on the right as we left the airport was very confusing and I thanked God I'd had someone to meet me. It would be impossible for me to have driven myself; I'd have died a thousand deaths before I'd gone half a mile.

Tania and Jeff lived in a rented ground floor apartment of an enclosed complex with their three boisterous and inquisitive sons. I was made to feel very welcome. I slept in the master bedroom while they made a temporary bed for themselves in the living room. In many ways it was a familiar experience to be in their home. Families are families the world over and children seem to share the universal traits of curiosity and fun.

The next day they all left for work and school and I went for a wander down a road running along side the expressway that headed north and south from the city. It was boiling hot, there was no sidewalk and not a soul about except that at every garden boundary vicious looking dogs lunged at me barking like mad. I was thankful for the fences preventing them from planting their teeth into me. At home, I was used to walking to the local shops, stopping to chat to passers by. The occasional truck tooted from the expressway as I walked along the service road and I wondered if the route I was taking was out of bounds to pedestrians? I reached a gas station, took a look around and then walked the mile or so back to the apartment. It was too hot to stay out any longer. I'd really enjoyed my sightseeing even though it had been mainly a mix of giant advertising hoardings and traffic.

Later that afternoon Jeff and Tania drove me to McAlester. On the way we stopped at an "all you can eat restaurant", something I'd never experienced before. Once we'd eaten our fill, we continued our journey while we chatted about our different countries as the car radio played Country music. At intervals we'd pass built up areas consisting of gas stations, restaurants, motels and food stores nestling like oases along the highway.

I hadn't realised our journey was nearing its destination until Jeff suddenly urged me to look to my left, as I did so I caught my first sight of OSP as we approached McAlester. It stood in open fields and appeared a gleaming white fortress in the afternoon sun. I felt a mix of excitement and apprehension; I'd never set foot in a prison in my life. We turned left down a deserted road with the penitentiary walls growing bigger and more impressive as we neared them. A few minutes later Jeff pulled up in front of the prison museum. We piled out. I had a camcorder and had been filming the last mile of our approach. I'd promised everyone I'd take as much footage as possible so they could share a little in my adventure. I looked around trying to take it all in. I'd seen an image of OSP on the prison website but to peer up at the security towers and high walls perched on top of raised banking in a style reminiscent of a Norman castle was not comparable to any photograph. I wondered where Jerry was being held behind those imposing walls. A wave of emotion passed through me as I realised I wouldn't have to wait long to find out.

Hospitality House is a very neat single story building just a couple of hundred yards from the prison gates. It had a welcoming porch and bench with a pretty bed of

flowers running along its front. Having made arrangements to stay overnight with Jeff and Tania on my return to Oklahoma City the following Monday, I thanked them for all their help. We said our goodbyes and I was left in the safe hands of Mary who'd taken my booking when I'd phoned from the UK. Mary helped me feel at ease while she took my details and explained the house rules. She showed me to my room. It was very neat and clean with two single beds. I was welcome to use the communal kitchen for my meals and told to make myself at home. Mary lived close at hand in an annex at the back of the house. There was no television or radio but that didn't bother me at all.

I was very grateful when she offered later that evening to run me into town. She pointed out landmarks as we drove along. I wondered how on earth I'd find my way around such a sprawling area. I would have to walk everywhere but that wouldn't be a problem, as I love walking. She pointed out the library so that I could email home and we stopped outside Allen's Store for me to buy some food. Getting ready for bed that night I was a little overwhelmed by my new surroundings and the long journey I'd undertaken to reach McAlester, added to this was the amazing realisation that in only one more day, Jerry and I would meet for the first time.

It was normal practice for all guests to vacate Hospitality House between the hours of 9am and 3pm, but this rule was stretched a little for me because I had no vehicle. I didn't want to impose too much so made sure I was ready to leave straight after breakfast. The day was mine to do with as I pleased. I wanted to take a closer look at the prison and the surrounding area. I walked along the east perimeter in a northerly direction stopping every so often to take photos. The outer structure was very impressive. The labour for its construction in 1909 on 120 acres of land donated by the citizens of McAlester had been provided by the prisoners it would later house. I passed a small security gate. At this point the massive walls ran away from me to the west. Standing behind a high steel fence and engulfed by rows of coiled razor wire in the foreground was a structure that looked like a large solid concrete bunker interspersed with narrow dark tinted windows. I could just make out an exercise yard through the shimmering wire. A few inmates who were trustees walked around freely on the public road. I said hello to a prison officer standing outside the security gate and asked him if it was okay for me to take photos, he said it was. I asked could I use my video camera if I returned later that day and he assured me I could as long as I didn't try to enter the penitentiary at this restricted end. I didn't think there'd be much chance of that! The trustee building was across the road from the security gate. Having satisfied my curiosity, I walked back towards Hospitality House passing the main entrance of OSP as I did so. Further along to my right was a large open complex housing minimum-security prisoners. Just down the road on my left was the County Jail.

It was already very hot and would climb into the low nineties as the morning stretched into the afternoon. It took me around an hour to walk into town making my way along the wide deserted roads. Keeping to the grass verges as much as I could, I didn't see a soul as I passed neat single story houses. Almost all of them had front porches and large yards with plenty of parking space for vehicles. Everything was so unlike my own narrow and compact ex-coalmining community with its rows of terraced housing strung out along the valley floor and hillsides. I passed Allen's store and found my way to the library that was set on a hill a few minutes walk away. Outside the library the Stars and Stripes fluttered on a pole in the breeze. Opposite was a grand looking building and in the open area immediately in front stood a huge lump of coal weighing two and a half tons. McAlester had been a coalmining town at one time just like the Rhondda; this made me feel an affinity with the place.

I was able to send some emails back home to let everyone know I'd arrived. Then wandering around town for a while, I found some shops selling a variety of things including cowboy apparel, antiques, and household goods. I noted that McAlester had

some impressive municipal buildings with a pleasant layout. By early afternoon, I was tired and very hot. I walked the two miles or so back to Hospitality House, arriving there around 3pm. I decided to rest up for the remainder of the day. It seemed natural to write to Jerry even though I'd be seeing him the following morning. I settled down with my writing pad, making the most of the peace and quiet, as there was nobody else booked in apart from myself.

I retired early and after a restless night of anticipation I got up at six, showered and was ready to leave by eight. I had no idea what to expect apart from what Jerry had tried to describe for me. I arrived at Visiting Control, a tiny building situated behind the Administration Block. I could tell the officer on duty was a little surprised to hear my accent; I guessed they didn't get many visitors from overseas. She took my passport, my only identity, checked her computer and phoned to let A unit know that Jerry had a visitor. Then seeing that I didn't have a clue where to go, she led me out of the office and in through a door opposite. We turned right and walked up a short flight of concrete steps to face large grey diagonal bars. After a few minutes wait, they slid open and we entered a small waiting area. Once they'd shut tight, I handed my passport through a slot behind which an officer was working in a control room protected by glass. Another set of prison bars faced us. These slid open and I found myself in a passageway with a narrow red carpet stretching off into the distance to what looked like the inner part of the prison. A female officer made a pat search of my body and asking me to remove my shoes she checked them and looked at the soles of my feet. Once this search was completed, I was allowed into the windowless visiting room. I looked around, there were ten small square tables, some with seating for two and some for four. I noticed a desk set on a raised platform on my right as I entered. This was where the male and female officer sat keeping a close eye on visitors. To the side of this room were two openings each leading into another room that housed vending machines. Visitors were allowed to bring a maximum of \$15 dollars in quarters in a clear bag or purse to purchase snacks and drinks for themselves and the inmate they'd come to visit. The rest-room was outside the visiting room, if you were caught short, the visit would end, you could not return.

I signed in and chose a table next to a wall at the far end of the room. Jerry had warned me I'd have to wait until he arrived. There were three other women I looked on as they busied themselves buying snacks from the vending machines. On their return, they opened the packets of potato chips and poured their contents onto a paper napkin in view of the officers. I'd brought a roll of quarters with me that Mary had exchanged for a \$10 bill, but remained glued to my seat. I was fascinated by my surroundings as I sat listening to the banter between the women and the officers in charge. They seemed to know each other so I took it that they visited on a regular basis. I knew when Jerry arrived we'd be able to hug and kiss for a few seconds and that this brief time limit was strictly observed. A prisoner walked into the room from where the vending machines were housed, I looked closely but it wasn't Jerry. I felt certain I'd recognise him without any difficulty even though before leaving home, I'd received a letter to say he'd shaved off his moustache. As I waited, I tried to keep from smiling to myself too much because of the excitement building up inside me. I kept looking in the direction where the other prisoner had entered. Suddenly he appeared, the huge grin on his face matching my own as we recognised each other immediately. He was exactly as I'd imagined him to be although without his moustache he appeared a little younger than he had in his recent photograph. He was heavily built with broad shoulders and a strong neck. We hugged and kissed as naturally as we could fearful of overrunning our few seconds time limit. Neither of us was used to such intimate contact and the lack of privacy made us feel more self-conscious. Yet our first meeting was as natural as we could have hoped for and we got on like a house on fire just as we knew we would.

The tables were wide so we had to lean forward with our arms stretched to their full length to be able to hold hands. This was not frowned upon so long as we didn't try to touch higher than our lower forearms. Once he sat down, he was not allowed to move until the visit ended. The first thing he commented upon was how small my hands were as he held them in his own. He was keen to know if I approved of the way he looked and I was able to lay all his worries to rest. He said he knew exactly how I'd look from the photos I'd sent him. It felt magical for us to be so close. It's a moment neither of us will forget. It made the journey I'd undertaken worth every single second.

I gave him the messages I'd memorised from those of his friends who'd contacted me before I left, he was pleased to receive them. He struggled to explain his feelings to me, how he didn't want to hurt or disappoint the small number of women he was still intimate with. He liked them, loved them and even though he knew nothing could come of these relationships he still found it difficult to let them go, to stop the intimacy and allow just a friendship to develop. I did my best to understand his confusion. I was the one sitting there in front of him. I was the one who'd accepted his marriage proposal and acted upon it. He knew this. But he also accepted I would not tell him what to do. I knew I had to let him sort out his tangled love life for himself. It was all on paper after all, nothing had happened. Not a single woman was willing to do what I was doing. Jerry had to grow up in this respect and I would have to wait a while longer for time and events to allow him to recognise that a marriage cannot have several other women waiting for a chance of passion with the groom even if he was in prison!

I sat patiently as he tried to explain some of what he'd been enduring for so many years. I thought I already understood a lot, but time would show I knew only a fraction of the complexities that add up to why he was still in a maximum-security prison with hardly a positive report in his records despite so many years of imprisonment. Over the coming months once I'd returned home he would begin work in earnest to teach me and give me an even greater understanding of his world and how it works.

We were so engrossed in our conversation I didn't even buy us a drink or a snack and this is something he'd been looking forward to because he'd heard there were some nice treats available. This would have been a wonderful change from the food he was used to eating all the time. It felt as though we'd been together for minutes rather than three hours when the officer told us our visiting time was up. Just before we parted I promised him we'd have a little party the following day to celebrate his 50th birthday.

Later that evening, as the sun was sinking low on the horizon, I strolled past the east security gate once more. The road was deserted and I felt uneasy, but I wanted to record as much of the place as I could. I'd been very surprised to learn that the large solid concrete building I'd seen was A-unit where Jerry was housed. I held my video camera rather self consciously as I walked along filming my progress at the same time. I carried on in this fashion until I stopped to peer through the fencing and twists of razor wire. A-unit stood in silhouette against the evening sky about 200 ft away. I used my zoom to get a closer look, but it wasn't possible to see in through the windows or gage if anybody was looking out. I knew he wouldn't be able to see me because he'd told me he was on the side facing north. I panned around to the area behind the east gate taking in a squat security tower standing just to its rear. Then I slowly filmed back along the side of A-unit trying to hide the glare of the sun with my hand. Further along the road to the north, just inside the fencing was another security tower about forty feet high. I began filming it and zoomed in closer to peer directly into the observation room talking away at the same time in order to make some kind of amateur commentary for everyone. To my horror I saw the officer on duty was standing on the balcony speaking into a telephone while looking straight at me. He gave me such a fright and the thought struck me that I was breaking the law in some way. I switched off the camera and swung around fast to walk back up the road. As I did so I could see two prison officers walk-

ing towards me. Once they got within hearing distance I tried to make light of the situation and joked that I hoped they weren't going to arrest me. To my great relief, they'd just come to investigate what I was doing. They told me I'd been filming for too long and they wanted me to move away from the fencing. They were friendly and interested to know where I was from and we chatted as we walked up the road together. We parted company by the east gate. I carried on until I was alongside the main entrance. I stopped to film the older part of the prison again and as the camera whirled I described the fright I'd just had.

The next day we shared the best birthday party Jerry could remember in a very long time. We ate sandwiches and cake and drank root beer. For years I'd wondered what root beer tasted like. To my surprise, I discovered it was my favourite childhood drink of Dandelion and Burdock masquerading under another name.

Sunday was our last day together, we made the most of every second to get to know and understand each other better, but all too soon the officer approached the table to indicate our time was up. Holding each other tightly we kissed, spoke our words of love quickly in whispers and then he was gone. We'd had almost ten hours together. I'm lucky in that I don't cry easily so we parted with little emotion just as he'd hoped we would, he'd been so afraid I'd 'break weak' as he called it. While waiting to be let out of the visiting room, I could feel a dull ache taking hold of my insides. In reality, leaving him was not as easy as I'd made it look. I walked out into the sunshine knowing I'd be back as soon as I could and was more determined than ever to help him make some positive progress.

The next day before I caught the Greyhound back to Oklahoma City, I kept my appointment with Chaplain Franzese. His manner was warm and friendly as he greeted me in reception so that he could escort me to his office. His assistant smiled and said hello as we entered. The Chaplain seated himself at his desk while I sat opposite. He began by asking how long I'd known Jerry. He asked our ages and why I wanted to marry him. He wondered if I knew how much it would mean to a man in his position to have someone like me on the outside. I felt that was a rather obvious statement to make and tried to explain that it wasn't all one sided, that our decision to marry was a joint one based on love and a desire to build a life long partnership no different in essence to any other couple wishing to marry. It didn't matter if he was in prison or free the concept was the same. He then dropped his bombshell. We must have counselling before we'd be allowed to marry. This would necessitate my making six separate trips from the UK spaced at six monthly intervals over the next three years. I looked at him aghast. I tried to protest, reminding him that he'd told me I would only have to visit three times when we'd spoken over the phone. He warned me that if he so wished he could force me to make twelve trips. There was nothing I could do but insist that if those were the rules then I would return twice a year over the next three years. He emphasised that I must find someone willing to marry us because he would not perform the ceremony himself. He was unable to even begin to process our marriage application until he knew the name and full details of our minister. When our meeting ended, I walked out of his office feeling a deep sense of disappointment and wondering how on earth I'd find a minister when I didn't even live in America?

I left McAlester later that evening. As we drove out of town, a full moon lit the sky; I peered out of the bus window towards the floodlit prison in the distance until it disappeared from view. When I arrived in Oklahoma City, I got a taxi to the apartment and spent the night with Tania and Jeff. They took me for a quick tour of the city the next day. We passed the thought provoking memorial to the victims of the Oklahoma bombing and walked around Brick Town a quaint area with canal side shops. We ate a fine meal at an Italian restaurant. I was very touched when they gave me a T-shirt with a map of Oklahoma printed on it and handed me a small square box, inside was a per-

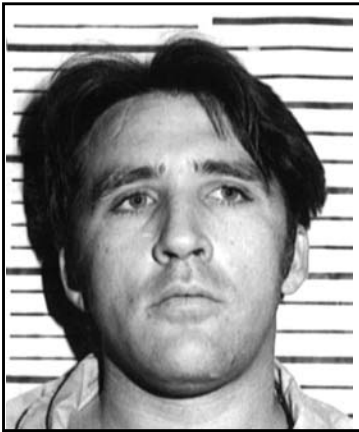
fectly formed "Oklahoma Rose" a unique rose shaped mineral, they then dropped me off at the airport so that I could begin my long journey home to Wales.



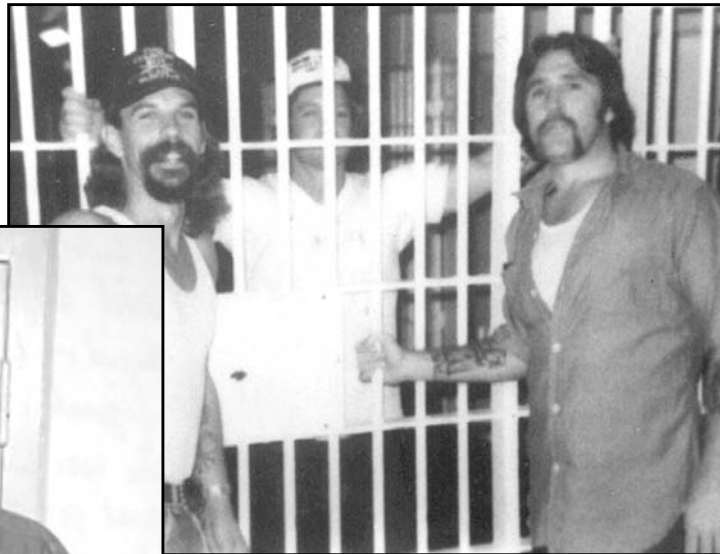
Jerry
(16 years old)



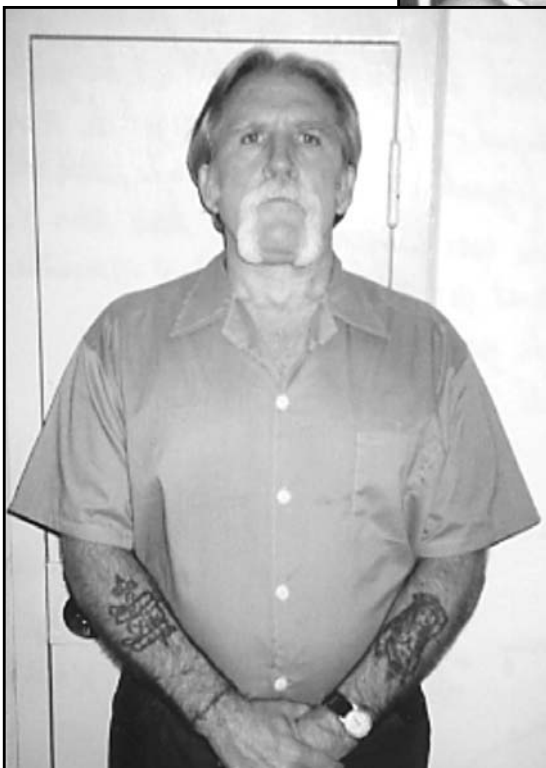
High on
drugs, 1975



1980
Imprisonment,
no end in sight



Jerry on right, just before the riot of '85



Jerry Hamilton at
Oklahoma State Penitentiary



OSP Main Entrance, author's photograph, October 2003



Public road running parallel with A unit and exercise yard, OSP 2003



View of author's home, Rhondda Valley, Wales



Gareth, outside the Economy Motel, McAlester



Returning to Dallas Fort Worth airport



**Marrried at last!
Pittsburg County Court - McAlester, Oklahoma**

Oklahoma's Finest



Tami Wagoner, Case Manager
(Employed at OSP for 16 years)

Tami's connection with this book led to her unfair dismissal in 2007.



Eddie Morgan,OSP Unit Manager
(Retired)

On the morning of December 17th 1985, Eddie and two other officers met with OSP Security Major Bobby Boone. They warned him that his decision to take valued jobs from general population prisoners and give them to men in protective custody was insane and would surely lead to a riot. These warnings were ignored. Later that evening the inmates rioted. During the mayhem that ensued, Eddie was stabbed repeatedly and permanently blinded in one eye.

Jeanne French, Counselor
(Employed at OSP for 19 years)

Captain Jerry Holt
OSP Employee for approximately 37 years
(Retired)

Chapter

8

Letter 55, November 10, 2003
Monday

"Now about our visit in February. You are already on my approved visitors list so be sure and point this out when you contact Pruitt for another special visit. And be damn sure to remind him that I get all old level 4 privileges and therefore I'm allowed 4 hours of visits weekly. Level 4 privileges prisoners usually get special visits approved for four hours each day the special visit is approved for. Now, knowing him, I expect he'll try to lay some off the wall bullshit on you like, 'oh, I'm sorry, I can only approve a special visit for an inmate once a year, every six months' or whatever and of course act like that's not his doing but the Department of Corrections policies. This is when you ask him to please give you that particular policy number as you've already inquired and researched all visiting rules and policies. That will shut him up and let him know you have done your research. But of course that doesn't mean he'll relent and do what he's supposed to do and follow policy.

I cannot submit another request to staff to him until you let me know the days, dates you want me to request for a special visit. He hardly acknowledges anything I submit to him. Just like how he assured you he'd let me know about our visit last October and never did. Sharon, he will not let me know anything, neither will Jimmy Wilson this is their way of being able to personally go over the bounds of their positions and jobs. Do not ever go by what they tell you. Do not ever believe them. If you do it will cost you one way or another. It would make their day if they could tell you, 'okay, your special visit is approved for such and such a date', and then you come all the way here only to discover there has been no special visit approved. This is for your own protection. I know how he truly is, you don't and I keep drilling all this into your head so hopefully you won't get burnt by him."

I'd made it my policy to listen to Jerry. It's something that I felt to be important deep within myself from the very beginning even though I found it difficult at times to take in all that he explained in his letters. That his complaints and warnings were not an exaggeration is something that has since been proved very real to me. I'd become used to his swearing, it didn't bother me at all despite the fact I've never been one to use strong language myself. I liked that he was able to express himself freely without being on his guard for fear of causing me offence. I decided from the beginning of writing this book that I would show the world the Jerry I know. What you see is what you get. Of course, I'm writing in a chronological order and this will mean you'll get to know him

and his world at the same rate that I did. Stay with the story, it is my expectation that your understanding of him will grow.

I arrived home exhausted 24 hours after leaving Oklahoma City. I'd brought back with me a big box of presents from Jerry for family and friends. He'd ordered them from other prisoners living on his unit. The box had been ready for me to pick up from the east gate the day of our first visit. When I got it back to my room, I unpacked everything and gazed at the contents in amazement. There were beautiful soft toys, a clown, and an elephant both expertly knitted along with pretty little crocheted flowers with petals; stems and leaves, just like the real thing. I thought about the prisoners who'd made them, men who were considered to be the bottom of the pile as far as society in general is concerned. Knitting and crochet seemed so out of place in that kind of environment. Until I met Jerry, I could never have conjured up such an image in my wildest dreams. I unwrapped wonderful jewellery boxes made from card; pieces of coloured felt and rolled newspaper. They'd been stained with coffee creating the illusion of wood or painted in bright colours and had hinged lids, inner compartments and little draws. I learnt that men in prison turn their hand to all kinds of creativity. The most amazing things he gave me were scaled down models of Harley Davidson motorbikes. Each one had taken 40 hours to make from scraps of polystyrene and rolled newspaper. They were painted and finished to the highest standard, a credit to the young man who made them.

Due to the time delay between our letters and the knowledge that his requests to staff were ignored most of the time, I felt it was prudent to arrange my next visit as soon as I could. I decided mid February would be a good time to return. My family backed my decision and so I wrote to let Jerry know. I'd have to wait for his confirmation that he'd submitted the request and then I could chase it up by phoning Pruitt to make sure he'd received it and had in turn submitted it to the deputy warden for his approval. I read through the procedure for visiting at OSP making notes of relevant information. Jerry was already preparing me for any trouble I might face, *"What Pruitt, Wilson and others here at McAlester are doing has a main objective and that objective is to defeat us, discourage us, to cause us headaches and problems. You of all people should understand this - it never stops. Remember Vanlandingham, the Interstate Compact Officer? These people will try everything they can to turn you away from me."*

How much discouragement would there be? Only time would tell. In the meantime, I had to find a minister willing to cooperate with the Chaplain, one who would be able to come to the prison at an allotted time, three years in the future in order to marry us. When Jerry heard the news about my having to fly out on six separate occasions for our counselling, he was livid. He was adamant that all other prisoners at OSP are able to marry in months rather than years and that the Chaplain was a "team player" out to do the bidding of the likes of Pruitt and Boone to prevent us from being able to marry. I decided to keep an open mind. I believed him but how could I stand up to the Chaplain? I'd done my best by reminding him he'd told me I'd only need to see him three times when we'd spoken on the phone but he'd refused to accept my argument. He'd told me prison policy had recently been changed. How could I question that kind of authority?

The only way I could think of to find a minister to marry us was to search for telephone numbers of places of worship in the McAlester area. I found a random selection on the Internet by looking in the Yellow Pages. I spent the next two weeks ploughing my way through the phone numbers but was unable to find anyone who was willing to perform the ceremony. It was a sobering experience and made me realise that maybe marrying wasn't going to be as straightforward as I'd thought. Time after time I met with a polite "No" when I explained the reason for my call. A few people I spoke with made it very clear they did not approve of such a union. I was beginning to despair of

ever finding a minister until finally I had a breakthrough. I'd forced myself to try yet another number, my call was answered and I introduced myself giving a brief explanation of my request. A very pleasant sounding lady made a note of everything and asked me to ring back the next day so that I could speak with the pastor.

Pastor King was a breath of fresh air. He didn't hesitate to say that he'd be pleased to marry us even though he'd never been asked to perform a marriage at OSP before. He gave me the information we needed to complete the marriage application and said he would contact the Chaplain. I asked for his home address and the next day I sent a "Thank You" card expressing my relief and pleasure to find a man with a true Christian heart. I said I'd keep in touch because at the rate the Chaplain was forcing our counselling sessions it would be three more years before we would require his services. I just hoped he'd understand my predicament and not forget his promise.

Because Katja and I could contact each other with ease not having to worry about any time differences, it was natural that we would begin to draw closer. Hardly a day passed when we weren't emailing and telephoning to pick over the contents of Jerry's letters as they arrived at our homes. She was as interested as I was to learn as much as she could about his Situation. This was the term we devised to describe the complexities of all that he'd been experiencing since 1985. She was on his official visitor list and hoped one day to be able to meet him in person. Any new information we found in his letters was dissected and discussed between us with enthusiasm. We soaked up his words like a sponge. He soon realised how keen we were to listen to him. He loved this and spent more time writing to us than everyone else put together with the exception of Bindy. She was just as dedicated, but living in Australia, the time difference and her work commitments meant she was steadily being left behind in her understanding. She took this with a good attitude and was only too pleased as long as it was positive for Jerry.

On the other hand, Beatriz wanted to concentrate on his health. His untreated Hepatitis C caused her massive concern especially as her son was training to be a doctor. But while this was a serious matter, his health remained stable and apart from his chronic complaints of arthritis and psoriasis, he seemed to get by, even though he was often left for periods without his prescribed medication. Katja and I felt we should not get side tracked with his medical issues. Jerry felt the same way and over time Beatriz got left behind.

It was due to a combination of my dedication and a realisation that I was very serious in my commitments towards our marriage and future that the last few women he was still intimate with fell by the way side. He cut them loose, to use his own turn of phrase. He did so out of a sense of respect and because he'd finally woken up to the fact that these relationships were based upon romantic fantasy. It was also very draining to pacify each woman's emotional needs as well as his own and this only added to the confusion he felt. He struggled to explain his feelings on numerous occasions, *"This fear of dying in here, and of course of being all alone a sad old man full of regrets of not getting out and being able to live a normal, peaceful existence always lay heavy in my soul, on my mind. So I guess like you said, just in case you changed on me - like everyone else has in my life- is the reason why I had a fear of totally placing my trust and faith in you. Even though I knew you loved me, wanted me and that you are the most sincere, determined, dedicated and strongest person I have ever known, I still know how time changes people and especially our being so far apart and separated from one another I feared that in time you might move on."*

I have seen guys who are stuck here in prison with wives who truly love them and yet time and the fact of their separation slowly drifts them apart. In trying to explain all this to you, it is my hope that you will understand the reason why it was so easy for me to vow my love to you and yet vow my love to others too. I had been acting like a

selfish self-centred no good mifer when it comes to all these other women and I'm sorry I did that."

I had done my utmost to place myself in his shoes, to try to imagine how I would feel if my every waking moment was spent in a tiny cell for year after year. I sympathised with his struggle to deal with his mix of intimate relationships. My refusal to tell him how to behave gave him the impression at first that I was an advocate of "free love", one of those women who would allow her partner to have extra-marital affairs! All I could do was be patient and little by little we got through it all until each romance fell by the wayside. I was so glad of this as I had other more important things to think about.

He was told he had a parole hearing set for the following year in October 2004 and although he was very reluctant to do so, between us we'd decided it was worth the risk of hiring a lawyer who would put together a parole packet and represent him at his parole hearing. A parole packet is a way to present a prisoner in a favourable light to the Parole Board members who have the power to recommend parole. One of the main reasons he felt he should take this risk of hiring a lawyer was because he'd applied to review his prison records and even though he'd submitted several requests to do so, nothing had come of it, every one of his requests had been ignored. This was completely out of order as the rules stated that all prisoners were entitled to review their prison records. Jerry had submitted his first request not long after his return to OSP and he'd been waiting at least six months without a response. If we hired a lawyer to put together a parole packet, part of the reason for hiring him would be to obtain all of his prison records. I'd learnt my lesson and there was no way I would ever jump the gun and hire someone on my own initiative as I'd done with Simon Wilson.

On the last day of our visit in October, Jerry pointed to another prisoner. His name was Ben and his lawyer had just been successful in gaining his release to general population after many years spent on death row. When I got back to Wales, he sent me a letter with the name of Ben's lawyer. With this information he was hoping I might be able to track him down. I found him without any difficulty and after making initial enquires, he was able to set up a three-way phone call allowing Kajta and myself the novel experience of asking questions together. It turned out he'd represented some high profile death row clients. We were impressed and so it was that we came to hire Paul Smith, another prominent figure of the legal world in Oklahoma.

Jerry had already sent Katja \$3,000 from his inmate fund. She used \$2,500 to retain Paul so that he could produce a parole packet and get access to all of his prison records. He explained that for a man of Mr. Smith's experience, used to handling high profile death row cases, parole packets would be "bread and butter" work. We retained Paul in November 2003, leaving plenty of time before the parole hearing the following October. In the mean time he told me his thoughts, *"That lawyer sounds ok to me especially since both you and Katja think and feel like he's the one we should latch onto. But Sharon, I have explained to you both that it's very-very important this lawyer understands we are retaining him to parole the 115 and the 25-year sentence for the supermarket robbery in 1985 to my last 20 year sentence. We are not interested in just paying him to get me a parole on my five year sentence."*

Reading these words with the luxury of hindsight they make complete sense now that my understanding has grown, but back then, neither of us fully grasped the implications of these specific instructions. He'd discharged a 25-year sentence in 2002, at the time we hired Paul he was serving a 5-year sentence for escape and larceny of an automobile. We had set in motion another disastrous collision course with yet another lawyer through sheer ignorance and blind belief; of course, we didn't know this at the time.

Jerry voiced his reasons for wanting to review his records. He'd been unable to do so all the time he'd spent in Texas, another sore point for him, *"I put in to review my*

records so that I could get the statement Pruitt wrote about me in that riot. He said we were trying to escape, we were trying to get a gun out of the control picket so that we could go up to protective custody and kill the inmates there which is all a bunch of bullshit and lies. His statement shows how he was out to fuck over me! He had his lieutenant, a guy named Fry to back up his statement to cover his ass. Well it just so happens this Lieutenant Fry is one of the guards who ended up getting fired because of the escape in 1985, which was seven months before the riot. Everyone knew this bullshit statement Pruitt wrote was all a bunch of lies. Remember he was the F Cell House manager when I escaped.

Also, back in 1988 I was released off Ad Seg and placed in general population. A board of three members, Warden Saffle, Lee Mann and I think Bobby Boone who was security major at the time signed these classification papers which in turn were submitted to the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, "Director's Review Committee" for their disposition, meaning for their approval or disapproval. Anyway, they stated that they felt like I was no longer a threat to the general operation of the prison, to other staff or inmates. This was in 1988 - 45 days later they just yanked me up and transferred me to Texas. They told me if I bucked up on them then they'd just kick my ass, hog tie me and transfer me anyway. Now Sharon, I know for a fact this paperwork is in my records unless Pruitt or whoever might pull them out. Why I know this for a fact is because at one time I had a copy of all of this, but while in Texas, I lost almost all my legal papers and my most important prison records were lost, the guards lost them. Since I'm back I have sent 3 requests to staff to review my records in hopes of regaining copies of these documents, but of course, my requests have gone unanswered." I wondered how this Lieutenant Fry could have been fired over the escape and yet still be working at the prison during the time of the riot seven months later? Jerry had often wondered the same.

I heard just before Christmas that he'd submitted a request to Pruitt for our special visit in February 2004.

"YOU were granted a special visit in October and now you are requesting another visit for February? Your request is denied! I refuse to grant it!" I'd had to steel myself to phone the prison because I always felt very uncomfortable and now Mike Pruitt was telling me in an emphatic way that he would not grant our visit for the following February. I asked him the reason for his denial? He said inmates are allowed no more than two special visits a year and each visit must be six months apart. I'd not read this rule anywhere in the policies and procedures and told him so. His voice took on an angry, menacing tone. "YOU dare to quote the OPS to me! You've just made a big mistake!" I tried to reason with him, but he'd made his decision and as far as he was concerned our telephone conversation was at an end. I was shaking as I put down the phone. My cheeks burned red, my heart pounded, I felt so intimidated and helpless to stand up to him. But there was no way I'd leave it at that so I phoned once again and asked to speak with the Warden. As usual I was put through to his personal assistant, Lee Mann. It would become obvious, as time passed that to speak with Warden Mike Mullin was impossible; his personnel guarded him like a queen bee.

I explained my dilemma, she backed Pruitt all the way agreeing that two special visits a year per inmate, six months apart was the rule. She made it clear that visiting is not a right, "Inmates do not have a right to have visits", she said, "Visiting is a privilege". I remembered reading this in the visiting procedures. I felt deflated but carried on speaking, reminding her that Jerry had submitted a second application for us to marry and that I needed to visit in order for us to begin our marriage counselling. I'd also need to book my airline ticket in advance and make my arrangements. She asked me if I was on his official visitor list and I told her I was. Her voice changed and she spoke as though I was making a fuss over nothing, "Well then", she said in a friendly manner,

"You can come and visit anytime you want. Just turn up at visiting control as all the other visitors do and ask to see him". I reminded her about the distance I'd be traveling and that I'd need to be able to see him for longer than just the regular visiting time. She told me not to worry about that, to arrange my flight and everything would be fine. I felt relieved as I put down the phone and had an overwhelming desire to make my booking with American Airlines right there and then. It was to prove a wise move on my part for reasons I'd never have imagined at the time.

As a result of my phone call, Jerry received a reply to his request for our special visit, the first reply he'd ever received; all the others had been ignored. Pruitt confirmed he would not submit another request for a special visit to be approved. Jerry's frustration came oozing out when his letter arrived just after Christmas, *"This is what I keep trying to stress, they all work in cahoots with each other. Special visits, getting a job, getting recommended for a transfer to medium security are ways Pruitt and others are able to play out their personal vendetta against me."*

Think about it Sharon, you come from another country just to see me, a 5,000 mile trip. I am supposedly retaining all level 4 privileges because of my good behaviour. Special visits are set up for people who must travel long distances. You are already on my approved visitors list, you qualify for a special visit, and you should be able to get approval because you will be coming such a long way. He is using his authority to fuck over us, and here at McAlester, he's allowed to do it! Anywhere else within the Oklahoma prison system we would not have a problem unless I was a hard ass, always getting locked up. It's only happening because of Pruitt and his staff. He cannot justify his response because of my behavior, disciplinary record or anything else. Yes, visits are a privilege and this is what they'll tell you, but if a privilege is given to one prisoner or in this case a prisoner's visitor then ALL prisoners are given that privilege. Now we're damn sure not causing him and his staff any big hassles or problems, we're not doing anything illegal, we're not manipulating the system or asking for anything out of the ordinary more than other prisoners, prisoners wives, families and friends get. Here we are following all procedures and policies and yet all we get is head-trips, lies and run-arounds. Why? I have had to put up with this retaliation and bullshit ever since that escape and riot.

I seriously feel like a shot at accomplishing anything in front of the Parole Board is a waste of time, energy and money and that there's no real chance of us getting anything done. We would be better off trying to get my ass away from these walls and out of the reach of Pruitt and others. Why set ourselves up for another big let down and disappointment? Hell, we can't even get a special visit so why do we think we stand a shot at getting something done as far as parole or getting me out to a medium security unit?

I was hoping after all this time away from these certain individuals that are behind the continuous bullshit I have had to deal with for the last 18 years that they'd live and let live and sort of let up on me once they saw I have changed and am no longer into the prison madness but Sharon the few that are still around are not going to let me live down my past, not EVER! That's the bottom line. We can lie down and accept whatever they do or try to expose what they're doing and why.

Hell, that's just like all the replies I got from the interstate compact officers when I was in Texas. They'd always write something like, 'Well you need to get a job and go to work'. I am back in Oklahoma and I cannot go to work because that would reflect a positive move and attitude on my part and a possible chance to move forward and get out to medium security. There've been openings in the print shop for several months but Pruitt and Wilson just refuse to let me and others go to work. It's not just me they fuck over, they fuck over all the prisoners they can and yes, they have certain prisoners they have personal grudges against and we are fucked over more than the average prisoner. Well, maybe one of these years I'll get away from McAlester then we'll be able to see each other."

I didn't know how to work this problem out, all I could do was trust what Lee Mann had told me and continue to plan my visit. Besides, part of me felt that this might be how prisoners are supposed to be treated? I didn't understand at the time that to be sentenced, to lose one's freedom, to be locked in a cell shut off from this outside world is the punishment given by law to each convicted person. The State of Oklahoma's Prison Administration is not meant to add to this punishment, a difficult concept to grasp for most people and one that eluded me for a while.

This new development placed a lot of stress on us because I'd be making a very expensive round trip of 10,000 miles and all we might be granted is a maximum of 4 hours together. As an approved visitor we could see one another for up to 4 hours each week if I lived within reasonable travelling distance as most visitors did. Why was I being subjected to this unfair treatment? I was disappointed for myself but more so for Jerry this was the one thing he had to look forward to. He didn't get visits from anyone else as a rule. We were not allowed the privilege to speak for 15 minutes a week as most were because the phone security system wasn't set up to receive calls from overseas. Mike Pruitt had no reason to deny our special visit because we'd not broken any rules. Jerry had not been disruptive or abusive in any way. He did his best to show he wanted to work and join in self-help programmes yet he was ignored. Day and night he was locked in a cell the size of an average family bathroom with another prisoner, his cellie. Everything took place in this confined space except for showering and one hour of yard exercise Monday to Friday. The cells at OSP are not places of comfort. They are ice-boxes in the winter, ovens in the summer when the air conditioning fails as it so often does. Fans prisoners had been able to purchase from the commissary since the 1980s to help circulate the air are no longer allowed adding to the misery and making it difficult to breathe in the summer months. Toilets overflow; windows leak in rain, drains sometimes block and flood the lower cells with polluted water, some cells are invaded by hundreds of biting ants, added to this, the narrow dark tinted window filters out natural daylight. Walls and possessions grow mold, bedding becomes damp and does not dry, condensation forms pools on the floor, and the air is stale and stagnant with the breath and body odour of two grown men living in proximity. Once again, it's something one has to experience before the full meaning can be appreciated.

Just after Christmas, Jerry wrote to tell me he still hadn't heard anything in answer to the second marriage application Pruitt should have sent to the Chaplain on his behalf. I let this ride for a while but by mid January I decided to speak with the Chaplain to try to find out what was happening. When I phoned, he told me he knew nothing about it. I insisted he should have received the application from the unit manager by now. As soon as I said this and to my great discomfort, he transferred me to Pruitt, I cringed when he answered the phone. I asked him if he'd forwarded the marriage request Jerry had submitted over 7 weeks ago. He told me no, he hadn't. His following words pulled the rug out from under my feet. He said he would not be submitting our marriage request because he'd removed my name from his list of approved visitors. He insisted I should not have been placed there in the first place because I had not had a background check conducted by Interpol. He then went on to explain that Interpol were no longer providing this service and as a result I would never be placed onto his visitor list again. I asked about Katja, he said she'd been removed for the same reason. He refused to discuss the matter any further. This was an obvious attempt to get rid of me. Unless I was on Jerry's official visitor list we could not visit or marry and I'd already been told they would not approve a special visit.

I contacted Katja to give her the news and then I phoned OSP again. I was told the Warden was not available but Lee Mann would take the call on his behalf. Once I'd explained everything, she told me she agreed with his unit manager adding that OSP was inundated with lovesick foreign women who constantly overrun the visiting room.

I knew this wasn't true by the way the officers had reacted to me when I'd been there in October, they'd regarded me as a novelty. I was aware there were a handful of people who came from other countries to see prisoners on death row at OSP, but there were no foreign people visiting inmates in general population except for myself. I mentioned this fact, arguing that this change of policy was an act of discrimination; she insisted it was a security measure recently enforced throughout the ODOC to counteract the threat of terrorists! She revealed how theirs was the first DOC in the United States to adopt this new policy because they'd recently found foreign visitors at OSP with forged documents. She said, "Our visiting rooms are full of foreign women. If we allow this to continue, there will be no room for anybody else." I told her I had already paid for my flight and had made my arrangements to visit in three weeks time. I reminded her how she'd urged me to book my ticket; that we needed to begin our marriage counselling. She confused me by saying I didn't need to be on Jerry's visitor list, all I had to do was ask his unit manager to arrange a special visit. "How can I do this when the unit manager will not forward a request to the Deputy Warden for approval for a special visit?" I asked. She said she'd speak with Mr. Pruitt and that I was to phone the following Tuesday.

We'd spoken on the Friday; it was a waiting game and very frustrating. I was on pins for Tuesday to arrive. I wasn't prepared for what happened when I phoned. Lee Mann's whole manner had changed. She'd been the one who'd told me to call back and yet she confused me by asking had I visited with Jerry before as though she'd forgotten who I was? I reminded her that I'd visited with him the previous October for three days. Without hesitation she delivered her next blow, "You were abusive, demanding and disrespectful to officers on duty in the visiting room. They had to remove you. An official report has been filed against you and I have recently met with Mr. Pruitt and the Warden. It has been decided you will never see Jerry again!" I could hardly believe what I was hearing. The spokesperson for Oklahoma State Penitentiary, the Warden's 'right hand man', was lying to me in a cold and calculating way. Our visits had been fine. There hadn't been any confrontation with the visiting officers whatsoever. How could a person in her position say these lies? Why would they want to treat me this way? All Jerry's warnings came pouring into my head. I could tell by the tone of her voice my fate was sealed and wondered what kind of conspiracy had taken place and how many were involved? I protested my innocence but I was fighting a lost cause so I ended the call. I had no option but to cancel my flight and my arrangements to visit. American Airlines refused to give me a refund but said they would keep my ticket valid until December.

Two weeks later I received Jerry's reaction, *"You need to raise hell and expose all of this to whoever in hopes that they'll help you get a special visit between now and December so that you at least won't lose that ticket. It's a fucked up situation when the ODOC allows these people here at McAlester to change and alter prison policies. I know what they're all about and if you let them run over you and not take a stand and fight back, you're fucked and we'll never win or accomplish shit. Now you can see for yourself the low life bullshit they're capable of doing since they have started to personally do it to you. You have been singled out for special treatment. How does it feel? Where at least you are out there in the free world and therefore have several avenues and options, I don't have that privilege. My only avenue is to make you and Katja aware of what's going on and let ya'll take it from there. Sure people will tell you prisoners have avenues - options. They can write letters, file grievances. Throughout the years Sharon, I have written to every damn legal aid place I could get addresses for, I have written politicians, judges and church organizations. I could find no help and most of these places ignore prisoners. But you and Katja are free world people and that makes a difference. At least they've overstepped themselves with their lies and now that personal-*

ly involves you. And if we can't prove why they're doing this and clearly show retaliation then I don't know what retaliation is. If we don't make a stand and fight back we might as well give up now. Don't ever back down to these people Sharon, that's what they want you to do. Don't do it!"

I had no intention of backing down and neither did Katja. It dawned on me that if they could treat me this way, go to these lengths to get rid of me, lie about me, what had they done to Jerry all these years?

Chapter

9

Letter 93, January 29, 2004
Thursday

"Now I explained to Katja that it's important to always try to stay one step ahead of these people and try to cover all bases. Like I brought up the fact how they might try to put us on mail restriction, make me incommunicado or even could possibly just up and transfer my ass again under the Interstate Compact. I can't see how they could do any of the above and justify their actions, but then again look how they've falsified records about you, lied about you. So we need to cover our bases and to do this it has to be documented on paper. In other words, we need to state it on paper to the head honchos in the ODOC, to politicians etc., that we want it to be noted that we fear these people here at McAlester, might try to transfer me, put us on mail restrictions and so forth just because we are trying to expose how we are being treated. Now that they have let us know that they are making false allegations about you this is their way of telling us "Keep it up and we'll get you BIG TIME."

I want you and Katja to crank it up. Like I said, these ole things here at McAlester are going to fuck over us regardless and unless we can put a stop to their bullshit then we'll never get anything accomplished and move forward. Ya'll not worry about me and what retaliation might come about over anything we do. I can handle and deal with all they might come at me with as long as I know you and Katja won't ever give up and are by me all the way and can handle it all, then I'm just fine.

That was good news about Interpol. I suspected all that bullshit that Lee Mann was telling you about foreigners was nothing but a lie. This is all behind us trying to get special visits and of course it's a means for Pruitt to personally retaliate on me. You and Katja are being used as a means to get at me. This is corruption being perpetrated on you, and we can prove this. You can prove that you caused no disruptive incident in the visiting room. If superior prison officials are so blatant about their actions and lies, then common sense will tell you I have no hope as long as I'm stuck here at McAlester. These people are doing anything they can to see to it that I stay here. They are out to bury me here and just let me grow old and die. And to do this, they will have to get rid of you and Katja. If ya'll were out of the picture then I'd just be here, buried alive like they had me in Texas. This is why they continue trying to paint me as a con man. This is their way of getting those people connected to me out of the way.

Well, I was glad to read where you mentioned to me how Paul Smith is going to get all those prison records photocopied for us when he gets them. At least this way we'll

know if they have put bogus allegations, statements in my jacket. There's no telling what kind of shit's been put in my records. I have a burning desire to expose their corruption because I know that is the only thing that will ever stop them misusing their power."

Of course we would do as he asked and "crank it up". Those three little words had made me more determined than ever to help him and when I read them out to Katja, she felt the same way. But what could we do to help? We needed more data. We needed to understand his Situation much better than we already did because we could see there were huge gaps in our knowledge.

To my surprise after searching the Internet, I found an email address I could use to contact Interpol. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would have the need in my lifetime to approach such an organisation. I was so pleased when a few days later I received a reply to my enquiry stating that Interpol would honor a request for a background check if it is received from a bona fide corrections or law enforcement agency." I felt like I'd struck gold!

In our ignorance and frustration with the way we were being treated, Katja and I contacted Paul Smith, Jerry's lawyer, and asked for his opinion and advice. He was sympathetic, stating he'd get in touch with the Oklahoma branch of the American Civil Liberties Union. He kept his promise but unfortunately they were unable to help. In the middle of all of this, Jerry was beginning to get very uncomfortable because Paul still hadn't visited with him. This meant my having to contact Paul to find out what was happening. When he'd told us to 'crank it up', Katja and I tried to pick Paul's brains over the Ex Post Facto Clause asking this question and that question. We wanted to be sure we were correct in believing it applied to Jerry with regards to his Level and Earned Credits and there was nobody else we could ask. We needed to be able to write effective letters to the ODOC and politicians. We'd done all we could to find as much information ourselves but we were so ignorant. Unfortunately, this ignorance also meant we didn't fully appreciate our contacting Paul as often as we were, was outside to bounds of reasonable behaviour.

With hindsight, how could we have expected him to give his time and attention to us? His initial curiosity in two British women working together to help an American prisoner, his friendliness and relaxed approach had made him appear to our unpractised eyes to be more interested than he was. He did try to advise us a little, but we were so close to Jerry, so consumed by our wanting to help him we were guilty of losing sight of the fact that really we were alone in this desire and it was unrealistic to expect a busy professional to focus upon us. It is no surprise to me today, with better understanding why many of our emails were ignored and that Paul would become fed up and annoyed with me in particular. He hadn't been paid to counsel us. He'd been paid to put together a parole packet to present to the Parole Board and to obtain Jerry's records.

At last Paul visited OSP in early February, Jerry wrote to let me know what he thought *"I liked him and think he'll do everything he can to help us. He was under the impression that you and Katja wanted him to get me paroled to my next sentence, 'the 115' and once I explained to him that to do that would not make any sense at all and wouldn't help me, he agreed and said he couldn't understand ya'lls logic in wanting him to help me get paroled to my next sentence either. I made it very clear to him that if I cannot get paroled to my last twenty year sentence then there's no use in ever trying to get a parole because if I was just paroled to my next 115 sentence I still have a 25 year sentence, a 2 year and a 20 year sentence. To sum it all up, he said it will be hard but he'll do everything he possibly can to try and get me paroled to my last sentence. He also discussed with me the visiting issue and suggested I proceed to file another grievance and exhaust all my administrative remedies. Well at least he seemed to be a lawyer who really cares and will work his ass off trying every possible avenue there is to help us. I feel real good about him Sharon. Now let's pray he can help us."*

The guard brought those release forms back to me this morning and told me the law library supervisor, who is the notary would notarize them because he said I did not fill them out properly. I filled them out the way the law library guard told me to. All this is nothing but a slow play tactic. Like I said, anytime a prisoner attempts to get anything done they're given a lot of bullshit and run around. When the guard took the release forms to the law library yesterday I had to send Paul's letter along with them to prove that it was my lawyer requesting my prison records and not just me wanting this notary service. No doubt they photocopied the letter and now Pruitt and Wilson will have read it too, that's how they do things here.

I also found out from that law library guard that these people are still showing the new guard recruits a couple of videos of me when I fought with the guards. See what these prison officials do is tape all major incidents, at least this is the procedure whenever there's conflicts between prisoners and security, 'guards'. They use whatever videotapes they choose to train new guards, show them what to do in confrontations with prisoners, how a prisoner fights and the best way for them to fight back. Now remember, these videotapes were taken in 1987 and there's been countless other incidents with other prisoners since then and now. But these people here at McAlester are still using 2 tapes of me fighting with the law. Now this automatically turns new recruits against me. We're talking about fights that happened 17 years ago. I mentioned this to Paul and he said he'd try to get a copy of these tapes. So be sure and remind him because I'm curious as to what they show and of course it's more proof to show the bigger picture of how I have been singled out and all that. See I knew they were using these tapes back in 87 to train guards, but hell, I didn't think they'd still be using them all these years later!"

I felt so out of my depth at times. What had we said to Paul? We'd wanted desperately to find the right attorney to do the best job for Jerry. His future was very bleak unless we could find a way that would allow him an opportunity to reach for a better life. When I'd made the initial contact, I'd tried to explain that we were hoping he'd help him parole to his last sentence; he said he would do his best. In a following conversation he told me he believed that 8 years was a more realistic time scale, 8 years to secure a parole to the streets. Maybe I buried my head in the sand? More than likely, I just trusted that whatever would be the outcome; we'd deal with it in October. At least Paul had the notarised forms to allow him four attempts to gain copies of Jerry's prison records.

The last paragraph of his letter caused me some discomfort. I was concerned to hear that video footage showing him fighting with prison officers was still being used as a means to train new recruits. This didn't sound good at all. He had so much going against him of his own making or so it seemed. The hole he'd dug all those years ago appeared to be getting bigger and bigger, except that time would show me there was much more to this complicated chain of events than meets the eye.

The visiting issue was on hold while Katja and I did our research in order to write a letter each to the Department of Corrections in an attempt to pre-empt any move by Pruitt or anyone else to make Jerry's life worse than it already was. We'd failed to pursue the fact they were preventing him from rising higher than Level 2. This had happened because we got side tracked with the confusion of emotions that had arisen in untangling him from his romantic relationships and dealing with his fear of being left alone and abandoned by everyone. All this had taken months with many letters going back and forth between us. Unless a person experiences the emotional weight of falling in love and deciding to marry a long term prisoner with as complicated a love life as Jerry's, it's impossible to convey in a few simple words the confusion and stress we had to deal with. We'd both been distracted with the result we'd allowed the DOC to ignore the first letters we'd sent them concerning his Level and Earned Credits.

Our letters, addressed to the Director were mailed to the head offices of the Department of Corrections in Oklahoma City. We did the best we could with the facts we had accumulated concentrating on our visiting ban, the lies that had been told about me, the issues surrounding Jerry's Level, his ignored requests to be able to work and our fear for his safety and future welfare. I made a formal complaint against Lee Mann and Pruitt emphasising that if I could be treated so badly and I'd not committed a crime, what kind of treatment could Jerry expect as a prisoner under their complete control? I received a reply towards the end of March 2004, it stated, "Please be advised that appropriate Staff are aware of your concerns, investigated your issues, and found them to be without merit."

It felt important we now had evidence the DOC had received my letter even though the issues I'd raised had been dismissed. This reply from the Administrative Specialist on behalf of Director Ron Ward was an admission that the treatment we were being subjected to was condoned at the very highest level. It was difficult not to feel defeated, but this hopelessness didn't last long. Jerry had been facing negative reaction for years yet he was still willing to carry on against overwhelming odds, I would let him be my example. One thing was certain; we would have to find a way to reverse the visiting ban or we would never be able to see each other again, or have any hope of marrying.

Right at the end of March, Katja and I wrote to the Warden at OSP in an attempt to overturn his decision not to allow us to visit. I concentrated on presenting as much factual evidence as I could in order to prove that there was no reason why we should not be allowed to see each other. I quoted direct from their own rules for visiting, I had not received a written notice informing me of their proposed ban, neither was I given an opportunity to respond, this was in violation of prison procedure. Lee Mann had told me in December that I should book my flight to visit Jerry and a month later she told me I'd been banned from seeing him forever. I enclosed a copy of my cancelled plane ticket as proof I had already made my arrangements to travel. I sent the email from Interpol to add weight to my argument for unfair removal and a copy of my own enhanced police disclosure as confirmation that I didn't have a criminal record. Katja had also been told by Interpol that they were able to conduct a background check if asked and she constructed the best letter she could around this evidence. All we could do was hope we'd receive a positive response.

While I waited for a reply, Jerry and I continued to write as usual and life carried on with no real change except that Katja and I began to receive a slow trickle of the paperwork he'd amassed during his imprisonment including copies of letters he'd written to Texas and Oklahoma Department of Corrections personnel and various outside individuals and organisations. This slow trickle was to turn into a flood of envelope after envelope stuffed full of what would begin for us to open the door wider into his world. I had no idea what a monumental task it would be for me to make sense of it all. It would entail spending long hours in a laborious process of reading and understanding, asking Jerry for explanations and guidance, waiting for his replies, deciphering documents and piecing everything together to make up the bigger picture.

With every batch of papers that arrived the more intrigued I became and amazed at the confusion he'd been drowning in since the time of the riot. When I thought I understood everything, along would come some more information that would lead to further awareness and more questions. It seemed never ending. The abuse he'd been subjected to was not so much physical torture in the way you or I would think of torture, it was much more subtle than that and yet it was still torture, mental torture in the extreme. He had been sent out of state to Texas against his will to be forgotten about as though he no longer existed. Out of sight and out of mind from the rest of the world he'd been prevented from making any positive progress. He'd been denied access to the courts and in a final desperate act to be returned to Oklahoma so that he could at last begin to make

the progress he so craved, he'd ended up in Ad Seg for over 12 years. There was so much to learn it was mind blowing.

He was excited as he witnessed my awakening to the fact that prison really is an alien world to this free world we take so much for granted. Vast numbers of prisoners are cut off from society and the opportunity for abuse in every way imaginable exists. He wrote *"The thing that gets to me is the assumption from your average citizen that things like this do not happen in these prison warehouses and that the systems people are just human and doing the best they can to handle and deal with a rough job. That prisoners are not mistreated or that whatever happens to us has been brought upon ourselves and we deserve it. If there were really any misuse of power, if there was corruption then it would come to light and be exposed. This is what really frustrates me because if there's a riot or disturbance the first thing out of these prison officials mouths to the media is that the prisoners did not have to take it to this extreme and take matters into their own hands. They mislead the public into believing that at anytime a prisoner can come to them if there's a problem. Which is a joke as we have a problem just trying to be allowed to visit and are unable to speak to anyone and solve this bullshit or even appeal to a higher up to get him to let us have a special visit. Prison Wardens are not supposed to let this happen!"*

His remarks concerning the kind of statements prison officials release to the media during a disturbance or riot situation passed me by for the most part. But as my journey into his world continued I would come to understand their true meaning. For the time being, it was enough to have experienced my removal from his visitor list and the false accusations made against me to know that some of those who should be snowy white and setting a shining example to the prisoners under their supervision were falling short of public perception.

In February he'd filed a request to staff to Pruitt asking that Katja and I be placed back onto his official visitor list. This time Jerry received a reply. According to Pruitt, we'd not been placed on the list legitimately in the first place and that was the end of the story so far as he was concerned. We couldn't argue whether we'd been placed there legitimately or not. We'd sent in our applications months before and we had documented evidence to show we were on Jerry's official visitor list.

Jerry continued with the grievance process and submitted a report to the Warden, two days later he received an answer, "Please be advised, after reviewing Unit Manager Pruitt's response to your request to staff, I find he has appropriately addressed your concern...The visitors in question are not American Citizens; therefore background clearances cannot be completed...visitors from outside the U.S. will not be added to your list and, at this time, I am not approving special visits for persons on whom a background check cannot be completed."

Two weeks after Katja and I mailed our letters and to our surprise we each received a reply. A feeling of relief ran through me as I read Warden Mullins words, "You are not being discriminated against...As you say in your letter, we can complete a criminal background check by contacting Interpol...I have enclosed a "Visitor's Request Form" and request that you complete the form and mail it back to the facility. My staff will then process your application and notify you of the results...it is a very simple process and will be followed by everyone."

The emails from Interpol had done the trick. Without them I doubted very much we'd have seen this complete u-turn. Katja had received a similar reply. But what was disturbing was the fact that the Warden of OSP, the man responsible for the welfare of 1,200 prisoners was either lying or very confused judging by the contradiction in his reply to Jerry and his reply to us just two months later.

We were elated and sent in our applications as instructed. Between us we agreed it was now Katja's turn to meet Jerry in person. We wrote to tell him this but he was

insistent it should be me who would visit next as I had the cancelled ticket that had to be used. It was decided that as soon as OSP had processed our applications he would submit a request for me to have a special visit in June. Katja was quite happy about this arrangement. We'd been given the impression our background checks would be a simple routine enquiry that would take a few weeks to process. We were in for another rude awakening.

By April 2004, we'd been writing for eighteen months. An observer might find it difficult to believe that up to this point, I had never discussed his convictions in any great detail with him. All I knew was that to my British eyes the length of time he was serving seemed unbelievable for a man who had never shot or stabbed anyone, raped or caused actual physical harm in any of his crimes. It was natural that as I received the envelopes full of his letters and paperwork, I would become more curious about his sentences. I'd already learnt that most were running consecutive and that he'd have to serve each one in turn. But how is it possible to complete a sentence of 115 years? It wasn't termed as a life sentence yet it was impossible for him to live long enough to serve it.

A chance find by Bindy on the Internet concerning the trial where he'd received 115 years led to long discussions between Jerry and myself. Bindy discovered that in April 2003, Terrie Simmons had paid the Garfield County court clerk \$20 for information concerning their trial. Terrie had been his accomplice during the robbery. She was a fellow drug addict and they'd only known each other for a few weeks. As our letters travelled back and forth between us, he did his best to try to convey what had happened.

He'd discharged his first sentence for selling the 6 tablets of acid after serving just over three years in prison. By autumn 1975, encumbered by his worsening drug addiction, he'd picked up three more offences. These were for second-degree burglary, carrying a firearm after a former conviction and withholding stolen property. He was allowed a plea bargain and received five years for each offence to run concurrent. In December, just as he was beginning this sentence, he simply walked off while working outside as a trustee prisoner and did not return. He was discovered hiding in a friend's house 45 days later after an anonymous tip off to the police. He didn't resist arrest. His prison records covering his incarceration through the 1970s shows he received only a few minor disciplinary infractions.

In November 1979 he was released on parole, he'd no intention of altering his criminal behaviour. His main preoccupation was to live the fast life, enjoying all the parties, drugs, alcohol and women that came his way. At the time he saw nothing wrong with committing robberies to support these activities. Throughout his childhood and teens, his father had been a bit of a wheeler-dealer barely staying on the right side of the law. One way he'd make money was to fake an injury at work and claim from the firms' insurance. The family would then up sticks and move to another county or state where his father would find a new job. During this process, they often lived in one vehicle eventually ending up in ramshackle dwellings without electricity or running water until something better could be found. If there was an insurance scam, you could bet his father knew about it and had probably tried it. Jerry explained to me how all those years ago in his more lucid moments, he would comfort himself by the unrealistic thought that he wasn't causing physical harm in any of his crimes and that those he robbed would be able to claim from their insurance company for their loss.

How he came to be given 115 years has taken a long time for me to fully understand because it happened through a series of complicated events, involving a second robbery that took place three days after the first, an escape from Garfield County jail and Jerry's decision to turn down a plea bargain for 25 years because Jerry refused to give evidence against Terrie.

In the first robbery, he and another man called Raymond Smith held up a drug store. Nobody was physically harmed during this robbery and they made off with a car-

rier bag full of stolen narcotics. The police stopped them 15 minutes later because their car fitted the description of the one seen leaving the scene of the crime. They didn't offer any resistance during their arrest. He was allowed to plead guilty in return for a sentence of 25 years. He had just begun serving this sentence when he was charged with the second robbery that had taken place in the same town, Enid in Garfield County. This was the robbery that he'd committed with Terrie. Terrie had stayed with the female assistant while the owner had gone at gunpoint with Jerry into the back of the shop to get the drugs and money. The robbery was over in a matter of minutes. On this occasion they drove away from the scene of the crime avoiding detection.

In these early years, he would grab any opportunity he could to escape and in June 1980, at the start of serving his sentence of 25 years he was caught escaping from the Stringtown Correctional Center in Atoka County. Criminal proceedings followed but prosecutors ran out of time. There were too many escapee prisoners from the two correctional facilities of this one county to prosecute; the DOC in Atoka County couldn't keep up with all the court attendances. As a result he was never convicted and sentenced. Escapes from penal institutions, were and still are a common occurrence in Oklahoma as I have since come to discover from my own research, even the Warden's wife of the Stringtown Correctional Center ran off with a prisoner in the 1990s!

The next event in his life should really be the subject of an episode from *The Dukes of Hazzard*, not a real life incident. Having been charged with the second armed robbery he was sent back to Garfield County Jail to await prosecution. Along with three other prisoners, he got very drunk on illicit homemade beer brought to them by trusty Larry Nichols. Nichols had free run of the jail in his duty as baker and cook. It was Nichols who got hold of the cell keys and the keys to the Sheriff's car freeing Jerry and the others in the process. The escape happened on the weekend when only one jailer was on duty. Nichols and another trustee had easily overpowered him and taken his keys. All four got away in broad daylight, using the Sheriff's fully marked car as their getaway vehicle. It wasn't pre-planned it was a spur of the moment drunken "adventure". The police gave chase and they were stopped after a few miles. Two of the escapees, Jerry Rushing and Gary Hagert were caught immediately. Jerry ran from the car and was caught three hours later hiding in a field. Larry Nichols somehow eluding arrest, took off once again in the Sheriff's car. Driving around town Nichols even stopping to buy gas and beer before he was captured. The escape hit the newspapers and was a major embarrassment to the Sheriff's department and Enid politicians. It also reflected badly on the Oklahoma Department of Corrections because Nichols was a state trusty placed upon their recommendation in the Garfield County Jail in a position of trust and responsibility, the only trusty at the jail serving penitentiary time. The fact that they had been blind drunk made it all the more embarrassing to the authorities. In a confusing turn of events, Nichols ended up as a witness against Jerry, another mystery he's yet to unravel?

Facing prosecution for the second time, he was offered a plea bargain for 25 years on condition he'd give evidence against Terrie. He refused. Although they'd only just met at the time of the robbery and he'd not seen her since his arrest, he knew she had two small children and by the time of the trial in January '81, one year after the actual robbery she was eight months pregnant. He didn't know who the father was but even so he would not cooperate. For the first time in his life he faced trial by jury. Bindy's Internet find revealed that in the event, Terrie had been persuaded to turn states witness against Jerry weeks before the trial began. He didn't know this at the time. He believed she'd been coerced into doing so on the day of the trial. With hindsight, the trap had already been set well in advance in order that they may make an example of him. He was surprised to hear this news after so many years, but told me he didn't feel bitter about it; it simply confirmed what he'd always believed to be true, they'd set out to pre-

vent him making a plea bargain so they could give him the record sentence that would send out a warning to others.

Simon Wilson admitted that Jerry had had the worst judge and prosecutor possible. I have no knowledge of the law, but I found the description of his trial and subsequent appeal to be as bizarre as his escape from the County Jail, *"Let me try to explain about that appeal on the 115 year sentence. Matter of fact, it's the only sentence I have ever appealed. I received that sentence in 1981. The final sentencing is always 10 or 20 days after the guilty verdict and sentence imposed by the jurors. See, at final sentencing the judge can go along with the juror's sentence or if he thinks it's too harsh he has the sole power to lower it. This is also the time when the judge will inquire into whether you seek an appeal on said jury trial and sentence."*

Now I had no paid lawyer so the state appointed a public defender to represent me. His name was James Maxwell and he ended up being one of the sorriest lawyers I have ever had to deal with. After the evidentiary hearing in November 1980 I wrote to Judge Green to ask that Maxwell be replaced because I wasn't happy with the way he was handling things. At the time, he was also my lawyer for the escape from the Garfield County jail. Maxwell was dismissed and a guy called McKeever took his place. In January '81, on the day of my trial, Maxwell turns up to represent me, I told him he'd been dismissed as my lawyer; he said he had not? Now the judge who tried my case was considered the hardest, worst judge in Garfield County. After I was found guilty and sentenced at trial, between then and the 10 days before I was supposed to go back in front of him for his sentencing, he died of a heart attack. So another judge had to stand in and officially announce sentencing on me. I expressed how I was not satisfied with how my appointed lawyer handled my trial, how he never even interviewed witnesses or anything. Since this was just a stand-in judge who did not try my case and knew nothing of how the trial went, he told me the usual process of filing an appeal is that they appoint the same lawyer. I knew that made sense because the lawyer who tries the case would be familiar with it. I just told him, 'OK, as long as James Maxwell would file me a good appeal.' Back then, I knew very little about the law, even less than I do now. Remember, this is in 1981 and I gave oral notice to the judge that I requested an appeal."

His letter went on to explain how in general the time line for an appeal is 6 to 12 months. He was transported back to OSP and waited to hear from Maxwell. A year or so passed and he'd not heard anything so he wrote to the judge in Garfield County complaining how the letters he was sending his lawyer were being ignored. In the end, he had to write to the Court of Appeals. They wrote back to inform him that no appeal had ever been filed on his case. After writing letters and getting nowhere, he was forced to appeal to the Oklahoma State Bar Association lodging a complaint against his defence lawyer. Once he'd done this, out of the blue, Maxwell turned up at OSP. During the visit he fed Jerry a sad story of a series of family troubles and misfortunes begging him to write to the Bar Association and withdraw his complaint. He sweetened this deal with a bribe of \$50, *"He left the visiting room and went over to the town bank and sent me a \$50 money order which prison records can all verify. Before leaving, he promised me he'd get right on the appeal and would write to me the following week or so. But I didn't hear a thing from him. This was in 1984 as far as I can recall. Now remember, to file an appeal usually takes 6 months to a year. I was sentenced in 1981 and now here it was 1984. Finally the judge appointed the Oklahoma Indigent Defense out of Norman to file an appeal on my case. As a rule, they only ever handle Death Row cases so it was out of the ordinary, unprecedented for a judge in any jurisdiction to appoint a legal defense organization or lawyer to represent a defendant with my case history."*

The kicker here is that once you are convicted you have a time limit to file a direct appeal. Because of the incompetence of the court appointed lawyer letting the time limit expire, I was denied a direct appeal. So to get an appeal we had to request one "out of

time". My appeal finally got filed in the Oklahoma Court of Appeals in 1989 or 1990. Then one day, I just got my trial transcripts and ruling from the courts informing me that it had been denied."

He was 29 years old in January 1981 when he was sentenced to 115 years in prison. This length of sentence for the crime he'd committed was out of the ordinary. In most cases back then the courts were handing out between 10 - 35 years. In 1980, he'd already begun serving the 25-year sentence. In all he had a total of three consecutive sentences amounting to 145 years. To say he'd made a mess of his life is an understatement, but at least he was familiar with his surroundings at OSP and there was no problem in getting hold of the drugs and alcohol he needed to feed his addiction.

In 1981 he was found guilty of participating in the mess hall disturbance and given 90 days restriction with 30 days loss of writing privileges. Apart from this incident, his behaviour during these first five years could not be termed as overtly disruptive; he worked at various jobs and according to reports, he got on well with other prisoners and staff.

With the amount of time facing him and the handicap of several consecutive sentences, he felt he'd be in prison for life. The incompetence of his lawyer in his failure to file an appeal on his behalf was an added burden to bear plus the fact that he still hadn't begun to alter his mentality, reform his character, or end his drug addiction. As a result the notion of escape was never far away, *"I didn't give a fuck because I felt like I was already buried alive with more time than I could ever do. So in my wilder days it was all about scheming to escape, trying to stay high on drink and drugs and involving myself in the prison hustling and madness. I'd had my chances, I'd got out of prison legally twice before and can honestly say I had no intentions of pulling up, changing my ways and life style. All I lived for and cared about was drugs and the fast life. But in a way it's good that I experienced that because now when I say all that madness is something that will never be an issue, it's the truth. Now my priorities in life are viewed differently."*

The temptation to escape proved too great and when the opportunity arrived he grabbed it with both hands. This was the worst mistake he could have made as far as his future was concerned. Jumping the Walls of Oklahoma State Penitentiary would drive the final coffin nail into any hope he may one day have of proving his rehabilitation and building himself a better future. Why should he have a better future? All I ask is that you don't decide this now, wait until you've listened to the whole story and then make your decision.

Chapter 10

Letter 157, May 12, 2004
Wednesday

"You asked did I not have a case manager or anyone there in the Texas prison system who I could talk to and get answers from? Yes, I did, but they could not answer any of my questions or provide me with any of Oklahoma's rules, policies governing earned credits, parole questions or anything like that. They were the Texas Department of Corrections classification case managers. That's the situation I was under when it came to anything pertaining to my earned credits or researching the law. Texas DOC has law libraries as every state DOC does. The problem is every State's laws are different. Just like every State's DOC policies, rules, security status, earned credits and levels are different from each other. So I would go to or check out stuff from the Texas Law Library, but none of that could do me any good. But in answer to your question, yes, I could ask a Texas case manager questions and I did many-many times, but they couldn't assist me on any of my issues. The same with the Texas prisoner legal lawyers who helped Texas prisoners, they couldn't give me any assistance because they were Texas lawyers and were not familiar with Oklahoma Law."

I found the paperwork and letters he was sending us fascinating and very slowly my understanding continued to grow. He was released from Ad Seg to general population at the beginning of 1988, two years and four months after the riot. He'd had paperwork to prove he was no longer seen as a threat to the security of the facility, its staff or other inmates. At the end of April, without any warning, he was transferred to Texas. He'd been working on his appeal and researching the law in the hope he could get back into the courts with some of his other convictions. He had a court deadline. This meant he was allowed access to the law library much more than he would have been allowed under normal circumstances. Faced with the reality of being a part of the Texas prison system, it didn't take him long to realise how difficult it would be to receive the legal materials and help he needed.

I studied the letters that had passed between Jerry and the interstate compact officers both Oklahoma and Texas and could sense his frustration as he tried to explain time and time again how it was impossible for him to conduct his legal research. The replies he received were confusing and contradictory. It was apparent from successful lawsuits he'd sent us of other prisoners in the United States that his case was similar to theirs and there was no doubt, even to my untrained eyes that his transfer had denied him meaningful access to the courts and that this was against state and federal law. I wondered

how they could justify sending him to Texas when their own rules emphasised that it was their policy to allow free access to the Courts, and no warden or superintendent should do anything that would inhibit such access?

When he arrived in Texas, he'd been processed into their system. It is normal practice when a prisoner is transferred from one state's department of corrections to another under an interstate compact exchange for them to be given a new prison number and have to abide by a new set of rules. But despite his transfer, he was still an Oklahoma prisoner.

There is so much that is difficult to understand about his time in Texas. He was even given a non-existent Texas sentence to serve, *"I can prove that for the first two and a half years Texas computer records reflected that I had an aggravated 45-years sentence. Texas set a discharge date on this sentence, they set a parole date and they even gave me work time-earned credits on this sentence. I was being held in Texas under a sentence of record that in reality didn't exist. Texas took my first sentence of 25 years and my last sentence of 20 years, put them together and came up with 45 years. Now Oklahoma has never acknowledged me as serving this 45 year sentence."*

This wasn't a figment of his imagination. The paperwork we'd received served to highlight this confusion. Jerry had written to his parole counsellor seeking clarification. She'd replied that he was in a Texas prison and as such it was up to the Courts to determine how long he was to stay. What Court did she mean? He was to face confusing and conflicting information time and time again during his confinement there. That he was recognised as a Texas prisoner by the Texas Parole Board cannot be disputed. We had the paperwork to prove it.

The law governing his interstate transfer clearly stated he was to remain subject to the jurisdiction of the sending state and was merely being housed by Texas for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. How could Texas give him earned credits and direct his parole eligibility on a non-existent sentence when to do so was illegal?

For the first two and a half years, he did his best to adapt and fit in to his new surroundings. On his arrival he'd been placed in general population and by May 1990, he was in Hughes Unit as a minimum custody inmate. He was working as an orderly and had kept a clean disciplinary record apart from one minor reprimand. His willingness to cooperate enabled him to achieve this favourable classification.

As I studied his letters and documents, it was obvious the reason for his transfer was because of his actions during the riot. Katja and I were very interested when Bindy found a newspaper report, it described how 60 inmates had been identified as playing a direct role in the riot that caused \$376,000 damage to A and C-units at OSP. Three prison officers had been stabbed and seriously injured. The report went on to mention another unconfirmed incident that had taken place at the same time in the F Cellblock. Inmates George Stidham and Jerry Hamilton were believed to have forced Correctional Officer J Williams at knifepoint into an open cell and held him hostage for 15 minutes before releasing him unharmed. In the immediate aftermath of the riot, the Director of the ODOC along with the Governor of Oklahoma declared a state of emergency. At the end of December, Jerry and four prisoners from A and C-units were chained into a small light aircraft and flown to Walla Walla, a penitentiary in Washington State over 1,500 miles away.

Katia continued to spend long hours deciphering the volume of paperwork as it arrived, discussing his Situation by phone and email everyday. We searched high and low for anyone who might be interested in what we were discovering. We wrote to the DOC and several politicians, to anyone we could think of who might be able to help. We didn't receive a single reply. Couldn't they see what we could see? We failed to understand how it could be that those given the responsibility to enforce the sentences imposed by the Courts were allowed to ignore their own policies and procedures and

flout the law while nobody seemed to care. It was like shouting for help whilst standing on the moon for all the good we were doing.

Katja was determined to catalogue the paperwork he was sending us. By April she'd documented everything we'd received up to that point in time. The value of her work struck me as soon as I began to read it. She'd used specific headings to group together letters Jerry had written to officials, lawyers, and judges. She made reference to the laws of the Interstate Compact, DOC policies and procedures and relevant legal cases. By placing everything in one document pinpointing dates and other significant information it made it possible for us to make better sense of everything. It was 35-pages in length and on the first page, by way of a comparison she included their Mission Statement, "Our responsibilities to the offender are: To promote law-abiding behavior by providing the opportunity to improve value judgements and acquire social, educational and vocational skills. To offer a climate of safety, helpfulness and courtesy - To serve as a positive role model."

By 1990, it was becoming clear to Jerry that he would have to do more than write letters if he was to be returned to Oklahoma. It was at this point when everything began to take a turn for the worse, *"The first two and a half years I hit Texas, I didn't receive a single disciplinary case. I was no problem at all in their system. All of a sudden I started receiving bogus disciplinary cases. Why? Because I began filing lawsuits to get out of Texas and back to Oklahoma. I would not cease my efforts so everything changed. I was no longer a good prisoner who didn't cause any problems, I was a hard ass mifer who could not adjust and caught serious disciplinary cases. This is how both Oklahoma and Texas worked hand in glove and in turn provided Oklahoma with legitimate excuses to keep me where I was. See, all of a sudden I changed from a prisoner who was no problem to a prisoner buried on lock up. You wanted to know in my mind why I spent twelve and a half years out of 15 in administrative segregation in Texas? Simple, because Oklahoma saw to it my ass would get locked up there."*

His claims could be backed up by the pattern of events as we pieced everything together. He'd filed two lawsuits in 1990, one against Oklahoma to show he was being denied meaningful access to the Courts because of his forced detention in Texas and one against Texas to expose the fact he was serving a non-existent 45-year Texas sentence.

He filed his lawsuit against the Director of the ODOC in July 1990. It wasn't long after this that he got his first Texas disciplinary, *"The disciplinary you mentioned? This is the beginning of the harassment and retaliation because of my not ceasing in my letter writing and filing lawsuits. I was assigned as a craft shop orderly, one of the best jobs a prisoner could have in the Texas prison system. I got this job from a Tim West who at that time was an assistant warden. He'd been a warden in another unit in Oklahoma and knew of me from when he was in McAlester for a while. He was a decent guy. I'd just filed my lawsuit against Director Maynard. One day I was coming out of the craft shop when this young guard starts talking shit to me. Now up until this happened I was getting along with this guard, never had any words with him. Anyway, he gets in my face, poking his finger towards my chest talking big shit to me. I finally told him to get out of my face, but as you can see by the disciplinary account he said I told him I'd knock him across the floor. He handcuffed me and took me to lock up, or pre-hearing detention to await disciplinary charges. I was out in general population and up until this point I was discipline free, working and getting excellent evaluations. The same day I got locked up my property was taken out of my cell and brought to me in pre-hearing detention. When it reached me, there was a box radio that wasn't mine. Two days later the law ran down on me there in pre-hearing detention and confiscated my radio and fan. A few days after that I was given a disciplinary case for a knife they say they found in the radio. I had never seen this knife or even knew whose radio it was. I knew I'd been set up. The only reason I did not end up getting free world felony charges*

filed on me for possession of a weapon was because they investigated the commissary records and the boss there verified that it was not my radio. Yet I was still found guilty.

After I was found guilty and served my time in solitary lock up. I was assigned to the Officers Dining Room. Tim West had come out to pre-hearing detention and talked to me on the day of the incident of my threatening the officer and he told me he'd look into things. He came back the next day and said he was going to get the disciplinary case dismissed and that I'd be getting off detention in the next day or two. It was at this point the law ran down on me and took the radio and fan. Several days later Tim West came back to lock up and talked to me. He told me "My hands are tied". Warden Garner would not even talk to Tim West who was one of his associate wardens. Tim told me he couldn't help me on this deal and for me to just keep my head and stay cool and he'd see what he could do.

As I said, when I eventually got off lock up Tim got me assigned to the Officers Dining Room. I got moved to 7 building and put in the kitchen. A month or two later the Kitchen Captain talks big time shit to me, spitting in my face, poking me in the chest. That's when I got the free world assault charge. All this took place all of a sudden and it can't be shown or proved but I know damn well and good that Oklahoma was behind it all. This was the payment I received because I wouldn't put up and shut up."

I'd read the charges against him. He'd pushed the Captain in his chest; he wasn't injured in the assault. He'd pleaded guilty because he was told that if he did so, they would fix it so that the 10-year sentence would run concurrent with the 25 years he was already serving.

We'd been working at an intense rate but my attention had begun to veer away from the paperwork to focus more upon my forthcoming trip to Oklahoma. May was passing quickly. Jerry had submitted a request for our visit and he still hadn't received a reply of any kind. It was obvious I would have to phone OSP to find out what was happening. Less than a month before my intended visit, I spoke once again with Mike Pruitt. I was hoping for a more positive response. I could hardly believe my ears when he told me he had no intention of forwarding Jerry's request. I explained how Warden Mullin had confirmed in writing that Interpol could conduct background checks and that I'd already sent in my visitor application with the Warden's assurance it would be processed. I emphasised how Jerry did not have any active disciplinary and was receiving all level 4 privileges. He told me he'd forwarded my application but that was as much as he was prepared to do. Once I was approved I would be free to visit as an ordinary visitor. I reminded him of the distance I had to travel and as such I would need a special visit. He wasn't concerned and refused point blank to cooperate under any circumstances. Our conversation ended in a stalemate.

I redialled the number for OSP straight away and asked to speak with Deputy Warden Harvanek hoping I might bypass Lee Mann. I was told to hold the line but after 10 minutes of silence I gave up waiting and put down the phone. I tried once again, the same thing happened. I sent him an email explaining my dilemma; I was hoping he would at least respond. I tried to be positive throughout the weekend and not let the stress I could feel building up inside overwhelm me. By Tuesday, I was still waiting for a reply. In desperation I emailed Warden Mullin. He replied that he would look into the situation. This was promising, surely he would intervene and we'd be able to have a contact visit?

Each day I checked my computer hoping for positive news, but there was nothing. A week later feeling deeply frustrated I phoned once again. No prizes for those of you who've already guessed I'd end up speaking with Lee Mann. Trying not to sound too nervous, I asked if I was now an approved visitor. She said my application was still waiting approval because Interpol had decided to place security background checks at a very low priority due to the threat of terrorist attacks in the United States. She had

paperwork sitting on her desk belonging to applicants who had been waiting as long as 9 months for clearance. I reminded her how I'd lost a lot of money when I'd been forced to cancel my trip in February and that I was already making my plans to visit in June believing I'd have no problem in getting a special visit approved. I knew that I didn't have to be an approved visitor to be allowed a special visit. In a sudden change of attitude, she asked me to give her Jerry's name and number as though she'd forgotten who I was. I gave her his details and she left the phone for a few minutes. When she returned I was in for another shock. A one off special visit had been approved but it was for non-contact only. I drew in a deep breath; I could feel the disappointment washing through me. She went on to tell me this was normal for all prisoners at level 2. I knew this wasn't true. Placing emphasis upon her words she said, "You will never be allowed a contact visit again." Jerry was in general population and receiving level 4 privileges. This treatment we were facing was outright discrimination.

I felt there was no point in arguing my case any longer. By that point I was so drained I was just relieved we'd be able to see each other. Before ending the call, I told her I would finalise my travel arrangements. Not wasting anymore time, I re-booked my flight for June 15th. It cost an extra \$350. I sent an email to Interpol asking why it was taking them so long to conduct their background checks and then I emailed Warden Mullin giving him several legitimate reasons why I believed we should be allowed a contact visit. He replied the next day, "I was unaware that my staff had granted you this Special Visit and personally I would not have been inclined to have granted the request, however, since they have already told you that you can visit I will not intervene. This will remain a non-contact visit." A few days later Interpol replied confirming that OSP may contact them for a criminal record check on proposed visitors. I was no nearer to knowing how long Interpol would take to complete their investigation.

It was the beginning of June 2004 and Paul still hadn't got hold of Jerry's prison records despite having made official requests to OSP to do so. Katja and I contacted him several times and it was always the same negative answer. He'd given us a firm promise we could have a copy of everything once he had them in his possession. We'd emphasised how important they were to Jerry. We would of course pay him for his time in copying them and for all other costs involved, including shipping them to the UK. Jerry couldn't understand why he didn't just file a simple motion in the courts that would order the DOC to release the records? It was at this point, basing his decision on his past experience that he lost all faith in him. Katja and I were still hoping for something positive, at least we felt sure he would eventually get Jerry's prison records.

There was one bright light on the horizon. Eddie Morgan would be retiring in August and he promised that he would write a letter for Jerry's parole review. We were surprised and very pleased to know this was acceptable practice. When we told Paul he seemed impressed and said that a letter from a high ranking employee at OSP who'd known Jerry for so long would be a very valuable contribution to his parole packet. But how could we ensure Eddie would write his letter?

Eddie had been passing the exercise yard when he'd spotted Jerry and told him he would write a letter of support. It had been a one-off meeting and it was unlikely he would have an opportunity to speak with him again. August was just around the corner and once he retired, he might forget his promise. All we could do was keep our fingers crossed.

I wrote to Jerry hoping the news of our approved non-contact visit would get to him before I'd fly out on the 15th. At least he'd know I was coming once he got my letter because I couldn't rely on prison staff to keep him informed. I'd already made my mind to drive to McAlester even though the thought filled me with terror. I realised that if I were as serious as I claimed to be in my love and desire to be his wife it was obvious I'd be making regular trips to the States. I would have to force myself to drive oth-

erwise getting around would be slow and difficult. It was ridiculous for me not to drive, and besides, I wanted to be independent and not have to rely upon the goodwill of others.

I phoned a British based firm that arranges car hire and insurance for travellers to the States. My heart was set upon driving the smallest car possible. This was a priority as the thought of a huge American model scared me to death. We made arrangements for me to collect my economy size vehicle when I landed in Oklahoma City.

Everything was set for my departure. I'd arrive on Tuesday afternoon and drive to McAlester, Hospitality House would expect me later that evening. On the Wednesday we'd have the first of our three consecutive visits and on Saturday I'd drive the 130 miles back to Oklahoma City and book into a motel overnight. My flight was scheduled to leave very early on Sunday morning.

I left home much later this time at around 2.30am. I'd bought a newer and more reliable car in March and felt it was unlikely I'd break down. Arriving at Heathrow airport around 6.00am, I got lost in the maze of traffic as I struggled to get to long-term parking. This didn't help my confidence and I wondered how on earth I would manage to find my way to McAlester. I'd searched the Internet for advice and information on the Highway Code, and had a printout with me of a list of general rules I'd found, I kept glancing at them during the flight. There were "stop signs" and "4-way stop signs". These were called intersections rather than junctions but it seemed that at 4-way stops the rules of the road were based on courtesy and whoever arrived first had the right of way. Then there were traffic signals to consider. A motorist could turn right at a red light if the road was clear and drive straight through if the lights were flashing providing it was safe to do so. These were the only things I'd managed to find and I assumed that apart from having to reverse everything by driving on the right the same rules I was used to at home would apply. Katja had emailed me a rudimentary map she'd found showing the roads I'd need to take to get to McAlester and I prayed it wouldn't be too difficult once I'd picked up my hire car to find the I-40.

Apart from my stomach turning somersaults every so often at the thought of having to drive, I enjoyed the flight and this time I didn't feel airsick when I changed to the smaller American Eagle in Chicago's International Airport. There was nobody to greet me when I landed in Oklahoma City and after asking for directions I found a courtesy bus to take me to the car hire place on Meridian Avenue. It was mid June and the temperature was in the 90s with high humidity, but at least I was prepared this time and had brought lightweight summer clothes.

In a matter of minutes the bus had arrived at the car rental. My details were checked and I was handed my keys and told the lot number where my car would be waiting. Before I left the rental office I asked for directions to the interstate. To my relief, all I needed to do was make a right turn as I drove out of the parking lot, drive straight ahead through several sets of traffic lights, and make another right onto a slip road that would take me directly onto the road that merged with the I-40.

I found my car and heaved a sigh of relief that it wasn't too big. I loaded my case and backpack into the trunk then automatically walked to the right side. Laughing at my mistake I dashed around to the left, unlocked the door and placed the cushion I'd brought with me on the driver's seat. I always used a cushion back home to help give me a clear view over the steering wheel because I'm not very tall. I sat down trying to calm my breathing. It was suddenly very real and I would have to drive out into the traffic for the first time in my life on the right side of the road. A sickening fear gripped me. It wasn't nerves it went much deeper than that. It felt as I imagine a person with a phobia of heights must feel if they suddenly found themselves perched on the edge of a skyscraper. My only saving grace was that I'd driven an automatic car many times because my parents had owned automatics since the 1970s.

If it had been fifty degrees below freezing it wouldn't have stopped the sweat that was pouring from me, as I pulled off. Before I'd travelled a hundred yards my hands were welded to the steering wheel, my teeth clenched tight and my knees were knocking so hard it was painful. As each set of traffic lights loomed nearer I prayed they would stay green so that I could continue without having to stop. My prayers were answered and I counted each one as I drove straight through. Once I'd passed the last I kept my eyes peeled for a sign to turn right so that I could reach the I-40. In a state of blind panic I spotted the slip road just in time and heading up it I joined the fast flowing traffic.

Cars sped past, overtaking in zigzag fashion from the lanes on either side of me as the heart of the Oklahoma City skyline appeared on my left then disappeared as though I'd just witnessed a mirage. It was so surreal. Hours earlier I'd been driving in Britain, now here I was driving for the first time ever in the United States.

I felt calmer as I left the city behind and the roads narrowed to two lanes. An hour or so later, I joined the Indian Nations Toll Road. I would have to pay to travel along this route. When I reached the Toll, I automatically pulled along the right side of the booth making it impossible for me to stretch across to the passenger side window to pay the few dollars fee. I waited in embarrassment as the careworn attendant was forced to leave her post so that she could collect my money before allowing me to proceed. As I continued my journey I was alone except for the odd vehicle that flew past in the outside lane. With my fear under control I could enjoy the countryside with its scattered woods and rolling fields. I spotted several species of animals I'd never seen before lying dead on the sides of the road. I found out later they were coyotes, possums and armadillos. I'd have to visit a zoo if I wanted to see those back home. I kept on driving oblivious to time ticking away when all of a sudden I'd reached the outskirts of McAlester. I caught sight of OSP as it appeared on my left glowing with a pale pink tinge in the low evening sun. I felt happy and very relieved, but I still had one hurdle to overcome. I'd have to make a left turn across the traffic. My fear came rushing back with a vengeance. The turn off for North West Street that runs direct to OSP was looming nearer and as I reached it I sailed past cursing my cowardice. At the same time I imagined myself driving through and out of McAlester to goodness knows where because I was too afraid to turn left. At the next set of lights I got into the left lane. Holding my breath as they turned from red to green, I drove as fast as I dared to the safety of the other side. It may sound insane to those of you who are used to driving on the right, for me, it was an ordeal. Thankfully I recognised where I was and one minute later I parked outside Allen's store. I felt as if I'd won a gold medal at the Olympics. I bought some fresh milk and bread before driving the last mile to Hospitality House.

Chapter

11

Letter 181, June 20, 2004
Sunday

"This will be a short one Sharon. I wanted to at least drop you a few lines so you'd know I'm never far from you and that I'm here, loving you every step of the way. Boy I enjoy visits and I loved being with you, seeing you. But once I walk back into my world - into my cell, I'm drained of all my strength and energy. The atmosphere in a visiting room consists of a lot of changes for me in my world and after visits I just sit back and run it through my mind. I don't know how you handle all the mental strain and all the changes you must go through and deal with just in order to make all the connections and arrangements involved in setting up our visits. You're stronger than I've given you credit for.

I hope you weren't too uneasy about me having some of those prisoners I knew and Tami stop and wave, say hello to you? I'm praying that your journey back home went without any hitches. You know I'll be worried and on edge until I get a letter from you letting me know you're back home safe and sound.

I'm kind of curious if you were able to meet up with Tami? I also want to know how you got on when you met Paul Smith? Sharon, you just ask me any and all questions you need in order to get all this stuff we discussed during our visits straight in our minds. I'll try to put it in order for you. As I see it the document you intend to work on plus this Scott v. Smith comparison and Katja's recent cataloguing of everything is what we will need to present to whoever might take an interest in what has been perpetrated against me from the time of the escape in 1985. That there are still certain prison officials who are behind most of what's happened to me and is now happening to us. State how Eddie came out to H-unit and got me transferred over to A-unit. That I had no trouble until all of a sudden they rotated managers and Pruitt shows up to run the very housing unit that I am living on. Explain how my level changed, write about their lies and made up policies. How people in the free world are being made to believe I'm a liar and con artist, that I'm using people. You can show how this is in an attempt to get people to give up on me and cut me loose. It will expose how the powers that be are determined to never let me go to medium security. They will never straighten out my level or records. They will never treat me fairly because Pruitt and others have a desire to discriminate against me any way they can. Thus the reasons they have tried to stop us from getting married and prevent us from visiting. It's virtually impossible for me to move forward in any positive way. For over 18 years they have made sure of this."

Mary was there to welcome me when I arrived. We discussed my journey as she booked me in. I was to have the same room I'd stayed in the previous time. I was glad of this because it made everything seem very familiar. I felt ecstatic to have made it there in one piece and even though I was physically and mentally exhausted it couldn't take the edge off the thrill of knowing I'd be visiting Jerry in the morning. There was a certain amount of apprehension mixed in as well because I didn't have a clue where our non-contact visit would take place or how it would be. He'd sent me a copy of the paperwork approving our visit and thankfully it had arrived a couple of days before I left. Taking it out of my shoulder bag I placed it on the bedside table so that I wouldn't forget it in the morning.

I unpacked my suitcase then made myself some food. After eating it at the table in the deserted kitchen listening to the tick of the clock I rinsed my dishes and put them in the dishwasher. Not having a dishwasher at home, I felt it would have been much quicker to wash them by hand, but the rule was that all dishes must go in the washer. I had the communal bathroom to myself, as I got ready for bed. A short while later I was thankful to lay in the comfort of my room listening to the ghostly drawn out whistle of a distant train. My last thought before I drifted off to sleep was that I wouldn't have to worry about taking quarters in with me this time, I guessed correctly that there wouldn't be an opportunity to eat or drink during a non-contact visit.

After a good nights sleep I woke around 6am. I took my time as I showered and dressed. At 8am, I let myself out the front door, unlocked my car and placed my shoulder bag in the trunk just in case I wouldn't be able to get back into my room until the regulation 3pm. At least I'd be able to drive into town this time, maybe I would even do a little exploring by car if I could pluck up the courage.

The sky was pale blue and the day already hot as I walked the short distance to the prison. The sunny weather and pleasant semi-rural surroundings contrasted with the austere prison walls as I walked up the steps to visiting control. To my relief the officer on duty found the details of our visit on the roster. I filled in the visiting sheet while she telephoned Jerry's unit to tell them I'd arrived. A few minutes later I was standing once again at the top of the concrete steps peering past the gray horizontal bars to the confines within. After a short wait I was allowed into the shakedown area and searched before being told to enter the general visiting room. My hopes were raised that maybe there'd been a re-think and we were going to be allowed a contact visit after all. This little flame of desire was soon extinguished as another officer gestured for me to follow him. He led me out of the visiting room, past the vending machines and straight into an adjoining room, leaving me alone to wait for Jerry.

The room was about 30 feet long and 8 feet wide. It was cut in half along its complete length by a dividing partition that reached from floor to ceiling. The bottom half of the partition was made of a solid material and the top half contained panels of toughened-glass a quarter of an inch thick. Underneath each panel of glass hung connections for phones but most of them had been ripped away. Out of approximately sixteen phones under half had handsets attached. There were two chairs to my left as we entered. The furthest one stood next to a glass door that looked out onto a passageway. It was the passageway that led off from the security area I'd just come through. I could see the familiar red carpet running past and realised that if I'd been allowed to walk through the door and turn right I'd head straight into the Rotunda, one of the oldest parts of the prison and an area out of bounds to general visitors.

The phones were cumbersome and looked like they'd been there a long time. I was dubious of how well they would work if their pitiful condition were anything to go by. I sat on the chair and disappeared below the partition. I giggled to myself as I realised there was no way I could sit down and talk to Jerry because if he was sitting down as well all he'd see of me would be my nose and eyes. I would have looked like Chad peer-

ing over a wall.

I stood up again wondering how long I'd have to wait. To my surprise a prisoner arriving for his visit was escorted right past me inches from where I was standing but on the other side of the clear glass door. He disappeared into a hidden room, directly behind me. This was the holding area where inmates were searched before entering the visiting room. I guessed Jerry would have to go into this room too so we'd surely catch a glimpse of each other before our actual visit would begin.

A variety of personnel passed by on their way into the prison and I wondered if any of them were making for A-unit where he was housed. I'd been standing idly gazing out into the passageway for about twenty minutes when I decided to sit down, as I did so Jerry and an officer appeared. He looked larger than life from my low vantage point as I stared up into his face. A very large Mexican style moustache hid his mouth but his eyes were beaming his smile. In a blink he'd entered the room to be searched and I was left to wait for his return. A few minutes later he reappeared and the officer unlocked a second door that allowed him into his section of the partitioned visiting room; turning the key he left us alone. Instinctively we both put our hands up to the glass half expecting to be able to embrace but of course it was not possible. We stood looking at each other with the palms of our hands lined up directly and the glass acting as a sandwich filling in between. We spoke but our voices were so muffled it was very difficult to make out what the other was saying. We picked up our phones. The quality of sound was appalling. It was as though I had phoned him from Britain and we were suffering a very poor connection. We looked at each other in horror and moved to the next set of phones. They were even worse. We tried them all but moved back to the original set deciding that even though the sound was terrible they were the best of the lot. The reason for the absence of chairs was plain to see there wasn't any point in having more because it was impossible to have a comfortable conversation anyway. It seemed obvious that this visiting room was very seldom used.

Still, it was wonderful to see each other and neither of us could stop from smiling until after a short while my jaw was aching. I sat down on the chair and waited for his reaction. His face lit up with laughter as I disappeared from sight. I ended up standing for the whole of the visit. Jerry had a small fixed hexagonal shaped stool that was so uncomfortable it caused him to keep squirming like a worm on a hook and he could only sit for short periods. It was hot on my side but at least I had the opening that led back into the visiting room where they had the air conditioning turned on. Jerry was in a sealed area without any fresh air and pretty soon I could see that the heat and humidity was beginning to take effect as his skin reddened and the sweat gathered on his brow but there was nothing we could do to ease his discomfort.

Despite the exhausting process of speaking via the telephones we made the most of our time together. The moisture from our breath clogged the handsets making the sound quality even worse after a while. Yet in some ways it was better than the general visiting room because we were all alone except for the security cameras and could walk about rather than having to stay seated by a table, but we'd have given anything to have been able to hold hands and talk in comfort. There was so much I wanted to ask him about various aspects of the paperwork he'd been sending us but our visit disappeared in a whirl. Once we'd said our hellos, we spent quite a lot of time just catching up with the events of the last few months and all the difficulties we'd been put through. We had such a shock when a prison officer appeared and told us the visit must finish after only two hours. We couldn't understand why this had to happen, after all there was nobody else who was being made to endure a non-contact visit so they didn't have to ask us to leave in order to make room for others. Just before he was led away he told me to go see Lee Mann and sort something out otherwise they'd do the same thing the next day.

I walked out into the searing heat with his parting words still ringing in my ears. How on earth could I force myself to go to the reception and ask to see Lee Mann? Yet I knew I had no choice otherwise tomorrow they could end the visit after two hours or even less and we'd not be able to do a thing about it.

I was trembling with apprehension as I walked down a short corridor following the directions the receptionist had just given me. I had a vague idea what she looked like because a few months before, Bindy had found a photo on the Internet of a presentation ceremony. In the photo Ms. Mann was elegantly dressed as she accepted an award from the Governor of Oklahoma for her role in supporting families who were victims of crime. I'd wondered how someone in her position could sit on both sides of the fence and remain impartial but I supposed it must be acceptable practice otherwise she wouldn't have received the award. The receptionist must have telephoned to tell her I was on my way because her door was wide open and as I approached it she waved me inside. I introduced myself and we shook hands. I then explained the reason for wanting to see her reminding her of the distance I'd had to travel and how we were already faced with the discomfort of a non-contact visit. She was sympathetic and agreed that this was unacceptable. After making a phone call she told me we'd be allowed more time. A couple of minutes later I was out in the sunshine again hardly believing what had taken place. Had I just spoken with the same person who'd recently told such blatant lies about me? She'd been charming. I was lost for words.

The next day was better because I knew what to expect. It was busier and more prisoners entered the room adjacent to be searched before their visits. Jerry tapped the window at one or two he knew, he told me their names at the same time and gestured for them to acknowledge me with a quick wave. These were men who'd probably been locked up for a long time, they looked ordinary, just like any other man you'd pass whilst walking along the high street.

This time we were allowed the full four hours. We managed to cram in a lot of talking and laughing. I stood for the whole of the visit and every so often we'd walk the full length of the room together hoping the other phones might be better than the ones we were using which were becoming waterlogged with our prolonged talking, a pointless exercise as their quality was always worse. We tried pressing our ears in turn to the glass while the other shouted, but this was exhausting and very uncomfortable.

Just before our visit ended I promised him I'd walk along the road that runs past A-unit at 2pm. All being well, he would be out on the exercise yard and with luck we'd be able to see each other through the fencing and rolls of razor wire providing the distance wasn't too great.

Running the exercise yard was a very hit and miss affair at OSP and often months went by and Jerry would not leave his cell. He did this in order to avoid the psychological ups and downs of looking forward to going out into the fresh air for an hour only to be disappointed when there was not enough staff to run the yard or another excuse was given. This happened far more often than most people would believe. It was also a long-winded affair as there were several security checks that had to be undertaken. The whole process could take as long as the actual period spent out on the yard, which was usually no more than an hour. At the time of my June visit, he was going to the yard as much as he could and even had a slight suntan, the first he'd acquired in many years.

I walked along the road heading for the area where I'd filmed A-unit and the observation tower the previous October. As I made my way up the hill past the east security gate the heat was unbearable. It was a hundred degrees. I kept to the right side of the road not daring to go near the fencing in case the officer on lookout would think I was doing something suspicious. I reached the brow of the hill and could see figures milling around as I looked through the rolls of razor wire to the exercise yard a few hundred feet

to my left. I couldn't believe I was crazy enough to put myself through so much discomfort just to be able to catch a glimpse of Jerry in the open air, an image I'd been longing to see. My embarrassment was acute. I thought how silly I must look, a lone middle-aged woman strolling along a road that would seldom, if ever have members of the general public walking its length. The experience of my last trip had taught me how unusual it is for a person to stroll along any unpaved roadside never mind one that runs parallel with the highest maximum-security prison in Oklahoma.

We spotted each other at the same time and he called my name. At that moment, it seemed like everyone on the yard stopped whatever he was doing to look in my direction. Peering through the haze of heat rising from the ground I could see he was standing with two other men. It was a magical moment for us both. I could just make out that he was wearing cut down jogging pants. The three of them waved madly as I continued to walk along the road, but I dared not stop. I was so self-conscious of being the centre of attention, although I did manage to wave back I could see the officer in the tower staring in my direction but I didn't look long enough to be able to gauge his reaction. I heard Jerry shout again, "Sharon, slow down! Are you scared?" He was teasing me. I carried on walking. When I reached the bottom of the road I turned around bracing myself for the walk back. I heard my name being called, he was shouting for me to stop. I stood still for what must have been only a matter of seconds although it felt like forever. I just couldn't stay there for long though and trying not to break into a run I carried on in the direction I'd started out from, waving goodbye at the same time. I'd pushed myself as far as I was able considering I'm quite a shy person at heart. But I did it and it's an experience I will never forget.

I returned to Hospitality House completely drained and very thirsty. Tracy was sitting on the porch outside. She'd booked in the night before and was the first visitor I'd met. She was in her late twenties, lived in Illinois and had come to visit her fiancé at the minimum-security facility next to OSP. They were to marry the next day. We chatted together while we waited to be allowed into our rooms, it wasn't quite 3pm and the house was locked up. After a while she asked me if I'd like to go with her to get an ice cream. This was a great opportunity for me to be driven over to the expressway where there were a variety of superstores and restaurants. I'd only been told about this part of McAlester and hadn't plucked up enough courage to find it and negotiate the service roads and the express way itself. I was very glad I hadn't tried to go there on my own because even Tracy found it an ordeal and she'd driven the whole way from Illinois the previous day. The more I saw of McAlester though, the more I liked it. It is a very pleasant place with lots of green fields and wooded hillsides allowing its 18,000 inhabitants enough room to spread out over a wide area.

The rest of the day passed quietly and I retired to bed early. It's an unwritten rule that all guests must be in between 8-9pm unless a special request is made to stay out later. The next morning Tracy and I were up early. She was waiting for the scheduled time of her marriage to arrive and sat outside on the porch nervously smoking a cigarette. I offered to take a photo of her before I left for our last visit. She wore a t-shirt and jeans with brand new cowboy boots. I smiled at her bridal attire. She and her husband to be had a little daughter just one year old. Nothing unusual you might think, except that he'd been in prison for five years! Their daughter had been conceived behind a soft drinks machine on one of their visits. There was no chance of that ever happening in the visiting room at OSP, but it just showed what desperation could achieve in a more relaxed setting. They'd had to pretend she'd strayed off the rails and that he'd forgiven her and accepted the child as his. I wondered if the prison staff really had swallowed that story.

Friday morning arrived, this was our last day and I wanted so much to build as clear a picture as I could in my mind about Jerry's past experiences. I needed him to

talk about his transfer to Texas, the riot, his Level and Earned Credits and so many other things. I'd written a list of questions in abbreviation onto the palm of my hand and kept glancing at it as I walked from Hospitality House to the prison.

I sailed through the usual security procedures, and once Jerry arrived, we settled down eager to make the most of the time left to us. We were engrossed in conversation with the phones pressed uncomfortably to our ears when suddenly he glanced out into the passageway and called to a woman with long brown hair and a very pretty face to come talk with us. I didn't have a clue who she was as he introduced us. She smiled and said hello. We could just about make ourselves understood. He was very happy to see her and thought I'd realised who she was. When he could see my confusion he said her name again and the penny dropped, it was Tami Wagoner, his old case manager and friend of Eddie Morgan. My face lit up because immediately I sensed a golden opportunity to make sure Eddie would write his letter for Jerry. I asked her to please meet with me after our visit had ended. She hesitated slightly but then agreed and told me to ask the officer at visiting control to contact her and she'd come out to see me.

Three and a half hours had passed and we were deep in conversation again. He'd been listening to me summing up my understanding of everything. His brow was creased with concentration as I completed my analysis. I was pleased with myself because I knew I had a good grasp of the main issues. Words and ideas were pouring from me, "When I get home I'll begin working on the Coordinators document and putting together the Scott v Smith document", I told him "And then what will you do", he asked, I stopped in my tracks. He was right. What could these documents achieve on their own? We needed outside help. I could write all the documents I want, I could catalogue every single thing, cross reference it, discuss the contents in depth, but unless we could get someone like a lawyer or a judge or the media or a politician to take an interest what could we hope to achieve? I was glad of this reality check, it's something I admired a lot in his character. He knew, as things stood it would be very difficult to get him to move forward in any positive way with the opposition we were facing. He would never try to delude me into thinking it would be easy. I gave him my usual reply, "I'll find the ways to help you, just let time do my talking."

In the last few minutes before our visit ended we discussed when we might see each other next. Policy and procedure prevented him from re-submitting our marriage application until I was placed back onto his approved visitor list. Without this approval, Warden Mullin had been adamant we would not get another special visit. This was an on going issue I must deal with when I got back to Britain.

Stuck either side of our glass divide there could be no quick hug or kiss like last time. All we could do was mouth to each other our love and wave goodbye when the visit ended. We'd hardly had time to discuss in any detail my forthcoming meeting with his attorney. Just before I'd left Wales, Paul had agreed to see me on the Saturday prior to my flying home on the Sunday and we'd arranged that I would contact him on my return to Oklahoma City. My main concern was to emphasise the importance of getting hold of Jerry's prison records, but I also wanted to hear his opinion about what we could expect at the parole review. I was eager for us to meet and yet apprehensive at the same time.

Tami and I shook hands as we stood on the path near to the main steps by the Administration Block. Everything I'd just been discussing with Jerry was still whizzing around in my head and I poured out my thoughts and feelings to her. I told her how he was being held back at level 2 despite the fact she'd raised him to level 4. She said she and Eddie had checked through his records and he definitely qualified to be classified at level 4, but she wasn't really surprised at the things I told her. I explained how I believed that state and federal law had been broken. She gave me the impression that this wasn't the first time such a thing had happened. She was sympathetic but really

there wasn't a lot she could do. She was working in a different part of the prison and no longer had anything to do with Jerry. She went on to tell me she was fighting her own battle with OSP and was in the process of filing a lawsuit against Warden Mullin for professional misconduct. I was very surprised to hear this and even more surprised when she revealed that several other members of staff were filing lawsuits against either the Warden or the Director. She even told me how Warden Mullin had thrown a chair at her when they were in his office! (Tami eventually won her lawsuit)

Before we parted, I mentioned Eddie's promise, she said she'd have a word with him but she was confident that if he'd promised he'd write then she had no doubt he would do so. She gave me her personal email address and told me to keep in touch. Our meeting lifted my spirits and took the edge off my sadness at leaving and the uncertainty of when Jerry and I would be allowed to see each other again. I was pleased I'd had the opportunity to meet Tami. I felt satisfied as I walked back to Hospitality House. In the end being forced to accept a non-contact visit would work in our favour if it meant that I'd secured Eddie's letter for the parole packet.

That evening, we drove in Tracy's car to the expressway and I bought us both a pizza as a wedding breakfast. We laughed at the irony of a wedding night without the groom. She said the ceremony had been special as far as a prison wedding can be called special and she was just relieved to be married to the father of her child. They wouldn't have too long to wait before they could be together, he'd already been granted a parole and in less than six weeks she would be returning to McAlester to collect her husband and they could enjoy a belated honeymoon drive back to Illinois. I wished her a happy future just before I left Hospitality House the next day to return to Oklahoma City.

Driving out of McAlester I felt the familiar tug at my heart. I tried to keep OSP in sight for as long as possible as I headed westward. The sky was black. It was obvious a thunderstorm wasn't too far away. I hadn't gone many miles when the heavens opened. I'd never experienced a storm like it. I could hardly see the road in front of me yet the odd car and truck went sailing past in the outside lane as though it was a clear day. I struggled to drive at 55 miles an hour because the signs stated that this was the minimum speed and that it was strictly enforced. The weather was so bad at one point that if a whirling tornado had crossed my path it wouldn't have surprised me at all. I was thankful when the storm petered out leaving a troubled sky that lingered for a while until eventually the rain stopped completely and visibility returned to normal.

Although I'd had full use of my own vehicle I had avoided driving like the plague. My fear had curtailed my movement and apart from the area around the library and the nearby park I'd refrained from driving at all costs. The thought of finding my way back to the car rental parking lot filled me with dread but I would have to do it somehow. I had no rational explanation for my fear and prayed that time would lessen its grip on me.

The Oklahoma City skyline was drawing closer and the roads widened to several lanes, each filled with fast flowing traffic. The physical effects of my fear were obvious once more as the sweat began to run into my eyes while my whole body shook. When I realised I'd missed my exit I was appalled. I drove on not knowing what to do. I ended up pulling into a service area. Parking the car I made my way into the crowded store cum café and asked for help to find Meridian Avenue. The man behind the counter blurted directions and I kept repeating them to myself as I walked back to my car. It was while I was sitting there trying to find the strength to drive off again that I noticed the roads I would have to somehow rejoin, they looked an impossible confusion of cars and gigantic trucks going in all directions. I summoned my courage and drove out into the mass of vehicles praying for help. I found myself sandwiched between two lines of trucks, a tiny insect in comparison. We moved along slowly. Just as my pho-

bia was beginning to stifle me, the traffic parted like the Red Sea giving me a chance to get my bearings. I spotted a sign for the I-40 heading east, this was the direction I needed to take. A few miles later I found the correct exit and driving triumphantly though the traffic lights on Meridian Avenue, I reached my destination in one piece.

The phone rang in my motel room. It was the receptionist informing me that there were two people waiting to see me in the lobby. I'd called Paul as soon as I'd arrived using the number he'd given me for his cell phone. He'd brought his wife with him. We said our hellos as I entered the lobby. Paul and I sat on one sofa and his wife sat on the other at right angles to us. He was no nearer to getting Jerry's records even though he'd made official requests to do so. He said he believed OSP was using stall tactics and that this was probably because his file was so big it would take too much time and work to copy it all. I explained once again why it was vitally important that we have his records and he assured me he'd keep trying to get them.

I was frustrated because it was obvious as we talked that he thought the most we could expect was to get Jerry paroled to his 115-year sentence. I asked him what was the point of us paying him \$2,500 when all we had to do was wait another year and he would discharge the 5-year sentence he was already serving and automatically begin serving the 115? He said he understood my disappointment but that he would continue to work with us and would apply for an early parole review after a year or so with the idea that in around eight years he might be able to work things so that he would be paroled to the street. Of course, this was based on maybes there were no certainties. I pointed out that Jerry would be in his sixties by then and would have served over 32 years in prison for non-capitol offences! He said he was sorry but that's the way it worked in Oklahoma. I became very arrogant in my frustration at such an outrageous thought because I knew he didn't know Jerry's Situation as I did and hadn't studied all that had happened to him since 1985. I told him I would expose this unfair system and that I would get him out of prison myself. I could see his wife was very uncomfortable at my outburst and thinking back I'm sure she must have thought she'd encountered a truly mad eccentric British lady. No doubt Paul was having similar thoughts at my naivety and complete ignorance of the legal processes and Oklahoma law. I must confess it was a strange meeting and ended with me asking if he would allow me to take his photo so that I could show Katja and Bindy what he looked like. We parted with smiles and handshakes but I was aware I had made a bad impression.

As soon as I got back to my room I wrote down everything we'd discussed so I could mail it to Jerry before I flew home. My meeting with Paul had been a disaster, but the silver lining was the good news about my discussion with Tami and her assurance that Eddie would write his letter. Paul had been glad to hear this news as well. It was the one common ground we'd shared.

My taxi picked me up at 6:30 the next morning to take me the short distance to the airport. Security was still very strict but at least the longwinded process of searches kept my thoughts distracted from the fact I was leaving and didn't have a clue when I'd be able to return again. To my dismay instead of flying to Chicago and then to London, my flight had been redirected and I would have to fly south to Dallas Fort Worth. We'd change planes there and head north to New York before boarding a different flight for the long haul across the Atlantic. As we took off heading in the direction of Texas, little did I know that this unexpected brief visit to the Lone Star State would not be my last?

Chapter

12

Letter 224, September 3, 2004
Saturday

"You would stake your life on my character and the fact that I would never go back to doing drugs, committing crimes. You would do this because you truly know me. I value the few true friends I do have, the respect, love and faith they have in me. Sharon, when a person starts growing older we look back at people and life differently. There's not a day goes by that I don't reflect upon life in some way. When you're on the home-stretch it all seems more important and as though every day, week, month, year must be valued and treasured. Yes, I've pulled up and changed my priorities, views, and way of thinking. I'm still the same Jerry Hamilton but now I have a good understanding of what's important in life. And if I ever do make it out of here I assure you I have no fear or doubt that I will ever break weak and reach for drugs, commit crimes or anything like that. That will never happen. My only fear is getting out of here so old I won't be able to find a job or means of providing a home life for us. Other than that there's no doubt I will be able to adjust and make it out there in that outside world.

Sharon, these prison officials will always try to paint you as a typical lovesick woman taken in by a prisoner. This is why it's important when you write to politicians and others to point out things like your education, your work, and that you've never been arrested. You need to push the issue of how we're being prevented from being able to fulfil our dreams of getting married. How it has been one thing after another to make it as hard as possible for us. These issues need to be mentioned in order to paint a clearer picture to show it ties in with their methods of retaliation and discrimination. They make it look as though all prisoners and their families and friends are treated the same, that everyone must follow the policies and procedures of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. In other words, whoever may contact them, a state senator or representative, someone from the media etc., the DOC would make it clear to them that we must follow the procedures, policies like everyone else. This gives the impression that we are breaking the rules because we are expecting special treatment or that we're just trying to manipulate the system.

We've worked our butts off trying to move me forward in hopes of one day getting me out. All the hard work, money spent, heartaches, disappointments, let downs, in reaching out for help and sympathy really goes unheeded and makes no difference to those who have the authority and power to set me free. To them I'm just a prisoner and what they read about me or are told about me is what they know. So yes, we're going to have to fight every inch of the way and these prison people here at McAlester are going

to try to stop us. They don't want to see me getting positive reports in my records that will therefore show a changed prisoner who is doing all he can to better himself. That's what we're up against.

If we could get those law students interested in me, and how Texas just materialized a 45-year sentence there might be a legal loophole in getting something done to help me prove my transfer was illegal? When it comes to lawsuits and appeals, that's what it's all about, claiming the law was not followed.

When you refer to all the discrimination, lies and retaliation in your letters, remember this, I was returned to Oklahoma NOT because they wanted me back, but because of your letters and others letters inquiring and questioning my transfer and lack of legal materials etc. So we forced them to let me come back or they might have ended up in hot water."

Katja's document cataloguing everything Jerry had sent us up until March 2004 had impressed me so much. It had given me an idea to use a lawsuit called *Smith v. Scott* to make a kind of comparison with his Situation. I wanted to strengthen my understanding, plus it would give me something constructive to do. I felt it would show that the DOC was breaking the law in the way he was being classified. My first priority had been to decipher its content. Once I could understand what seemed at first just a jumble of meaningless words I was able to blend the lawsuit and what was happening to Jerry together with positive effect. I was very pleased with the end result. In my mind it proved there was no justification for his being prevented from being a higher level. Using this knowledge, I wrote to the Case Manager Supervisor at OSP in an attempt to persuade him to re-think the way Jerry was being classified. I sent a copy to the Director; I never received a reply.

My next project was called the "Coordinators" document. Named after the interstate compact officers who'd been responsible for his welfare during the fifteen years he'd spent in Texas. It took me several weeks to complete utilising every bit of spare time I could muster. I had twice as much material to work with than Katja did when she'd written her original document because Jerry had continued to send us stacks of paperwork. At intervals I included my own commentaries where I would often ask questions for which I had no answers. To finish, I wrote a summary and conclusion. I felt that at the very least we were cataloguing and making sense of everything even if it was only for our own satisfaction.

Jerry's overwhelming desire to be returned to Oklahoma led to his filing a lawsuit against Gary Maynard on July 31st, 1990. Less than two months later on September 22nd he'd caught his first disciplinary for threatening the officer as he left his job in the craft shop. Two days later whilst confined in pre-hearing detention he'd received the second for possession of a weapon and contraband. He was demoted in level, placed in solitary confinement for fifteen days and lost 365 days good time. He was tried by Texas for these violations, found guilty and punished without the knowledge of Oklahoma. The way these disciplinary proceedings were conducted and the punishment he received did not comply with the law of the Interstate Compact.

Two months prior to this, Gayle Krien acting for Oklahoma confirmed in writing that any misconducts must be on file with them before punishment could be enforced. She'd already told him he was an Oklahoma inmate only residing in the Texas Department of Corrections. He pointed out to me, *"You show me anything in the Oklahoma statutes and laws governing earned credits, levels, rule violations etc., that says they can apply another states department of corrections rule violations against me to dictate loss of earned credits or to set my level. And what about the right of a prisoner by law to appeal a rule violation, loss of credits and the restoration of credits, who would I appeal to, Oklahoma or Texas?"*

It seemed very clear as I studied his paperwork and compiled the document that he

was caught in a confusing mess with neither department of corrections knowing how to implement the transfer in a correct and legal manner. To confuse matters more, during the time he spent in Texas, he was overseen by at least four different Interstate Compact Coordinators for Oklahoma, each one interpreting and applying the rules as they saw fit and not one applying them correctly.

Once Jerry had completed his punishment for the disciplinary infractions, Tim West had helped him get assigned to the Officers Dining Room. He hadn't been working there long when just four days before his lawsuit was dismissed in the Courts, he was charged with the assault on the Kitchen Captain. In a grievance he filed to the warden of Hughes Unit, he claimed that the disciplinary proceedings for this assault had not been held within the guidelines of the Interstate Compact. He stated in the grievance, *"At the Disciplinary Hearing I could not make a statement, call witnesses or defend myself because of the possibility of free world charges being filed against me. I complained that the disciplinary hearing captain would not let me ask them who's good time did they take? My Oklahoma good time or my Texas good time?"* Texas did not have the legal right to take away his Oklahoma good time only Oklahoma had this right. He was not a Texas prisoner so how could they take away Texas good time? According to the law he should not have been able to earn any Texas credits.

I found the warden's answer to his grievance both intriguing and confusing, he confirmed that since Jerry was incarcerated in the Texas Penal System, he'd forfeited their time, and this came off Texas Records. This decision shows how he was being treated as a fully integrated Texas prisoner just as if he'd committed his crimes and been sentenced in that state. This is backed up by the fact that Texas had given him a non-existent 45-year sentence to serve when he arrived. He'd received notification for parole hearing dates and earned Texas good time credits. Yet according to Gayle Krien's statement and the wording of the Interstate Compact he was merely residing in Texas, as such he remained an Oklahoma inmate at all times. As I wrote the document I could feel the despair and frustration he must have felt. He was trapped in no mans land.

Texas disciplined and punished him using their policies and procedures. They demoted him in level, took away all privileges and placed him in solitary confinement. They would eventually inform Oklahoma that they had demoted him and taken away X-amount of credits. Oklahoma would then use these Texas disciplinary infractions to deduct time from Oklahoma time calculations. According to separate audits dated January and August 1991, Oklahoma took over 1,000 good time credits from him, for the disciplinary infractions mentioned above. How could they use Texas disciplinary cases to take this amount of credits when each states' department of corrections has conflicting definitions of offences and differing punishments? The amount of credits taken from Jerry during the audits just didn't add up. Both Texas and Oklahoma applied their own rules and punishments for the same offence. This meant that he was being punished twice. In legal terms this would be double jeopardy. His predicament was made all the more unfair by the fact that once he'd served his punishment and Texas had promoted him for good behaviour, restored his privileges and earned credits, Oklahoma refused to acknowledge these positive changes. He lost all earned credits for good.

Each time Oklahoma changed its policies and procedures governing earned credits, they applied them to him even though by doing so they were breaking the law, *"I did something like twenty-two and a half years on a twenty-five year sentence. Why wont they investigate properly and correct my Level and Earned Credits? Especially if they know they are all screwed up! Is it because they cannot or do not want to admit incompetence or is it because the people who call the shots for the DOC are making sure nothing is done to straighten out Jerry Hamilton's records?"*

Katja and I continued with our quest to find someone, anyone who would listen to us, while Jerry tried to help himself. He asked time and time again to be allowed to

work. His formal appeals were either ignored or he was told the same old story, he was on the waiting list. He watched helpless while those below him on the list were given jobs. A prisoner needs to be able to prove he is trying to help himself. He needs to be the highest level. He needs to be able to work and take part in self-improvement programmes. How could Paul put together a favourable parole packet for him? He had nothing positive to present to the Parole Board.

I trawled the Internet searching for help of any kind. There are hundreds possibly thousands of prisoner-help organizations throughout the US. A few are very big and well known while most are much smaller and confine their activities to helping those in their particular state. Individual state law leads to great variation; this is why there is no real consistency of treatment of prisoners from one state to the next. Some states have the death penalty, while others don't. Calls for reform of the penal system would not help him in the short term and the smaller more specific campaigns were not relevant to his Situation. My hopes were raised however when I telephoned the legal director of a university in Illinois. His students did pro-bono work for real prisoners. In a few cases they'd been able to help resolve legal problems as part of a "hands on" learning process. The legal director listened politely to all I had to say and asked me to clarify everything in writing. I wrote a three-page letter. With it I included the documents Katja and I had produced and copies of letters we'd written to DOC personnel. I have no idea if my package arrived because I didn't receive a reply.

That summer we also managed to get the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to accept a petition from the both of us on Jerry's behalf. This had been Katja's idea. She'd filled in the application and gathered the evidence. Unfortunately nothing positive came from her efforts because they decided not to pursue the matter further. Disappointment was something the three of us learnt to accept. We felt it was better to try and fail than not to try at all.

The visiting situation was stagnant. Katja wanted to visit but was told that until they had received background clearance from Interpol she would not be allowed to see Jerry under any circumstances. I'd emailed Lee Mann in July and August but her reply was the same, they were still waiting to hear from Interpol. I decided to write to the United States Director of Interpol explaining my predicament. I enclosed a copy of my most recent email from Lee Mann. I didn't think I'd receive a reply but at least writing gave me the feeling that I was doing something to speed up the process.

Jerry was sure OSP would continue to stall Paul and prevent him from getting hold of his prison records. An inmate's lawyer should be able to receive copies of everything on their behalf including video recordings if they exist, and confidential statements by prison staff. They can access records prisoners are prevented from seeing. Jerry was tired of waiting and decided to submit another request to staff to review his records. He did so in June, pointing out how he'd already made a similar request the month before. Two weeks dragged by without a response. Mike Pruitt's office was a minute's walk from his cell, yet it may as well have been a hundred miles away for all the notice that was taken of these written requests. By mid July he felt desperate enough to file a grievance to Warden Mullin. To comply with correct policy and procedure every prisoner must submit with his grievance form an answered request to staff. This is to show that he'd tried to sort out his problem at unit level but of course Jerry couldn't submit what he didn't have. Still, he had no choice but to go ahead and risk filing the grievance even though he half expected it to be sent back to him as invalid. He pointed out to the Warden that in the past year he'd submitted approximately four request to staff forms and two specified forms to review his records but they had all been ignored. His grievance should have been recorded and processed in an official manner but it too was ignored. However, someone had taken notice because a few days later, he was finally called down to Jimmy Wilson's office and allowed to look through his

records. It had taken over a year to do so. Why so long when according to policy he should have been able to see them within 15 days?

It had taken years for Jerry to look through his records, and having succeeded at last he was faced with more disappointment, *" I just got back from reviewing my records. Now the main information I was out to get a hold of, the paperwork showing where I was released off Ad Seg here in 1988 and let out into general population was not in my records. I know it exists because I had a copy at one time. All my good time slips showing I was receiving good time credit while on Ad Seg before my transfer to Texas were missing also. Someone has pulled them out of my records? While I was looking Pruitt phoned and asked if I was still wanting to pay 25 cent each for the records I'm ordering, knowing that my lawyer will turn around and order the same copies. I told them I'd order copies and the lawyer could order whatever records he wants. That's when Wilson made the comment that Paul hadn't applied for any of my records yet. Anyway, it's probably cost me an arm and a leg to pay for these copies. I should have them in a few days and I'll gradually send them to you and Katja."*

The statement Mike Pruitt had made at the time of the riot was also missing. We'd wanted a copy of this in particular but there was no sign of it. For almost 17 years he'd been unable to see his records, when he was finally given the opportunity, he picked out dozens of pages to be copied. A few days later he was charged 25 cents for each copy, the standard fee for all prisoners. But then in an unprecedented move, he was charged an extra \$64 for having taken up four hours of Jimmy Wilson's time. Jerry is probably the first prisoner at OSP to be forced to pay the wages of a correctional officer in order to review his own prison file. I emailed Paul to relay the news that Wilson insisted he'd not applied for any of his records. He was offended by this accusation because he could definitely prove he had done so.

Autumn was approaching fast and to our relief, Eddie kept his promise and wrote a very positive letter of support to the Parole Board. He ended it by saying he'd feel happy to have Jerry as his neighbour. Jerry was very touched. He was surprised and very pleased to learn that Tami had also written to the Parole Board on his behalf confirming how she'd raised him to Earned Credit Level 4 in 2003. She'd based her decision on his Texas documentation and Oklahoma file prior to his transfer.

I contacted his pen friends and organised for their letters of support to be sent to me so that I could forward them in one envelope to Paul. I sent copies to Jerry. He was deeply moved when he read the kind things his friends had said about him. He asked members of his family to write letters and to send them direct to Paul. We did all we could to collect anything constructive for his forthcoming parole review, but searching for positive paperwork amongst his records was like looking for a needle in a haystack. It made me thankful he'd at least managed to hold onto copies of the letters he'd received from the psychologists in Texas. Now we could add Eddie and Tami's letters to this meagre collection.

We'd talk about his future, *"Sharon, you're right about what they've done to me and are continuing to do to me. They are stealing away all hope of my ever moving forward or getting out by applying their new levels and security points and by making sure I can never rise any higher than level 2 or be transferred out to a medium security unit, all the things I need to be able to progress. Sure I'd be the first to admit I was a high escape risk when I was determined to get out, but I gave all that up including drugs in 1987. You would think that after all this time I would have paid the punishment for my actions."*

Katja came up with an excellent document she called the "Truth verses the OPS". She took operational policies and procedures and set them side by side to show how they should be applied to Jerry. The discrepancies were glaringly obvious from the rules concerning the individual conduct of employees through to the maintenance and access

of offender records. Everything depended upon the correct application of these policies and procedures and there was so much scope for personal vendettas and retaliation.

Six weeks before the parole hearing, his Washington records arrived. Katja had organised it so that he could have copies sent to him via her. These covered the six months he'd spent in Washington State Penitentiary after he'd been flown there two weeks after the riot. Approximately 25 prisoners deemed to have played the most significant role were transferred from OSP for security reasons to different states throughout the US. Of the five sent to Washington, Jerry was the only one who'd been in the F Cell House. The other four had been caught up in the riot on A and C-Units.

When they arrived at the penitentiary the five of them were placed in the Intensive Management Unit, (IMU) in administrative segregation. Washington recommended that Jerry be placed there because of the seriousness of participating in a prison riot. They stated that if he was to be considered for release, he was expected to remain discipline free, cooperate with staff, abide by the rules and regulations of the institution and participate in available programmes.

By February Oklahoma were still insisting he must stay in IMU. In March Washington recommended he be released. They emphasised he'd not been a problem to them, and that he seemed sincere in his desire to be given a new start and to be able to work and program. Oklahoma insisted he must remain in IMU, yet they allowed the other "rioters" who were transferred along with him to be released to general population.

Trapped in IMU, every other day he was subjected to physical strip searches and cell searches. He wrote a letter to Mr. Clint May, his Washington Counselor, *"Sir, I have done what has been asked of me since I was transferred here from Oklahoma. I have not broken any infractions of this institution and since being here I have enrolled in school and gotten my G.E.D. For unknown reasons, I'm being punished and kept on lock up status."*

At the beginning of April he was given the news that his mother had terminal cancer. His only thought was to return to OSP so they could see each other before she became too ill to visit him. His counselor at Washington recommended he should be sent back. His mother's doctor wrote to the ODOC informing them of the seriousness of her illness. Two more months passed and it was obvious he was not going to be released from IMU or be returned to Oklahoma. He decided the only course of action left to him was to protest by refusing to cooperate. On June 2nd an infraction report stated Jerry refused to come out of his cell and refused to comply with the order of a strip search. When they opened his door he charged at the officers with the mattress out in front of him. The mattress was pulled from him and he started swinging his fists hitting one officer on the side of his face. They overpowered him with hair, arm and leg holds and placed him back in his cell. Before they left, he told them the same thing would happen each time they came to do this regulation cell and body search. On the same day, another Progress Report recommended he be given consideration for transfer back to Oklahoma.

Two days later he refused to cooperate again, and had to be removed from his cell by force. They took his mattress and used water cannon to subdue him. His protest gained the sympathy and support of the Washington prisoners in IMU. On June 5th, twenty-four of them began banging on door and light fixtures and trying to disrupt the count, fifteen were involved the following day. Alarmed by the disturbance, the Warden paid him a personal visit to find out the reason for his behaviour. After listening with some sympathy, he promised him if he cooperated he'd arrange to have him sent back to Oklahoma as soon as he could. Jerry agreed and on June 8th, he was returned to OSP. The four who'd been transferred with him in December, returned on the same plane.

Why didn't Washington find him guilty of assault and punish him? Because if Oklahoma had given their permission, they would have freed him when they'd released the others. Washington understood the reason behind his sudden refusal to cooperate and in many ways they sympathised. They knew he was been treated unfairly and they supported his stand in the only way they could, by not following through with disciplinary action and punishment. Why didn't Oklahoma punish him for his behaviour in Washington once he'd been returned to OSP? Only a Washington disciplinary court could find him guilty of a Washington infraction. It was out of their jurisdiction. Bearing this in mind, while he was in Texas, how did Oklahoma use Texas disciplinary infractions to punish him under Oklahoma law?

Texas Department of Criminal Justice
INSTITUTIONAL DIVISION
Inter-Office Communications

To Mr. Samarron and Mr. Cantu Date 10/25/93

From T. Ruttiger, M.Ed., ACP III TAR Subject Hamilton, Jerry TDCJ# 479571
Administrative Segregation Recommendation

It is highly recommended that Jerry Hamilton, TDCJ# 479571, be considered for release from Administrative Segregation, Group A. He is presently classified as an SAT4 with no days of lost good time. He presently attends and participates actively in recreation therapy, guided group therapy, rational behavior training, work therapy, and individual therapy.

He has made continuous progress in the program since being admitted on 2/26/92. He has never lost his level for any reason. He demonstrates model behavior through appropriate interaction with staff and peers. Patient has been described as a role model inmate by numerous staff personnel.

He denies any current suicidal, homicidal, or paranoid ideations. No thought disorders or loosening of associations have been noted. He is currently on Doxetine to control mild symptoms of depression.

Mr. Hamilton has verbalized his goals of improving his behavior and attitudes in hopes that the Oklahoma prison system will consider him for transfer back to the state of Oklahoma prison system. He has demonstrated, for a significant period of time, that he is able to control his behavior and function within the institutional rules. Attached you will find several IOCs from staff members of various disciplines supporting inmate Hamilton's appropriate behavior and attitude. Please review these recommendations with the Administrative Segregation classification review committee.

Again, his Treatment Team encourages and supports the lifting of his present Administrative Segregation classification status.

TAR/zow

SO-4

Attempts by professional psychologists in Texas and other staff members to help Jerry failed. He was returned to Ad Seg lockup, Hughes Unit once he'd completed his two years in the P.A.M.I.O. program.

Enclosure to grievance submitted to Warden Mulline on
September 2, 2003

Memorandum



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

FROM: Lee Mann, Warden Asst. DATE: 8-11-03
TO: Jerry Hamilton # 91102

Please be advised, Perry Reading was contacted
and verified that you were promoted to level 2
effective 5-1-03. Since did not establish your level
as you were an Oklahoma inmate while housed in
Idaho. As you do not fall under DSP 060101, you will
receive benefits, cost, etc as allowed under the
old level system. Records do not reflect that you
have ever been eligible for promotion to level 4.
I have no authority to intervene in the classification
action of your unit team

SEP 02 2003

Memo to Jerry from Lee Mann, August 2003. She insists he's level 2 and that records do not reflect that he has ever been eligible for promotion to level 4.

Current days remaining report for: HAMILTON, JERRY W DOC number: 91102

Ekstrand Eligible

Case Supervisor = INTERSTATE CORRECTIONS COMPACT

Housing Unit = INTER Bed Space = 402

| Effective Date | Time Served | Earned | Lost | Other | Month Net | Days Remain- ing |
|-------------------|----------------|--------|------|-------|--------------|------------------------|
| 10/31/94 | | | | | | 2,441 |
| 11/30/94 | 30 | 44 | 0 | 0 | 74 | 2,367 ✓ |

NOT CAP Eligible

Evidence to show that in 1994, Jerry was level 4 and earning 44 credits each month.

Tue, Mar 23, 2004 6:38 pm

Subject: RE: Clearance for two British women to visit prison inmate?

Date: Thursday, January 22, 2004 9:07 pm

From: USNCB.WEB@usdoj.gov <USNCB.WEB@usdoj.gov>

To: "sharontom@care4free.net" <sharontom@care4free.net>

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

This office of Interpol will honor a request for a background check if it is received from a bona fide correction or law enforcement agency. When the agency forwards the request to this office, it should include the full name, date of birth, passport number (if available), prior addresses and any other identifying information on the person to be checked. The request must be forwarded on the agency's official letter head and include the country or countries the checks are needed from. The request should be mailed to:

U.S. National Central Bureau
Interpol
U.S. Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530

-----Original Message-----

From: sharontom@care4free.net [mailto:sharontom@care4free.net]

Sent: Saturday, January 18, 2004 2:56 PM

To: USNCB.WEB

Subject: Clearance for two British women to visit prison inmate?

Dear Sir or Madam

I apologise if I am sending this email inappropriately. My fiance is an inmate within the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. I have been taken off his visitor list and the reason given to me for this decision is that Interpol is refusing to conduct the necessary research that is needed into my background to clear me as a security risk. My friend who also writes to my fiance has also been removed. The Warden's secretary informed us that if we can get Interpol to do this "search" of our backgrounds then that will probably solve the problem and we will be able to be placed back on the visitor list. I'm sorry if this sounds very vague and confused, but this is because I am feeling very confused about this whole issue. I visited with my fiance last October and experienced no difficulty whatsoever. My fiance and I are trying to get married, but if I am not on his official visiting list we will never be allowed to marry. Is there any information or help you could give me in this matter?

Thank you

Sharon Michell

Page 1 of 1

First of four replies to author from Interpol stressing that they were able to conduct a background check.

7C65



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July 25, 1988

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Mr. Jerry W. Hamilton
TDC No. 479571
Michael Unit
Tennessee Colony, Texas 75861

Dear Mr. Hamilton:

We have received your letter of June 27, 1988 regarding your case.

Under Texas law, your actual calendar time served must equal one-third (1/3) of your forty-five (45) year sentence before you are legally eligible for parole consideration. Therefore, your case is on the docket for March, 1995.

The Board of Pardons and Paroles has no jurisdiction over time credited to an inmate's sentence; therefore, we suggest you contact the Records Office, Texas Department of Corrections, P.O. Box 99, Huntsville, Texas 77340.

We are making your letter a part of your permanent file.

Very truly yours,

BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES

Cecil C. Simpson
Cecil C. Simpson, Director
Institutional Services

cdf
cc: File

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

First mention of his non existent 45-year Texas sentence. How could Jerry be considered for parole by Texas when he had not committed any crimes in that state and was not a Texas prisoner?

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
INSTITUTIONAL DIVISION
INMATE GRIEVANCE FORM
FORMA PARA QUEJAS DE LOS PRESOS

10,534
STEP 1
PASO 1

Inmate Name: Jerry Hamilton
Nombre Del Preso

Inmate TDCJ Number: 479571
Numero Del TDCJ Preso

Unit: Hughes
Unidad

Housing Assignment: 12-C-74 A9-Seg
Vivienda Asignada

Check if an emergency grievance: ☐ yes(si) ☒ no(no)
Marque si es una queja de emergencia

I object to the posting of issues presented in this grievance: ☐ yes(si) ☐ no(no)
No deseo que se publiquen los asuntos tratados en esta queja

OFFICE USE ONLY / Para Uso De La Oficina Solamente

Unit Number: 10,534

Code: 400

Date Received: DEC 19 1990

UGC Signature: Jac Lane

Specify how and when informal resolution was attempted / Especifique como y cuando trato de hallar una solucion informal:

When I was arrested and placed on Ag-Seg on 12-6-90
When I went to Disciplinary Hearing on 12-18-90

STATE GRIEVANCE (Include documentation, name of any witnesses supporting your claim and date of incident. Attach additional pages if necessary.) / ESPECIFIQUE LA QUEJA (Incluya documentacion, nombre de cualquier testigo que certifique su queja y fecha del incidente. Agregue paginas adicionales si es necesario.)

this is to appeal Disciplinary Report No. 783449, Striking an Officer and Refusing to Obey Orders. I object to this Disciplinary hearing because as an inmate compact prisoner it was not held under the guidelines set forth in Inmate Compact Clause. At the disciplinary hearing I could not make statement, call witnesses or defend myself because of the possibility of free world Charles being filed against me. I object to the fact that the disciplinary hearing Captain would not let me ask and have an important issue put on the disciplinary hearing tape - I would like to know who's good time did the disciplinary hearing committee take? my Oklahoma good time, or my Texas good time? This is what I wanted read into the disciplinary tape for my legal reasons reviews and was denied this by the disciplinary hearing captain.

ACTION REQUESTED / ACCION SOLICITADA:

These charges be reversed and expunged off my record and everything taken be returned.

Jerry W. Hamilton 12-18-90
Inmate's Signature / Firma Del Preso Date / Fecha

WARDEN'S Decision and Reason / Decision del GUARDIAN y Razones:

As you are presently incarcerated in the Texas Penal System, you forfeited time the Texas System is in control of and that comes off of the Texas Record Keeping System. Appeal denied for report # 783449.

[Signature] DEC 21 1990
Warden's Signature / Firma Del Guardian Date / Fecha

If you are not satisfied with the Warden's Response, you may appeal to the Regional Director through your Unit Grievance Coordinator. (See reverse side for further instructions.) / Si usted no esta satisfecho con la Decision del Guardian puede apelar al Director Regional por medio del Coordinador de Quejas de su Unidad. (Vea el reverso donde hallara instrucciones adicionales.)

I - 127 (Rev. 3/90)

1/15

J0336/p1

The Warden of Hughes Unit tells Jerry he's a Texas prisoner and as such they've taken his Texas time from him?

OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

New Arrival / Adjustment Review / Earned Credit Level

C-1-10

Inmate Information

Facility OSP Facility Arrival Date 04/15/2003 LARC Arrival Date 04/02/1980
 Name HAMILTON, JERRY W DOC Number 91102 Gender MALE Date of Birth 10/25/1952
 Date of Assessment 08/01/2007 Housing Restrictions YES Identification NO
 Name of Emergency Contact Hamilton, Sharon Relationship Wife Phone Number _____
 Address Fernhill House Tynwedd Rhondda Cf425rd South Wales Will I/M reside at this address after re-entry? NO

Sentence Information

Special Conditions of Suspended Sentence / Parole NONE FOUND 85% NO 57 O.S. 1991 NO
 75% Sec 521 eligible

PPWP eligibility NO Days Remaining 40472
 Prior Convictions YES Number of Prior Convictions 1
 Assessed Security MED Security Points 10 Assigned Security MAX Mandatory Override? TIME LEFT TO SERVE (HIGHEST CRIM
 Misconduct History _____ Active Misconduct Points 0 Date of last Misconduct _____
 Parole Date 01/01/2015 Parole Stipulations ON MANDATORY 1/3 - 12/01/2004
 Parole Conditions None found

Current Patterns of Behavior

Performance Rating = Poor, Good, Excellent, Outstanding

Staff GOOD Program Participation no data Job no data
 Other Inmates GOOD Personal Hygiene GOOD Living Area GOOD

Month/Year Rating Program / Job Evaluations Assignment

Case Plan

| Initial Plan Needs | Plan of Action | Projected Enrollment | Completion | Restrictions/Comments |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Updated Plan Needs | Plan of Action | Projected Enrollment | Completion | Comments |
| NO ASSESSED NEEDS/PROG | No Plan Needed | | | 100+ Years Remain |

OMS0079D

DOC 060203A (R 7/02)

ERIKTHOM

08/01/2007 14:06

July 2007 - Jerry's scores 10 on the Custody Assessment Scale. This placed his custody level assignment at medium security rather than maximum. His new case manager did his job correctly much to the annoyance of Bobby Boone.

OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

New Arrival / Adjustment Review / Earned Credit Level

C-1-10

Inmate Information

Facility OSP Facility Arrival Date 04/15/2003 LARC Arrival Date 04/02/1980
 Name HAMILTON, JERRY W DOC Number 91102 Gender MALE Date of Birth 10/25/1952
 Date of Assessment 12/13/2007 Housing Restrictions YES Identification NO
 Name of Emergency Contact Hamilton, Sharon Relationship Wife Phone Number _____
 Address Fernhill House Tynewdd Rhondda CF425rd South Wales Will I/M reside at this address after re-entry? NO

Sentence Information

Special Conditions of NONE FOUND 85% NO 57 O.S. 1991 NO
 Suspended 75% Sec 521 eligible
 Sentence / Parole _____
 PPWP eligibility NO Days Remaining 40242
 Prior Convictions YES Number of Prior Convictions 1
 Assessed Security MAX Security Points 20 Assigned Security MAX Mandatory Override? TIME LEFT TO SERVE (HIGHEST CRIM
 Misconduct History 1 Active Misconduct Points 0 Date of last Misconduct _____
 Parole Date 01/01/2015 Parole Stipulations ON MANDATORY 1/3 - 12/01/2004
 Parole Conditions None found

Current Patterns of Behavior

Performance Rating = Poor, Good, Excellent, Outstanding
 Staff GOOD Program Participation no data Job no data
 Other Inmates GOOD Personal Hygiene GOOD Living Area GOOD

| Month/Year | Rating | Program / Job Evaluations | Assignment |
|------------|--------|---------------------------|------------|
|------------|--------|---------------------------|------------|

Case Plan

| Initial Plan Needs | Plan of Action | Projected Enrollment | Completion | Restrictions/Comments |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Updated Plan Needs | Plan of Action | Projected Enrollment | Completion | Comments |
| NO ASSESSED NEEDS/PROG | No Plan Needed | | | 100+ Years Remain |

OMS0079D

DOC 060203A (R 7/02)

ERIKTHOM

12/13/2007 14:57

December 2007 - five months later, the same case manager raised his score to 20, a score of 12 or more points is maximum-security. He did this by adding escape points – actually, there were no escape points when Jerry escaped, only misconduct points and these had expired according to old prison policy, over 20 years ago.



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Classification Referral/Progress Report

REVIEW PERIOD

TO

WSP/IMU

FACILITY/LIVING UNIT:

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------|-----------------|--|------------------|--|
| 1. REFERRAL AGENT: Stan Sturgill, Ad Seg Hearing Officer | | DATE: 3/20/86 | | 2. DOB: | | 3. DOS/TS: | | 4. MxED: | |
| 5. MxED: ADJ. | | 6. SenType: | | 7. MT: | | 8. GTRD: ADJ. | | 9. EPRD: ADJ. | |
| 10. RMED: | | 11. MinReview Cal: | | 12. NEXT REVIEW: 10/86 | | 13. NEXT BOARD: | | 14. BOARD TYPE: | |
| 15. DETAINERS: | | | | | | | | | |
| 16. PURPOSE(S) OF REPORT: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 6 MO. REVIEW <input type="checkbox"/> MINR ELIG. <input type="checkbox"/> CUST. PROM. <input type="checkbox"/> CUST. DEM. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IMU/AD. SEG. <input type="checkbox"/> TR/PROG <input type="checkbox"/> INTAKE <input type="checkbox"/> UNIT ASGNMT <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSFER <input type="checkbox"/> FURLOUGH <input type="checkbox"/> W/TR <input type="checkbox"/> BOARD PROG RPT <input type="checkbox"/> PRE-PAROLE REF. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify): 30 day Review | | | | | | | | | |
| 17. UNIT TEAM COMMENTS/RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTIONS: <p>INITIAL REASON FOR PLACEMENT: Inmate Hamilton arrived at WSP on 12/29/85 from the State of Oklahoma and was placed on Ad Seg because of his involvement in a riot at that institution. Inmate Hamilton, a tier porter at that institution, was directly involved in aiding some prisoners to be let out of their cells, who then locked an officer in a cell and attempted to break into a control room. Records indicate inmate Hamilton was not a problem except for his escape from a penal institution and the present incident that caused his transfer to WSP. Records indicate also that inmate Hamilton had [REDACTED] It is noted that a referral was sent to DRC for IMU status dated 2/26/86.</p> <p>DISCIPLINARY RECORD: No infractions.</p> <p>INMATE STATEMENT: Inmate Hamilton states that he had been placed on Ad Seg at Oklahoma because of his escape. He states he had a good work record and had earned a lot of good time credits which were taken away after his escape. Inmate Hamilton now would like to stay at this institution and states he just wants us to give him a chance to live in general population and get a job. He states that if he gets into trouble here, then keep him on Ad Seg but give him a chance like we have the other four inmates sent here from Oklahoma.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION: RELEASE - Recommend inmate Hamilton be released from Ad Seg. This recommendation is made on the basis that inmate Hamilton has not been a problem since his arrival at this institution and also the reason that inmate Hamilton seems sincere in his desire to be given a new start and his desire to work and program at this institution.</p> <p>BEHAVIOR EXPECTATION: If inmate Hamilton is to be considered for release, he is expected to remain infraction free, cooperate with staff, abide by the rules</p> | | | | | | | | | |
| 18. UNIT TEAM CHAIRPERSON: | | | | | DATE: cont. | | | | |
| 19. REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION: | | | | | | | | | |
| 20. REVIEW COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON: DATE: | | | | | | | | | |
| 21. SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION: | | | | | | | | | |
| 22. SUPERINTENDENT'S SIGNATURE: DATE: | | | | | | | | | |
| 23. DIRECTOR'S REVIEW COMMITTEE ACTION: | | | | | | | | | |
| 24. [] APPROVE [] DISAPPROVE [] APPROVE [] DISAPPROVE [] APPROVE [] DISAPPROVE | | | | | | | | | |
| MEMBER SIGNATURE | | DATE | | MEMBER SIGNATURE | | DATE | | CHAIRPERSON DATE | |

NAME: LAST FIRST MIDDLE

Three months after he'd arrived there, Washington recommended Jerry be released from Ad Seg as he'd not been a problem to them. The other four Oklahoma 'rioters' that had transferred with him had already been released. This recommendation fell on deaf ears. The same thing would happen in Texas. Once he was placed in Administrative Segregation, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections made sure he could not leave.

Chapter

13

Letter 245, October 20, 2004
Wednesday

"I was called out to the staff's office and signed the enclosed notice of Pardon and Parole Board Hearing Results which I'm sending you in this letter. Well at least we won't have to sweat another parole hearing for a few years. Maybe by then prison reform will be a reality. I wish I could go to a medium security unit like Joe Harp or Connors. At least I would be able to enrol in programs, work and maybe take a vocational training course, and get visits.

No doubt if anyone tries to check and find out the outcome of my parole hearing and discover I made parole, they'll take that as a good sign that things are looking up and all that. But me, I know the system and how it works and it's hard for me to see anything positive in any of it. Sure if they paroled me to my last 20 years sentence, then yes, that would have sent out a positive message because even if they would have paroled me to my last sentence, it would still mean I've got to be locked up a few more years before I'd get out. All this is hard for people to understand unless they actually know how it works. Anyway, I suspect many will see how I made parole and take that as a hell of a victory. But if we're going to be realistic about everything, all we did is pay \$2,500 for nothing. What sense does it make to give me a parole on this 5-year sentence? I can never live long enough to reach my parole dates on all my other sentences."

The waiting was over and once the Governor had signed his parole they sent Jerry the Investigators report, it stated, he would parole to a 115-year sentence and must serve 15 years on it before being eligible for parole adding that he had three additional sentences totalling 47 years. He would not be given further relief on his other sentences. On reading these stark words I wondered how he would manage to stave off severe depression. He had no future to look forward to but years and years of existing in a tiny cell with nothing worthwhile or constructive to occupy his time. Each day was never ending. He couldn't work or program and it seemed like everything possible was being done to try to prevent us from seeing each other and marrying.

Salt was added to the wound when his sister Pam sent him a copy of an article she'd read in the Enid newspaper. Staff writer Jay Marks had interviewed Cathy Stocker, District Attorney and top prosecutor for five counties including Garfield where he'd received his 115-year sentence. She disagreed with the recommendation for his parole, mentioning at the same time that he still had several lengthy consecutive sentences to

serve - including his 115-term for robbery with a firearm. She claimed the board's decision to allow him to begin serving his next sentence would only hasten the day of his eventual release, "Hamilton is an offender who should, in my opinion, remain incarcerated for the remainder of his life" she said.

The article caught him completely off guard; it was the last thing he expected, *"This Cathy Stocker was just starting out as a prosecutor at the time of my trial. The prosecutor who tried my case for the state was also just starting out and Cathy Stocker sat throughout my trial reading for him. She clapped when I was convicted. This robbery happened in 1980 and I went to trial and was sentenced in 1981, twenty-four years ago. She acts and sounds like I'm a mad dog. You have my trial transcripts, I didn't hurt anyone, kill anyone. Yes, I held up the pharmacy by gunpoint but why does she think I should stay in prison for the rest of my life? Am I to be made an example of to all other criminals? Does she think that all armed robbers should stay in prison for the rest of their lives, or just me? My co-defendant, Terrie Simmons was given 5 years suspended sentence, does she feel this was a fair sentence for her? Am I a cold-blooded killer, a serial rapist? She knows I am not and yet she thinks I should die in here? Why? Because I and 3 other prisoners escaped from their jail, because I was an Oklahoma City parolee at the time of the robbery coming to their small town to rob a drug store to get drugs? How can someone like Cathy Stocker make public statements like this based on the fact I escaped from jail, I committed robbery for drugs?"*

We can paint a true picture of my convictions showing how these felonies were stacked on me to load me down with time and how these crimes, all except for the armed robberies and kidnap were not serious crimes. Prisons are full of prisoners with criminal records similar to or worse than mine and yet they're only doing 20-50 years. Yes I'm guilty and deserved to be put away in prison, but I am no menace or threat to society anymore as a crime breaker and I've never been a physical threat to society. So why should I spend the rest of my life locked up in a prison cell. I am not the person that Cathy Stocker claims I am.

Sharon, will you write a history of my crimes so that it will clarify exactly what I've done and show even though I do have many felony convictions some of them amounted to small time offences where the laws just charged me with crimes to stack convictions on me. A violent crime is a violent crime, no ifs or buts about it, yet in my opinion during that armed robbery that I got the 115-year sentence for there were no actions that I did during that crime that justified such a large sentence. Remember, in 1981, the usual sentence handed down at trials for armed robberies ranged from 10-35 years. The robbers who did get large sentences back then for armed robbery beat up, shot or kidnapped someone during the robbery. None of this is the case with me! The same goes with that kidnap and assault during the riot, if someone really looked into it, the events, statements etc. at least they would know I did not kidnap or assault the guard. And this is what this document needs to point out. But if someone just reads I got 115 years for armed robbery, 20 years for kidnap, they only assume things. At least if they are allowed to read a detailed description of the crime and events they'd have a better picture.

It seemed very cruel. Cathy Stocker must have known that being paroled to his 115-year sentence was nothing. He'd begin to serve it a year later anyway. He wouldn't even be eligible for parole for another 15-years according to the Investigators Report. He'd be 67 years old before he'd have another chance to get one step nearer his release and yet she felt so strongly he should spend the rest of his life in prison she wanted her opinion reported in the newspaper knowing there are men walking the streets of Oklahoma who have been released for murder convictions and crimes of actual violence far worse than the robberies Jerry had ever committed. Why would she go to this trouble to highlight his case?

Katja was of the same opinion that the comments had been biased and very unfair. It smacked of kicking a dog when he's down. It seemed to us she'd used the Enid News to promote some kind of personal vendetta. Katja sent an email but got no response so she wrote a letter from us both to Mr. Marks in Jerry's defence; she never received a reply.

With Jerry's help, I researched all of his convictions and sentences in detail and wrote a document just as he'd suggested. The offences that led to his imprisonment for five years in 1975 were fairly minor. In the conviction for carrying a firearm after a former offence, the gun was not actually found in his possession. Two police officers had entered a bar where he'd been having a drink with a group of friends. After checking people's IDs including his own, one of the officers told him to come outside. Once they'd left the bar, he was handcuffed and placed under arrest on suspicion of being in possession of a stolen motorcycle. Some minutes later the second officer came out of the bar holding a gun in his hand. Jerry denied the gun was his, but he was charged nevertheless.

In another incident he'd been left alone in a friend's car to sleep off the effects of drugs and alcohol. The car was parked outside an apartment block. Sometime during the night, the police were called when a woman living nearby reported seeing a man breaking into parked vehicles. Checking each vehicle on arrival the police shone their torch upon Jerry, they banged on the window to wake him up and ordered him to get out of the car. They called the woman over and asked if it was Jerry she'd seen, she said she couldn't tell if he was the same man or not. Searching the car, the police found a toolbox lying on the floor behind the drivers seat, it turned out to be stolen. Rather than snitch on his friend, he took the blame and ended up with a conviction for second-degree burglary.

In the third charge of withholding stolen property after a former conviction he was arrested for possession of a stolen driver's license. Of course if he'd been a law abiding citizen he wouldn't have fallen on the wrong side of the law, but at least with this latest document it would now be possible for anyone who was interested to see at a glance the exact nature of his crimes making it easier for each person to judge whether he should be forced to languish in a cell until he died. It wasn't as though he could make amends in prison or do anything that would lead to something constructive and worthwhile because he could not.

Jerry wrote to Paul to tell him he wouldn't be requiring his services in the future and asked to be sent a copy of the parole packet. He wanted to see the contents, especially the letters that had been written by members of his family. When we retained Paul he'd promised we would have a copy of the parole packet and a copy of Jerry's records. Over the coming months I emailed and phoned his office several times but could make no headway. Paul did manage to get Jerry's medical records for which we paid extra but that was all we received. We have no idea what kind of a parole packet was submitted because not one of us has ever seen a copy. Of course it's possible without Paul's input Jerry might not have paroled to his next sentence and would have had to wait until he discharged it naturally a year later. I for one didn't regret hiring an attorney because we had to at least try to achieve something positive. I didn't hold Paul responsible for his failure to parole Jerry past his 115-year sentence, but it was deeply disappointing that we didn't even get the records we'd so desperately wanted. Without them it was more difficult to show the discrepancies surrounding his transfer to Texas. These records would have made it easier to document the many irregularities of his Level and Earned Credits. We knew the statement from Mike Pruitt at the time of the riot would expose the lies he'd told in comparison to the statements we already had from the other officers on duty that night. It was a difficult time, but picking ourselves up and brushing off the dust, we carried on.

At the end of September another ray of hope had appeared on the horizon when I emailed Lee Mann to ask if I was now cleared to visit. Her response revealed that Interpol had requested some additional information and she was expecting to hear something very soon. This at least sounded encouraging. I wondered if my letter had spurred Interpol into action although I had no confirmation it had ever reached them? The end of October brought the good news that events had finally turned in our favour. Lee Mann confirmed they had completed their background check at last and I'd been granted approved visitor status. I would need to present two forms of ID on my next visit. She emphasised however that my background check was the very last Interpol was prepared to conduct.

I phoned Katja straight away and she emailed Ms. Mann to find out what was happening. We'd mailed our applications at the same time after being told to do so by Warden Mullin, the previous April. Unfortunately, Katja had sent hers by certified mail and OSP had refused to accept it. It had taken until late July for her to find out this information by chance and so it wasn't until mid August that they received her second application. Now that Interpol were refusing to conduct background checks Katja was on pins to know how she could become an approved visitor. She was told to find an agency that could conduct a background check and have them send it directly to OSP. Why didn't they tell us that in the first place? We could have applied for these checks right at the very beginning when we'd first been prevented from visiting.

We guessed it would take Katja a while to arrange everything; in the meantime I paid my airfare for a November visit, I wasn't going to risk another roadblock being put in my way and looked upon my ticket as a kind of insurance policy. I believed the only reason I'd been granted my non-contact visit in June was because I could show I'd paid for and been forced to cancel my flight the previous February. I wrote to tell Jerry to submit a request for a special visit for Wednesday, 24th through to Saturday 27th. I chose these dates because the Thursday was Thanksgiving and a free visiting day at OSP. We would be able to see each other over a four-day period rather than three.

I waited with a mixture of excitement and apprehension to hear from him that he'd sent in the application. I'd already decided I wouldn't put myself through the stress of phoning Mike Pruitt, but would contact Lee Mann. I received the news by mid November that Jerry had sent in the paperwork. I emailed Ms. Mann straight away and she replied the same day confirming that I could visit. It had been so easy to arrange and this time we would be allowed to have physical contact. I could have jumped for joy.

There was no time to re-submit our marriage application and organise the first of our counselling sessions, we'd have to do that at a later date. My main priority for now was to see Jerry. He'd been so down after his parole and with no end in sight to the visiting ban I'd been very concerned for his health and welfare. Although he'd had many years of dealing with high levels of stress, deprivation and disappointment the lows he'd reached in October meant he'd suffered some kind of viral infection that had laid him out both physically and mentally. I longed to be there for him in person to lift his spirit.

A chance remark by the Chaplin during our meeting the year before had sewn a seed in my mind. I'd mentioned how I'd flown to Oklahoma City via Chicago, and he'd asked me why didn't I fly direct to Dallas Fort Worth in Texas? That way I wouldn't have the rigmarole of changing planes. I'd been grateful for this information but at the time of my visit in June I felt it was safer to drive from Oklahoma City to McAlester because at least I'd made the journey with Jeff and Tania and had some idea of what to expect. Once I'd got approval for my visit I called American Airlines. It was possible to fly direct to Texas but I'd have to leave from Gatwick rather than Heathrow airport. I booked a morning flight and my hire car. All I had to do was buy a road map and work

out the route I'd have to take to get from Dallas Fort Worth to McAlester. I wanted to see Jerry so much; somehow I'd have to quell the fear that was already lurking in the pit of my stomach at the thought of driving in the US again.

It was never easy leaving my family, especially my mother and Chris who relied upon me a lot. My sons always stepped in to help while I was away and not once did I receive any criticism for my commitment to Jerry. I'd used my credit card to finance my trip in June and had just finished clearing the debt in time for this next visit.

Gatwick airport was further from my home but at least when I reached there after driving through the night I was pleased to find the roads into the airport were easy to negotiate. All I needed to do when I arrived in Texas was find my way out of the airport complex, get onto the I-635 heading east that would eventually run past the exit for Highway 75, then drive approximately 200 miles to McAlester. Surely I could manage to do that?

Throughout the flight I tried to distract myself and stave off any worrying thoughts. Remembering the lesson from my first visit when the temperatures had been in the 80s and 90s in late October, I wasn't taking any chances with November and had brought clothes to suit both summer and winter just in case. It had been freezing when we'd left Gatwick, ten hours later as I made my way to the courtesy bus that would take me to the car rental, the mid afternoon weather in Dallas was in the seventies with hazy sunshine.

The assistant in the Dollar Rental took my details and handed over the keys of my economy car, the same model I'd hired in June. I asked him for directions. He took out a ready printed sheet, highlighted the bits that I should follow, and politely pointing the way to the underground parking lot he told me I'd find my car parked in one of the bays.

Several minutes later, having wandered around in the subdued light lost amongst the confusion of vehicles, I managed to locate it. I loaded my luggage and tried to settle my nerves telling myself I'd driven once before, I could do it again.

Repeating out loud the directions I'd been given I turned left out of the booth following the exit signs until I reached the first set of traffic lights. It was as though I'd never driven in the States before. Fear gripped me from my head to my toes. I turned left as the lights changed to green, crippling horror struck as I realised immediately my mistake. I was driving in the wrong direction. My only saving grace was that this section of the airport road was deserted except for a pickup bearing down upon me headlights flashing like mad. I pulled to a dead stop and could only watch in mortal embarrassment as the driver sped past showing me in vivid sign language what he thought about me. As soon as the pickup had distanced itself in my rear view mirror I shifted the control and drove as fast as I could in reverse until I was able to turn back into the road I'd just exited. I stopped the car, every natural instinct screaming to abandon it and fly home. I sat frozen as the seconds ticked away. Luckily the road remained deserted. I considered pulling the car onto the grass verge and aborting my attempt to drive to McAlester, but I knew that was not an option. I had to do this somehow and I had to do it safely. The lights changed again, swallowing my fear and edging out slowly I drove far enough this time to cross the wide concrete road. Reaching the other side, making my left turn as I did so I prayed for help so that I could get to McAlester in one piece.

Driving north for a few miles, I joined the I-635. The roads began to widen until I was sandwiched between six lanes of very fast traffic. Most of my motoring back home is spent on the slow roads of the narrow South Wales valleys. Nothing could prepare me for Dallas or the speed and erratic driving of the Texans. It was far worse than Oklahoma City had been. I was forced to keep up with everyone or risk being hit like a scared rabbit. Just like my first driving experience, I was bathed in sweat from fear and concentration. I followed the overhead signs, fighting my way into the correct lanes, not an easy task remembering that I had six to choose from. Twenty minutes later I was exiting I-635 sweeping around in a left arc for Highway 75. I could feel some of

the tension leaving me. All I had to do was keep on the 75 until it changed to Highway 69 and this would take me to the outskirts of McAlester.

My fear had levelled off when I joined the expressway that merged with Highway 75. Feeling settled enough to be able to take in my surroundings; I noticed the section I was driving along was named after President George Bush. Everything seemed enormous with roads and buildings sprawling across the open landscape. There was so much space. It made Britain look like toy town. I passed a building that was the proud owner of an American flag the size of a house the light breeze causing it to wave from side to side in slow motion. I smiled to myself, as children my father would tell us how everything was BIG in Texas. When I was twelve my parents bought the largest house in our area. Built in 1911 for a mining agent; it has eight bedrooms and is surrounded by acres of woodland. A few years after we moved in he decided to convert it into a small hotel soothing my mother's worries by telling her to think big like the Americans. All those memories flooded back to me as I drove along.

Dusk was falling and I felt relaxed enough to turn on the radio. I kept to the right of the two lane highway travelling at a steady 55 miles an hour listening to country songs and dreaming about seeing Jerry the next day. We'd be able to talk in comfort this time and hold hands. I'd told Mary to expect me sometime between 8 and 9pm. She'd warned me the place would be full this time because of Thanksgiving.

I'd been awake for many hours and was starting to feel very tired but kept telling myself to keep on keeping on because I was almost in McAlester. I just had a few more miles left of driving along the unlit country roads. With nightfall I'd had to turn off the radio because of the constant interference of static, all I had to listen to was the hypnotic hum of the car wheels. Driving along I could make out some lights up ahead in the distance on my right. I couldn't really judge how far away they were. I slowed down trying to get my bleary eyes to focus in order to make out what it was. As I neared I could see a very large broken down truck on the side of the road. I did what I'd have done under similar circumstances back home and pulled out so that I was straddling both lanes allowing a safe distance between the truck and my car. A brightly lit vehicle was parked behind the truck, and a shadowy figure stepped out into the road shining a torch in my direction as I drove past. The thought flashed through my mind that it might have been a police officer but I hadn't been sure. I had no idea why he'd shone the torch in my direction and I wasn't going to stop to find out so I continued driving, edging back into the right lane.

I hadn't gone very far when a light startled me as it hit my left side mirror. I looked up to see what was to my eyes an American movie style cop car with its roof lights flashing. I slowed down from 45 to 35 thinking it would pass me but it stayed right behind. I was confused and didn't have a clue what to do. Back home if the police want to stop a vehicle they will flash their headlights or sound the siren indicating you must pull over, but this police car did nothing except follow closely behind and in my confusion I kept on driving. I nearly jumped out of my skin when he turned on his siren.

I brought my car to a halt on the hard shoulder and awaited my fate. I guessed I'd done something wrong but I had no idea what it was except it must be to do with the way I'd passed the broken down truck? I wound down my window and came face to face with the angriest looking police officer I'd ever seen. He ordered me out of my car and into his. I sat down not knowing whether to laugh or cry. With everything I'd just been through this was the last thing I needed. I was exhausted and after all the perspiring I'd done my deodorant had long lost its effectiveness and I guessed I didn't smell too sweet. I was so self conscious but he didn't seem to notice, he was too busy telling me off and had already begun filling out what I thought was my on the spot fine. I did try to explain I'd only just landed in the US and hadn't realised I'd broken any rules, but he was so angry he didn't take any notice and said he was going to book me. He asked to

see my driver's license, fumbling around in my bag I handed it over and waited for his reaction, I knew in his anger he'd missed the fact I wasn't even an American. "What's this?" he said. I'd got his attention at last and was able to explain my inexperience and that in my own country the way I'd passed the broken down vehicle was perfectly within the law. To my great relief he calmed down instantly, but gave me a stern lecture on how under those circumstances motorists must indicate and move fully into the left lane as soon as possible before passing any right side obstruction. Lecture over he filled out a form, asked me to sign it and then gave me a copy stating that he'd let me off this time with a warning. He asked me where I was heading and when I told him he said he'd follow me until he felt it was safe to leave me loose amongst the poor citizens of McAlester. I thanked God when two miles later I branched left and he continued straight on making for the expressway.

Arriving at hospitality House, I said a heartfelt prayer of thanks before turning off the engine. Mary let me in and after we'd gone through the ritual greeting and completed the usual formalities, I showered, settled myself in my room and collapsed into bed. Before switching the light off I examined the warning notice I'd just received. A few minutes later I drifted off to sleep with the events of the day spinning around in my head. I'd done it! By a miracle I'd reached my destination in one piece and had even managed to escape a fine.

When I awoke, daylight was filtering into my room. I drew back the curtains and everywhere was coated with a thick covering of frost that surprised the hell out of me because it hadn't been cold at all when I'd arrived the night before. I was alone, but Mary assured me this would change by the evening when she expected the place to be filled with all those who'd come for a Thanksgiving visit the next day. I felt very pleased to be there for this special holiday. I'd seen Thanksgiving portrayed in films and television programmes many times over the years so it was an opportunity to experience it for myself if only second hand from speaking with the visitors Mary insisted would arrive.

The following morning Jerry and I were elated to see each other and to be able to hug and kiss for a brief moment, but I was alarmed to see that stress and illness had taken its toll on his physical appearance since I'd last seen him in June. We talked and held hands the whole time except for when we needed to relieve the tension in our shoulders from having to stretch across the table. We caught up on all the news and discussed the documents Katja and I had written. The luxury to talk freely, share concerns and problems, to laugh and express our love was such a release and as the hours passed I could see a transformation in his features as if a magic brush had been passed along his face taking ten years off in the process. It was wonderful to witness.

That first day it was quiet and we were able to visit for the full four hours. I've always found the officers on visiting duty to be polite and friendly as much as their job allows. When we've been asked to leave even though the room has not been full I've known it's because they were following orders. Just like that first day in June when they ended our non-contact visit after only two hours.

It was 12.30pm when I walked out of the prison gate past the little museum that houses "Old Sparky" the electric chair. Old Sparky became defunct in the 1960s, these days they execute by lethal injection in Oklahoma. I strolled up to the east security gate so that I could collect three large manila envelopes containing copies of everything Jerry had ordered when he'd reviewed his records. It would get dark early and with no TV or radio to distract me, sifting through all the paperwork would help to occupy some of my free time.

Mary had been correct, the place became so full she ask me to share my room with another woman. There were two single beds so I didn't find this a problem. It was nice to be able to sit around the kitchen table chatting with everyone. I watched with inter-

est as one lady baked herself some sweet cinnamon rolls for breakfast, something I'd never consider eating at that time of day. The women were all ages and it was obvious that most were struggling to get by. They were mothers, wives and girlfriends. They weren't all visiting loved ones at OSP as McAlester has other prisons of lower security. I was relieved otherwise we'd have been vying for a place in the same visiting room. Everyone lived in Oklahoma but came from places four or five hours drive away. It made sense to travel the day before and stay in the locality, avoiding what would have meant a 3 or 4am start in order to arrive early enough to guarantee the maximum time with their loved one. They were curious about me. Two women who stayed on a regular basis told me they'd never met a visitor from overseas. They were amazed I'd travelled from Great Britain and impressed that I'd driven in Dallas because they'd heard how crazy the drivers were down there.

Next day the visiting room was full from the word go and we were told I'd have to leave after only two hours. On the way out I picked my way past the bored and tired looking people sitting on the steps leading down from the security shakedown area. This pathetic sight took the edge off the disappointment I felt from having to leave so soon. I wouldn't have liked to see anyone turned away a fate that sometimes befalls those who are delayed in their arrival. They hang around till the twelfth hour hoping against hope to be let in. I can only imagine how disappointing it must be bearing in mind many of them are very poor and can barely afford the gas to travel to McAlester. One officer told me that was the part he really disliked, having to turn people away when it was busy.

Driving wasn't an issue for me during my stay as I stuck to the usual places. I found the weather unusual with heavy frost and biting cold in the morning but pleasantly warm by the afternoon, so much so that I wore just a t-shirt and jeans. The leaves had taken on their autumn colours but were still firmly in place and the grey squirrel, American conqueror of the British countryside was a common sight as I took my daily exercise. Jerry wondered why I didn't explore more, I tried to explain that it was a luxury for me to be able to rest and relax when we weren't visiting because my daily routine back home was very hectic, especially since I'd taken on the task of helping him. I'd had months of writing letters and documents, not to mention the hassle and stress to get back on his approved visitor list. Added to this, it took a while to recover from the great distance I had to travel and I suppose there must have been a certain amount of jet lag given the 6-hour time difference. Besides, I was using some of the time when I wasn't seeing him to check through all the paperwork I'd picked up from the east gate. As I sifted through it, I discovered that in his haste to choose as much as he could, he didn't realise that a lot of what he asked to be copied was already in our possession. There was some new information that filled in a few gaps and prompted more questions but on the whole I could find nothing significant. Of course the main documents he'd wanted and the very reason he'd hired a lawyer to try to obtain them remained unaccounted for.

I kept in touch with Katja by emailing daily from the library. She still hadn't received confirmation of approved visitor status yet. She'd managed to get a criminal background check completed and had the document in her possession, but Lee Mann insisted they could not accept it because it must come direct from the originating agency. She told her she was unable to advise her as to how she could become approved to visit without meeting the background clearance requirement. She placed emphasis on the fact that Warden Mullin and Deputy Director Boone would not approve anyone without a background check from an appropriate agency. Katja persisted in her quest and was finally able to arrange for one to be sent directly to OSP by the East Sussex Police Data Protection Unit. Ms. Mann still wasn't satisfied telling her it now had to come from the embassy, not a local law enforcement agency. We were flummoxed. The

Data Protection Unit provided background checks for each county in the UK. If the document was not acceptable to OSP, she didn't have a clue who else to contact. For obvious reasons we don't have a UK embassy in the UK so this was out of the question. We wondered who'd given Ms. Mann this advice? Katja emailed again to ask but hadn't received a reply when I left for McAlester.

Saturday came all too soon and our final visit ended with an embrace and my promise to return for our marriage counselling as soon as I could. We felt fairly secure now that I was on his approved visitor list that we'd have no further problems arranging to see one another. But Jerry warned me if they could find a way to stop us from marrying, they would. I didn't know how true his words were at the time. Before I'd left him I promised that when I got back, I would write to any person or organisation I could think of who might be willing to take an interest. He nodded his head in approval and smiled wearily.

Early the next morning I let myself out of Hospitality House as quietly as I could. It was still dark as I scraped the thick frost off the windscreen. I drove off with a heavy heart, always the same feeling each time. Heading out of town along South Main Street I settled my nerves as much as I could. I was pleased because the further I travelled the more relaxed I began to feel. I watched as the strengthening dawn light gradually began to turn the monotone passing landscape into the golden reds and browns of a beautiful autumn day. I liked the little I'd seen of Oklahoma and I liked McAlester. I just wished Jerry could get to see what I could see. Stuck in prison for all these years, he may as well have been living on Mars.

My fear returned as I hit the city limits but I kept it at a manageable level and arrived shaking but very relieved at the Dollar rental. My flight wasn't scheduled to leave until 3.15pm and I was in check in by 11am. Dallas Fort Worth airport is magnificent and has an endless choice of places to eat and shops to wander around so the time passed quickly. With the six-hour difference, it's actually a night flight home and has a very different atmosphere to the outward daytime flight. Most passengers sleep through the greater part of the journey. I managed to get my head down for an hour, but that was all.

We landed in a rather forlorn, damp Gatwick just after 6am the next day and when I got to my car, the battery was dead. Not a pleasant experience bearing in mind I was tired and missing Jerry, but at least free help was on hand allowing me to make it home safe and sound by early afternoon.

Chapter

14

Letter 286, December 26, 2004
Sunday

"2005 is right around the corner and on January 12th I start my 25th calendar year in prison. That's a long time, Sharon. I was 27 when I started these consecutive sentences and now here I am 52 years old. Surely I'm not such a serious threat to society that I should spend my entire life in a cell? Yes I deserved to be punished and locked up. I was an out of control drug addict. I would commit a crime and I didn't care what happened but now I do. I have you, people who care about me, I am no longer a threat or danger to society in any way, shape or form. I will never commit another crime or go back to that fast life and drugs. And yet here I sit a changed man and to those who hold the cards, the power of my life and future it seems to make no difference to them at all. To them it's not about if I'm a changed man, it's about what I did in my past. They never let you live down your past and you're judged and punished time and time again for what you've done in the past. Like these people are justifying screwing me around on my level, security points etc. not because of my actions of the 2000's but because of what I did 2 decades ago.

You know that Re-entry law, it explains how it can more or less let prisoners out who have so many consecutive sentences they'll never get out any other way. The Parole Board has the same authority and power to do everything that new Re-entry law can do. The Parole Board has the power to run my sentences concurrently, to cut my sentences, to parole all my sentences at once. They have the power to parole my sentences under the stipulation that I agree to parole firstly to a half-way house for 6 months, that I attend drug abuse counseling and all that. They have the same authority granted to them to do the same things this new Re-entry law does, but like anything else in life it all boils down to money and who's in your corner, fighting for you, pulling for you.

The bottom line is the law makers and politicians know there is no way I could ever serve Time on all my consecutive sentences because I have too many of them. Anyone with half a brain would know that if I haven't endured enough heartaches and suffering and regrets by now, I never will. If I have not changed for the better by now, I never will. The truth is, another day, week, month, year, decade for me in prison makes no difference at all as far as punishing me, making me reflect on things, have regrets and be sorry for all I've done. If I haven't endured enough punishment all these years and reflected on life in general by now, I never will. So what I'm trying to point out here and say is, the courts, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, prison folks, parole board members and society will all agree 25 years of a persons life spent in prison is a long, long time and

I can never reach the end of my sentences, parole wise and I can never discharge them. So what's going on now is not about actually punishing me for crimes I committed per se, but to deprive me of any real hope of a life and future out there in the free world if I did get out. Statistics show that someone like me, if given the opportunity of getting out the likelihood of my coming back is slim. All those who've gotten close to me know I would never fuck up or come back to prison if I got out. Everyone knows I've served enough time and paid for the crimes I've committed and yet those with the power of my life and future in their hands won't let me move forward."

The search continued to try to find someone who would help us to help Jerry so that his prison records would at last begin to contain proof of his willingness to progress. I longed to see him have something constructive to do with his time rather than spend each day confined to his cell struggling to find meaning and keep hope alive. He was housed on A-unit where prisoners have an opportunity to work in the print shop. He'd been told he was on the waiting list yet he saw men released from H-unit after serving their punishment receive jobs within four to five months of applying while all his requests were ignored despite his clean disciplinary record. Prisoners do not have many rights, but the law states that they have a right, circumscribed by legitimate prison administration considerations, to fair and regular treatment during their incarceration.

For the first two and a half years after his arrival in Texas he worked and had a clean disciplinary record. He also kept up a continuous letter writing campaign to be returned. But as we have seen, everything changed when he filed his first lawsuit in 1990. Within a matter of weeks after he'd filed the lawsuit, he received two disciplinary cases.

There was no state of emergency at OSP when he was transferred to Texas. He'd been released to general population with the approval of Director Gary Maynard, Warden Saffle and Lee Mann, who was his case manager at that time. His release to general population confirmed he was no longer seen as a threat to the security of the facility.

One month after his arrival, Warden Saffle wrote to tell him he'd not asked for him to be sent to Texas, but that he believed his transfer would hopefully give him a fresh start. He tried to make the best of this so called "fresh start" but could see from the beginning that things were not as they should be as far as the implementation of the Interstate Compact was concerned.

In February 1990, he filed a habeas corpus lawsuit for illegal confinement. He'd wondered what Texas would do next if they were not challenged, would they place him on death row? This was an exaggeration of course, but not miles from the truth considering everything he was experiencing. He was granted an evidentiary hearing during which Texas told the court magistrate the 45-year sentence was a means to keep track of his security status on their computers. Siding with Texas, the magistrate dismissed the lawsuit as frivolous. However, from that time onwards, he stopped receiving earned credits from Texas, *"If this 45-year sentence was simply a means to reflect my security status on their computers, why would I get monthly good time slips and why would their parole board records show I was doing an aggravated sentence for 45-years? And anyway, by law their computers should have reflected I was serving a 25-year Oklahoma sentence."*

Confined to Ad Seg he was desperate to make some kind of positive progress. He applied and was granted approval to join the PAMIO program for aggressive offenders in February 1992, *"I'm there 2 years getting excellent reports. The Classification people running the PAMIO program did all they could to get my Ad Seg status lifted off me, get my lost earned credits returned because they knew I was getting fucked around. They knew I wasn't the out of control hard ass mifer that the disciplinary reports claimed I was. After all they were the doctors, the professionals, experts in the human*

psyche and behavior. Hell, Sharon, 2 or 3 psychologists even called the Oklahoma Interstate Compact Coordinator and Director and spoke to them personally trying to help me get returned. I was in their offices when they did this.

Once a prisoner is discharged from the PAMIO program they are returned to the prison unit they came from and back to the same security status. In my case, back to Ad Seg lock up because Oklahoma via Texas officials would not agree with the PAMIO Classification folks and lift my Ad Seg status. They couldn't keep me any longer so I was released from PAMIO and sent back to the Hughes Unit. I did not catch a disciplinary case or anything at the time to get returned to Ad Seg. I was placed there because Oklahoma wanted to keep me there, just like they did when I was in Washington State."

In March 1994 whilst being transferred from Clements to Hughes Unit in Texas one of his property bags weighing around fifty pounds disappeared. It contained his legal papers, and the most important of his prison records, including the paperwork that was missing when he'd eventually reviewed his records. He was devastated and wrote many letters during the months that followed to various personnel in Texas and Oklahoma in an effort to locate the missing bag. Deeply frustrated, he sent a letter to Larry Fields the new director of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections threatening to name him as a defendant in yet another civil rights lawsuit. How could a bag that size, stamped on the outside with his name and number, filled with his personal legal papers and prison records, each item clearly marked with his details, stay missing? He'd filed grievances immediately, filled in the necessary forms, yet he was never to see the bag or its contents again. It seemed every time he tried to better his situation not long afterwards something would happen to shoot him down in flames.

That summer Texas finally released him from Ad Seg, to the relative freedom of general population, in reality this release was not worth the paper it was written on. The reason for this can be traced back to the racially turbulent 1960s and the infamous San Quentin prison in California where white prisoners banding together for protection, formed themselves into a gang called the Aryan Brotherhood. Eventually copycat gangs formed amongst all races of prisoner in other states including Texas. The Texas prison administration decided that any prisoner proved to be an active gang member would be placed in administrative segregation by policy. This was to have a huge bearing on Jerry's future.

Discharged from the PAMIO Program he had paperwork from the psychologists recommending he be single celled. Once he was released, he discovered he would have to share contravening their recommendations. More worrying than this was the fact they were going to force him to share with a black prisoner. He refused to integrate. He was taken in front of a disciplinary hearing, found guilty of refusing a direct order and placed in solitary for 15 days. This procedure was repeated three times; on each occasion he refused to integrate and was forced to do another stretch in solitary. He was released after the third stretch sometime between 2 and 3 in the morning. A black prisoner named Gabriel was released with him.

Jerry takes up what happened next, *"The third time I was released from solitary instead of my being taken to 7 building where they knew I'd only refuse to integrate and the whole process would start again, in a change of tactic, I was escorted under the orders of Security Major Brock to 1 building, the administration block where the various wardens and other staff had their offices. There was a bench outside the building where us prisoners were made to sit while waiting to speak with whoever wanted to speak with us. I had all my property with me in tote bags. Gabriel was with me. He had all his property too and was refusing housing and refusing to work in the fields. He wasn't being integrated; he just didn't want to work in the fields, at least that's what he told me.*

We were told to sit on the bench and wait. Around 5.30 the Security Major along

with Warden Garner and his 3 associate wardens came out of the building heading for the officers dining room. As they passed us, Major Brock looked at me and told me to change my shoes because I was going to be put to work in the fields. I had on a pair of tennis shoes, and told him they were the only shoes I had. Major Brock told a guard who was near by to go to necessities and get me a pair of work boots. The Major left to eat breakfast. He returned later with his goon squad suited up for business. Remember, I hadn't even been assigned to a cell. I had all my property with me so I knew this was not about sending me to the fields to work that very day.

The guards surrounded us both but then they told Gabriel to get over in the corner and out of the way. This was all on video - it was filmed. The Major gave me a direct order to turn round and cuff up. If their intention was to just lock me up, why didn't the guards simply escort me back to lock up once I'd refused to integrate as they'd done before? I turned around and put my arms behind me to let the guards handcuff me. There were approximately 10 guards and the Security Major. I was getting handcuffed when one of the guards pulled and squeezed my upper arm real tight. That's when I said fuck this and just reacted back in a physical way. I knew they were going to kick my butt before I got to where they were going to take me so I choose to stand like a man.

By the way, when all the guards jumped me Gabriel grabbed one of the guards to get him off me and they whipped him too. I was taken to a quad in 8 building; this was the quad reserved for prisoners who are always getting in trouble, catching disciplinary cases. Everyone placed there lost all privileges. I'd been in a cell on my own for about a week when my cell door was opened and this black guy was standing there carrying all his property. I told the guards I wasn't being integrated, walked out of the cell and sat down at one of the day room tables. Before I walked out, I told the black guy what they were trying to do, what I was doing and why. I explained it was nothing personal towards him but I wasn't going to allow them to force integration upon me. Luckily the guy understood. Remember a lot of blacks were refusing to integrate. A few days later I was escorted to Ad Seg. I signed Ad Seg papers just like all prisoners do when they are placed there. I was placed in Ad Seg because the Texas Department of Corrections confirmed me as an affiliated gang member. Remember, I was not placed there because of disciplinary reasons, assaults or whatever, but because of being confirmed as a gang member. It was all a set up, Sharon. You can believe that or not."

He wasn't the only white prisoner in Texas refusing to integrate, there were many others and each of them was caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. If they would not integrate they risked being tagged as a gang member and locked in Ad Seg. If they joined a gang, they still risked being locked in Ad Seg, either way they couldn't win. In desperation they came up with the only solution they could think of, they formed an organisation called, "The Aryan Nations", affiliating themselves to the, "Church of Jesus Christ Christian". A legal document was drawn up and copies made for each prisoner to sign. Citing examples of 11 "free world" Civil Rights lawsuits, they attempted to put forward the case for non-integration. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, they argued that they were Christian fundamentalists with a belief in the separation of each race for religious reasons rather than racial prejudice. Jerry sent his signed declaration to the Interstate Compact Office in Oklahoma. What was his motive? It was simple, over the years he'd received letters from Oklahoma compact officers, emphasising how he must work and prove his willingness to reform in order for them to consider in a positive light his requests to be returned. He was now a confirmed gang member, confined in Ad Seg by a Texas policy. He put it to Oklahoma that they must allow him back because it was impossible for him to fulfil their conditions for his return. He couldn't work, or prove his desire for reform. It was his last ditch attempt to return to his home state. At the same time, he hoped that by declaring

himself to be a Christian Fundamentalist Texas would have to admit he was not a gang member in the true sense of the word. They would have to release him to general population and drop their insistence that he integrate. If all of this failed, he reasoned that Oklahoma would have to recognise he was being confined in Ad Seg illegally.

In the end there was no positive outcome, the Texas administration used their rules to demote him to their lowest level. They took away years of his earned credits, even though they did not have the power to do so. Texas notified Oklahoma, and they did the same, lowering him to level 1. Level 1 is punishment level according to Oklahoma policy, it denies all privileges and prevents credits from being earned. He was in effect punished twice for the same offence. He was forced to endure the terrible restrictions of Ad Seg without a respite from 1994 until 2003. It's been said by experts in penology that prisoners who spend years and years locked up in this way become insane and inhuman while only a tiny percentage of very strong individuals like Jerry survive the ordeal physically and mentally intact.

Despite being in Ad Seg, his good behaviour meant he was able to climb back up to the highest Texas level. As a result, Texas restored his lost credits. In contrast Oklahoma refused to follow suit. This decision meant he stayed at punishment level according to their classification for nine years until his return to OSP in 2003 this was unprecedented. During these years, he served what is known as "dead time", he didn't take a single extra day off his 25-year sentence. There is no doubt that Oklahoma broke the law when they kept him at their lowest level for all those years. They also broke the law each time they took away his earned credits because of a Texas disciplinary.

And what about his attitude to black prisoners and other non-whites? This is his explanation, *"Now about the integration, Sharon. When I hit Ad Seg there in Texas in 1990, Texas was not forcing prisoners to integrate. But in 1992, they decided they would. So when they let me off Ad Seg in '94 and tried to force integrate me I knew Oklahoma was having Texas do this. See, Oklahoma also started force integrating in 1992. I've found all this out since I got back. And supposedly all prison units within the State of Oklahoma were force integrating except McAlester because they knew there would be a lot of killing and yes, your black prisoners, just like my race of prisoners don't like the idea of being forced to integrate."*

Hell, I'm 53 years old and I have not so much as even slept in a cell with a black, only whites and Indians. My last cellie was a War Chief in the Indian gang here in McAlester. It's not that I'm a racist or real prejudiced or anything like that, it has to do with workings, ways, dealings of prison and prisoners, that's all. And this is what the free world people don't know or can't quite grasp. They cannot compare the ways of prison, to free world ways. Just because a prisoner would rather that other prisoner be Black, White, Indian or Mexican and refuses to integrate does not necessarily mean he's a racist. We in prison have codes and laws of the land we abide by for self-preservation and survival. Just like out in society, people and places have different codes of behavior that people must abide by, certain ways to act while in public.

Blacks, Whites, Indians, Mexicans, band together in their races to stop the system from force integrating them. For example, if a white integrates with a black, then the whites will label him as a nigger lover and he is facing the might of those within the white population who come back on him for integrating. The white prisoners who are gang members frown upon whites that cell with a black and blame them for the system integrating prisoners. Let's say I go out to a medium security unit and I cell with a black prisoner, from that moment on I will be looked upon as a race trader and it will follow me no matter where I go within the Oklahoma prison system and cause me many conflicts and arguments with other white prisoners that call me a race trader, nigger lover or whatever. And I will have to deal with and handle that. But you'll see by this letter I wrote Harry Reading, I'm making it very clear to him that I do not refuse to integrate

if that's what it takes for me to progress and move forward.

I'm truly not a racist Sharon, although I must conduct myself to the world and environment I'm in for self-preservation. This is something society fails to understand about the prison environment. Whereas the prison officials attempt to make it all into racism bullshit and do know what it's really all about. Just like they know I'm not a racist or a gang member. You have seen how they have turned all this gang affiliation and refusing to cell with a black from all this Texas information to use against me. There is not a single incident where I have ever been in a confrontation that can be construed as racist or gang activity in any of my records here in Oklahoma, Washington or Texas. Wouldn't you think that if I have spent approximately 32-33 years in prison, in three separate department of corrections that if I were a racist, a gang member, I'd have some incidents in my prison records that would indicate such?

There is nothing in my Washington or Oklahoma records that suggests I'm a gang member. Only Texas records indicate such and that came about as a ploy to try to get me out of Texas. Both Texas and Oklahoma know this. Sharon, gang members tattoo their gang affiliation on them. All my tattoos have been on me since 81-82 before gangs began in Oklahoma or Texas. When I went into the Texas system all my tattoos were photographed and it can be proven that the only tattoo that's been put on me since my receiving process into the Texas prison system is that strand of barbed wire around my right wrist and that's not a gang tattoo.

What these prison folks never tell citizens is the fact that some prisoners are forced into killing each other because they play them like a chess game. They pit prisoners against prisoners in their games of forced integration. They send young kids to prison and subject them to all this bullshit and madness and many of them are scared shitless and so they hook up with the gangs in order to fit in and be accepted or just to try and survive without getting raped or killed. And in many cases in the hope of not having to kill someone else and get more time, end up on death row. Society never knows the real story of prison and what it takes to exist and survive because they have been brain washed by these prison folks and of course they're the good guys. But there is more to this integration and gangs than meets the eye."

When he finally reviewed his records he'd found a Cell Assignment Form, dated September 2003 made out in Mike Pruitt's handwriting. It confirmed him as a member of the Aryan Brotherhood and ended with the stipulation "Do not cell with a non-white." This and the fact that his 120-day review papers labelled him with a housing restriction prompted him to write to Harry Reading, Case Manager Supervisor at OSP, "Let the record reflect I am not now, nor have I ever been a gang member here in Oklahoma nor in Texas or any other place... I explained all this to Gayle Krien and the ODOC Director. I have documented evidence to verify this."

He tried everything in his power to lose his gang member tag but Oklahoma would not let it drop. They were only too ready to accept the document claiming his membership of the Aryan Nations, but nobody would accept his counter claims and overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

When I returned home in November, I set about writing to anyone I thought might be able to help. I wrote to senators and representatives at random. My most difficult task was to condense everything in order to keep my letters a reasonable length whilst at the same time giving enough information to present Jerry's Situation in a way that would be clear and comprehensive. No matter how much I tried my letters would end up several pages in length. I mailed each one away, but never received a single reply.

That same month, Jerry told us about a new bill that had just been passed in Oklahoma to help prisoners return to society. One section advised that the Department of Corrections, should consider offenders with long-term incarceration and violent offences. Katja received a reply from the DOC when she emailed for information, she

was told the this new law specifically stated that a re-entry facility may be created only with federal or private funds, no state funds could be used. As there were no federal or private funds available the program did not exist. In January I wrote to the two state representatives responsible for proposing the bill to ask them to take an interest in his plight, once again my letter was ignored.

After our November visit, Jerry submitted yet another request to the Chaplain for us to marry. We were so disappointed when it was returned to him with the news that in order to be eligible, I would have to be on his approved visitor list for six months. The Chaplain had disregarded everything we'd been put through and was now going to force us to wait again before we'd be allowed to re-apply. It was a successful ploy to delay our marriage making us face another frustrating wait until the following April.

As January 2005 froze its way into February we kept up our search for people we could write to who might be able to help or at least point us in the right direction. Katja even set up a petition on the Internet. Before Christmas I'd began sending letters at regular intervals to the Governor of Oklahoma, writing as his fiancée pleading for clemency. Despite all this activity, we still had nothing to show for our efforts, and apart from friends and family only a few individuals signed the petition. It was during these first months of 2005 that he began talking about an old convict friend called CJ, and suggested that one of us try to make contact with him. It was a long shot, but he felt that there might be a chance CJ would be willing to at least confirm some of our assumptions concerning Jerry's time in Texas and his inability to rise higher than Level 2.

Back in the summer of 1994, Jerry had begun preparing another Civil Rights lawsuit to try to prove he was being denied meaningful access to the Courts. On the prison grapevine, he came to know about a woman in Oklahoma called Karen. She worked for an organisation that gave legal aid to indigent prisoners. In most circumstances individuals in prison are forbidden to correspond directly with one another, Jerry's idea was that Karen could act as a third party. He wrote to her and she agreed to help.

CJ had been sent to Washington State after the riot of 85 and in a similar case scenario he'd returned to OSP only to be transferred again to another state. He'd studied the law and was an excellent paralegal. Fighting his own battle for lack of meaningful access to the Courts whilst confined in New Mexico, he'd already achieved success taking his case as far as the United States Court of Appeals. Jerry felt he might stand a chance of filing a successful lawsuit if CJ could help him. Of course, having to conduct everything by open correspondence, he could not hide the fact from the DOC that he was working on his lawsuit. It was during this period that he was confirmed as a gang member. By the time the lawsuit was filed in December '94, he was buried alive in Ad Seg.

The lawsuit ran into difficulties straight away. An example of his problems can be seen in the following extract from a letter he wrote to the County Clerk for the Western District of Oklahoma, *"As I understand it, I have 15 days to fill out and return to you the above mentioned documents. Then I am supposed to serve to the Defendants a copy of this order and complaint with accompanying summons in accordance with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 4.*

I am really confused because I have no means of obtaining copies at this time, nor do I have any kind of legal assistance in helping me in my legal endeavor. I must write to a friend in Oklahoma relating my legal issues and then this person relays the issues to a third party in another state and this all takes time...I am very limited with legal preparations and have no other means of getting legal assistance except as mentioned.

I request additional length of time to respond to motions, orders, deemed fit by the Honorable Judge as my Civil Rights Complaint pertains to my not having access to the Courts or any means of legal assistance." It's rather ironic that his lawsuit was dismissed for one of the reasons it was filed in the first place, Jerry's lack of legal assis-

tance. He did his best under extreme conditions but in the end it became impossible for him to meet the court deadlines and the case was dismissed without prejudice.

Contacting CJ seemed the next logical step, but there was one big stumbling block, we didn't know where he was and the last Jerry had heard of him he was confined in Washington State. Katja approached Washington, but they had nobody in their system of that name on an interstate transfer from Oklahoma so we had no knowledge of where he could be or how to find him. We'd almost binned the idea when one evening, for no apparent reason I had a feeling he was at OSP so I checked and found my hunch was correct and that unknown to Jerry CJ had recently been returned there.

In March 2005 Katja wrote to him. She explained a little of what we'd been doing in our attempt to find help, highlighting our research and the documents we'd compiled. She talked about Jerry's inability to move forward and briefly described the details surrounding his Level and Earned Credits, asking for his legal opinion in the process. In her last paragraph, she wondered if he would consider working with Katja and myself so that we could combine our efforts to make some positive changes.

Her letter must have come under close scrutiny when it arrived at OSP because two weeks after it left the UK Jerry received notice from Warden Mullin that Katja had been permanently removed from his visitor list. As an added measure, she would also be prevented from visiting with him at any DOC facility for the duration of his incarceration. To complete the punishment, a correspondence restriction was implemented preventing them from writing to each other and warning that any attempt to circumvent the restriction could result in his being disciplined. The letter went on to state that these measures have been deemed necessary based on documentation that she was engaging in inappropriate communication with another inmate. She was accused of trying to, "Instigate and exacerbate issues to conditions of confinement that are without merit."

My initial reaction to this news was relief that we'd made the correct decision to let Katja be the one to write. This was followed closely by disbelief at the outcome. Jerry had been warning us that having forced them to place us back onto his visiting list they'd be waiting for the first opportunity to remove us again. His prediction had not been an exaggeration. The ironic part about it is that CJ had been moved from OSP pending transfer to another state before her letter could reach him. We found this out by chance a little while later when I checked the DOC website.

Warden Mullin had violated prison policy and procedure by denying them the opportunity to respond before the writing restriction and visiting ban was enforced. Jerry did the only thing he could, he filed a grievance but it was returned to him a month later stating it had been filed outside the 15-day limit. Even though he could prove that this was not the case, he was unable to pursue the matter any further.

From the time they'd began writing to each other, Katja was lucky to have the support of her immediate family in her desire to help him. She'd studied his Situation as much as I had becoming more engrossed with each new discovery. She had a small son and fitting his needs around those of helping Jerry was not an easy task, but despite many difficulties she managed to achieve a lot. She succeeded in getting hold of a copy of his 1981 trial transcript that had disappeared when his property went missing in Texas. She did so despite my having been told by his attorney Simon Wilson that it was too difficult to obtain. All this had taken perseverance, not to mention money. The visiting ban was a severe blow, but the writing ban effectively cut off the blood supply to their friendship alienating them from each other in a very short space of time. I was unable to help them. If I had acted as their go between, passing messages and so forth Jerry could have been disciplined for circumventing the writing restriction. I dared not mention her name in my letters for fear of reprisals.

There was no rule to stop her contacting CJ. Any free world person is able to write to a prisoner if they so wish. They may write to as many prisoners as they care to. I'd

read the rules and these stated that prisoners had the right to receive legal assistance from other inmates. If this is the case, why was Warden Mullin so incensed by Katja's letter that he would prevent her from having any further contact with Jerry? Prior to this harsh decision, she had written letters to the Director and other personnel with content much more damning and controversial than the letter she had sent to CJ. She once sent the Director a letter three pages in length. Taking their "Mission, Vision, Values", statement. "Our mission is to protect the Offenders, our values are, Honesty, Integrity and Credibility, holding offenders accountable through humane, firm and consistent practices", she wove into the statement a description highlighting the opposite with regard to their treatment of Jerry. It didn't even ruffle their feathers or merit an acknowledgment from them. Could it be that by writing to CJ, she'd hit upon a raw nerve?

Chapter ~ 15 ~

Letter 359, April 28, 2005
Thursday

"What I fail to understand, not once have we been able to arrange a visit without all kinds of bullshit and hassles involved. A visit is supposed to be a relaxed and happy time, not filled with uncertainties and worries.

I sent Lee Mann a request to staff this morning personally requesting a special visit with you for Wednesday May 4 through to Saturday 7 and to be allowed 4 hours each day time and space permitting. I doubt she'll even acknowledge it but at least now she can't say she was not aware that I had submitted for a special visit. How are we going to be able to have a relaxed and happy visit under those circumstances, Sharon? You are always having to go through this bullshit with them, us knowing what they're doing and why. We are at their mercy while they play with us all they want, and we have come to realize there is virtually nothing that we can do except complain and when someone complains it only brings more games and retaliation. We have not done anything for them to continuously fuck with us like they're doing.

Yes, hopefully after 5,6,7, years of putting up with their games they'll see they can't play me or manipulate me into acting crazy? Anyway, the frustrating and psychological part comes from knowing they can do whatever they want and there's nothing us prisoners can do about it but complain to our families and friends. Just like this Warden removing Katja from my visiting list and stopping us from writing, we know why he's done this; it's flat out retaliation. We are talking about the headman at McAlester and he is told what to do by the Regional Director and Director. Think about it, if the Warden will stoop to such bullshit retaliation moves what does that tell you, show you? Can you imagine how they will conspire to give prisoners bogus set up cases? Us prisoners are at their mercy, they fuck over us and if we choose to complain about it too much we get fucked over more. That's the situation we're in here at McAlester.

At least I know that you have taken the time to really listen to me when I have pointed out the ins and outs of what prisons are all about. Not once have I ever asked either of you to do anything illegal or against prison policies and rules. And yet these people here at McAlester with the backing of those in higher authority have continuously manipulated these very laws, prison policies and rules in their treatment of us."

Katja was doing what she could to get the visiting ban and restriction lifted. In the mean time, I decided I would visit Jerry. I made this decision because of Chris' failing health. When he was 11, medical tests revealed his heart and lungs were damaged

beyond repair and he was not expected to live much beyond sixteen. But Chris being Chris, he'd used his strong will and stubborn character to defy the medical profession and in January, he celebrated his 39th birthday. However, the extent of his recent deterioration had led to increased problems with his mobility and natural body functions creating a lot more work for my mother and myself. I wanted to visit just in case he would deteriorate even further making it impossible for me to leave.

Our six-month wait was almost up and we would be able re-submit our marriage application. The big uncertainty was how long we'd have to wait before we could have the first of our counselling sessions. My sensible, economical self told me I should not spend upwards of two thousand dollars on a visit that would yield nothing apart from the pleasure of seeing Jerry, but my heart told me to go while the going was good and trust that I'd find the money to return when we got the go ahead for our counselling.

In mid April, I wrote and told Jerry to submit a request for a four-day visit from May 4th to May 7th 2005. I was cutting it fine time wise to organise everything but had faith it would all work out. I'd discovered we could apply to see each other for more than the three days I'd originally been led to believe was the maximum allowed. By asking Jerry to add the word 'extended' to his request, a term I'd seen mentioned in the procedures for visitation I hoped it would place emphasis on the fact we'd qualify for extra time, due to my having to travel a great distance. Of course this would depend on available space in the visiting room each day. I couldn't imagine we'd have problems to qualify for a visit. I'd been an official approved visitor for six months and the previous November we'd seen each other for four consecutive days.

In due time I phoned Visiting Control only to discover they had no record of my impending visit on their computer. Hoping to get something in writing, I emailed Lee Mann straight away explaining the situation. Once again I was unprepared for her reply, "It is not necessary to request extended time as you will be allowed to visit hours available based on Mr. Hamilton's level." I emailed her a second time. I was confused, if there were no extended visit in place, how would visiting control know to give me the extra time? Five days passed with no reply. I phoned Visiting Control again, they confirmed what I already knew, unless a special visit had been approved by the Deputy Warden, they could only allow me a maximum of four hours and not a minute more. Under those conditions, I would be making a round trip of ten thousand miles and providing the visiting room was quiet we'd see each other for a total of four hours to be spread out over the four days. Had I lived a short walk away from the prison, I could have seen Jerry for this same amount of time every week. I sent a third email to Ms. Mann asking for her advice and waited in vain for a reply that never came.

I phoned Mike Pruitt. He told me without any hesitation that he'd denied the request. I asked him for an explanation, he said he didn't have to give me one. I reminded him I was an approved visitor and that he'd forwarded the paperwork for our visit last November. He said in that case I could come as a regular visitor dismissing outright my protest that I'd be travelling thousands of miles. He told me if I had a problem with his decision, I'd have to take it up with someone in higher authority.

I was so disappointed and frustrated by his attitude, which was nothing but outright discrimination. Jerry was not a problem prisoner and he'd not had a disciplinary for years. It wasn't as though we were asking for special treatment. OSP has a policy for allowing special visits and this was part of the official visiting procedures, in short, we had a right not to be discriminated against.

In August 2004, Jerry made a request for me to be made his official Next of Kin. His first request was ignored and so was the second. I followed up by phoning Mike Pruitt and each time he told me he'd not received the requests. During my third phone call he suggested I write to Jerry and tell him to submit another. When Jerry received this news, he decided to submit the paperwork directly to Warden Mullin. The Warden

thanked him for bringing the matter to his attention, and the request was processed, returned to the unit and eventually passed through the bean hole into his cell. When he picked it up it was to discover that someone had stapled to it forms belonging to another prisoner. He had no idea who this prisoner was. As usual he sent everything to me.

When the paperwork arrived I could see that Pruitt and Wilson had approved the transfer of the prisoner from OSP to a lower security prison. He had the same number of security points as Jerry, had been discipline free for less number of years, had convictions for robbery with a dangerous weapon, assault and battery with intent to kill and he'd escaped in 1989. This was a cruel way of driving home the fact that others were being allowed to move on and progress, but they had no intention of allowing Jerry that opportunity. It was also payback time for forcing them to place me as his 'Next of Kin'. Given everything we were being subjected to, it didn't appear that the rules concerning the individual conduct of employees of the ODOC were being taken seriously. Rule number one states their duty is to, "Perform work with diligence, honesty and impartiality".

The stress of trying to arrange a legitimate special visit was beginning to take its toll triggering a migraine attack, something I hadn't experienced for years. I didn't know what to do? I was intending to fly to America in just four days but without a confirmed special visit I'd yet to book my flight or arrange my hire car, added to all of this was the fact I suddenly found myself without a place to stay.

At the beginning of April, I received an email from Mary at Hospitality House thanking me for an Easter card I'd sent her. In the card I'd mentioned that I was intending to visit Jerry in the not too distant future and hoped I'd be able to stay as usual. She said she looked forward to seeing me. Believing I'd hear positive news from Lee Mann, I emailed Mary again at the end of April to confirm I'd be arriving the following week for a five-night stay. She didn't answer my email. I phoned and she told me she was very sorry, but she was no longer able to offer me hospitality. The rules had recently been changed so that only immediate family members of prisoners were allowed to stay there. As Jerry's fiancée I was not classed as immediate family. Why this sudden change to their rules, I wondered? It could have been a coincidence, but it certainly felt like there was a force at work doing all it could to deter me from visiting.

I floundered around trying to decide the best action to take. Jerry wouldn't have a clue what was happening, he'd be wondering if I'd managed to secure a special visit or not. He was loath to see me travel all that distance if they were only going to give us four hours. He was worried about the money involved for so little time together but I couldn't bear the thought of Wednesday arriving and my not being there for him. More out of wanting someone to tell my troubles to than any belief she'd be able to help, I emailed Tami.

Tami and I had kept in polite sporadic contact since she'd written her letter and organised Eddie's for Jerry's parole. To my relief, she replied straight away suggesting that I phone Bobby Boone, the Regional Director and the man responsible for the over-all running of OSP. She said they could not deny the fact that I met all the criteria for the approving of a special visit considering the distance I must travel. She also mentioned that she'd like us to meet up for a few hours during my stay and invited me out for a meal with Eddie and his wife. She'd thrown me a lifeline but instead of feeling instant relief, I was filled with nervous apprehension. Bobby Boone and Jerry went back a long way and he believed with a passion that he was the main instigator, along with Pruitt of all that had befallen him since the riot.

As a direct result of Jerry's escape in '85, Warden Brown and the Security Major of OSP lost their jobs. A new warden was appointed; his name was Gary Maynard. At the same time a new security major took the place of the old one, that man was Bobby Boone. The ODOC were adamant they would not allow any of the escapees to make a

plea bargain forcing them to face trial by jury confident the law would make an example of them. The maximum sentence for escape was seven years, and they hoped each of them would be given this full amount. They were found guilty, of course, but not one of them was given seven years. Out of the five who escaped, Jerry received the least of all, a sentence of two years, the minimum allowed by law.

After his capture and up until just weeks before the riot in December, he'd been housed on D Block. This was where all those on punishment and in Ad Seg were confined. Right out of the blue he was moved from D Block to the F Cell House along with several others, including George Stidham, one of the five he'd escaped with in May. They'd been moved to the F Cell House in order to free up cells in D Block for prisoners transferred to OSP who were suspected of having taken part in a riot that had broken out at the Stringtown Medium Security facility in Atoka County. The F Cell House was for general population prisoners. Jerry was still officially classed as being in Ad Seg and if it hadn't been for the riot at Stringtown he would not have been in the F Cell House when the riot at OSP began.

When he returned to OSP from Washington State, he found that many of those who'd been accused of taking part in the December riot were on D Block too having been brought back from other states to face trial. They were all accused of a variety of offences from assault and battery to hostage taking.

In D Block, each of them was confined to a single cell. In the early months of our corresponding, Jerry had written about this period of his incarceration. He explained how they'd been subjected to consistent abuse and harassment and as a result many of them had taken part in a protest to highlight their plight. I was easily confused in these early days finding it impossible to tie in this event with everything we discussed in order to make a complete picture. All I could understand was that he'd decided not to take part in the protests because he wanted more than anything to be able to attend his mother's funeral. She'd been putting up a good fight but wasn't expected to live much longer. A little while before her eventual death at the young age of 51, he'd promised her he would not try to escape again, that he would give up drugs and do all he could to turn his life around. A promise he's kept to this day. But it was also during this period when he knows Boone became a main player in dictating his future.

At the height of the protest, prisoners smashed their cell windows with the result that a whole squad of officers in full protective gear ran down on them. Jerry sat in his cell listening as selected prisoners along his run were dragged out one by one and beaten. When they came to his cell, Boone gave Jerry verbal orders to, "cuff up". He'd heard the others being beaten so knew what was facing him. He asked why he was being given this order when he hadn't been protesting, he hadn't blocked his cell window with newspaper or smashed it and he hadn't refused to cooperate. The other prisoners had been sympathetic from the start understanding and respecting his reasons for not backing the protest. A reliable guard from the "old school" as Jerry described him was on duty in D Block at the time, he verified that he was telling the truth. But Boone refused to listen. He gave the order again. Jerry refused to cooperate. By this time, his anger and deep frustration at the injustice, plus his suppressed fear of the inevitable beating was boiling inside him bubbling uncontrollably to the surface. When they opened his cell door to drag him out and do what they'd done to the others, his response caught them unprepared. He charged at Boone, grabbing him by the shirt sending his buttons flying everywhere. Within seconds officers armed with nightsticks dived onto him dragging him off Boone, and beating him with force in the process. Along with the other bruised and battered prisoners he was taken to an abandoned area of the prison called "The Rock". Thrown into cells, they were left there for days. "Starved" and "frozen" were the only words he'd used in his early letters to describe what they'd faced in the aftermath.

He was still in Texas when I first read his scribbled account and everything it contained seemed so jumbled at the time. All I could make out was that he'd reached the end of his tether. Along with the others on, he'd been facing constant harassment and retaliation for months. The thought of being written up and punished for a protest he'd not played any part in plus the stress of his mother's impending death was just too much. He'd listened to the men in the other cells being beaten one by one. When Boone gave him the orders to cuff up for the second time and he refused, he knew what was coming and had made the split second decision to fight. It would take me a long time and a great deal of reading, listening and research before I could fully appreciate what had really happened on D Block and "The Rock" and the events that led up to that point. By then, the pieces of the puzzle of his transfer, his experiences in Texas and his inability to progress would begin to make perfect sense.

Heart in mouth, I phoned Bobby Boone. A lady answered. I asked to speak with him but she said he wasn't available. She wanted to know my reasons for phoning. She took notes while I explained everything to her. When I finished she made the comment that it sounded to her like I should certainly qualify for a special visit. She asked me to hang on while she went to speak with him. A few minutes later she returned and assured me that they would make sure a special visit was in place by the time I arrived at visiting control on Wednesday morning. It was as easy as that?

With some relief, I went into overdrive. I had three days to organise everything so that I could leave. I managed to find a motel that wasn't too far from the prison and arranged to stay there for five nights. I decided to take the risk that everything would be in place when I turned up at visiting control. I had no proof in writing should there be nothing on their computer, all I had was a verbal promise from the office of the Regional Director. I did my best to block my apprehension and concentrate on getting to McAlester knowing that this would entail the inevitable drive through Dallas Fort Worth. I hoped I'd seen the last of my irrational fear but the mere thought of driving out of the airport tossed my stomach into my mouth. Not a very reassuring sign.

How could I have made such a stupid mistake? I'd flown from Gatwick on the Tuesday morning arriving in Dallas Fort Worth at the usual mid afternoon time. I was fortunate, some planes had been prevented from landing during the first part of the day because of severe weather, thankfully, all that was left of the storm was an overcast sky and damp roads.

Fear gripped me as I drove out of the underground parking lot. I was frustrated by the fact I had to cope with these feelings each time but at least I could keep them under control and found my way to the I-635 with relative ease. All I had to do was take the exit for the 75 and the rest would be straightforward. In no time at all I reached it, sailing up the slip road I made a fatal choice, I got into the right side lane instead of the left. I was on the 75, only I was heading south instead of north.

The next hour was a nightmare as I tried to rectify my mistake. I left the highway and ended up driving around in a sprawling built up city area. I didn't have a clue how to get back to the 75 North. I stopped at a large grocery store and after receiving some complicated directions I drove off again ending up in a traffic layout I can only describe as a huge cross roads where several roads filled with vehicles met at one single point controlled by an array of traffic lights. As I caught sight of this monster, the directions I'd just been given flew out of my head at the thought of having to negotiate a way through. No matter where I looked there were cars lined up waiting to move off. The distance between myself and the other motorists appeared so great I just couldn't figure out what direction any of them would take. A massive roundabout would have handled a similar converging of roads in Britain, but roundabouts don't appear to exist in Texas or Oklahoma. Not knowing what to do, my plight was made worse by the fact I was first at the lights and so there wasn't a car in front I could just follow that would at least

allow me get to somewhere safely. By that point I was past caring about finding Highway 75.

The lights ahead changed to green and I pulled off in trepidation. As I passed the cars on my left, I felt sure I'd gone far enough to be able to turn safely, but as I did so I saw a line of vehicles coming towards me, I was driving the wrong way up what was this time around an extremely busy road. In total panic I hit the accelerator and speeding onto the grassed central reservation I flew across. The car bumped down hard into the road on the other side. I thanked God, at least the lane I'd landed in was clear and I was heading in the right direction again.

Thinking back, I wonder how I got away with it. I can only thank my lucky stars there were no state troopers around or my driving days in America might have been over. As soon as I could I pulled off the road. Parking safely in front of yet another grocery store I sat in the car while visions of being trapped in the city till the next day flashed through my mind. But that didn't happen as you can guess. I obtained a new set of directions. All I remember from that point on is driving along a very straight road through set after set of overhead lights until I reached a railway crossing, the kind I'd seen so often in American films. I passed through safely thankful as I did so to see a sign directing me straight to the 75-North. Three and a half hours later I pulled into the Economy Inn of McAlester, exhausted but very relieved.

The effects of jet lag caused my sleeping routine to be such that on occasions I would wake in the middle of the night and not be able to get back to sleep for two or more hours. Each time this had happened during my time at Hospitality House, I'd lay in my bed listening to the drawn out sound of a train whistle in the distance. It seemed to happen at regular intervals and I'd often wonder where it was coming from. Staying in the motel gave me a definitive answer as I awoke with a start that first night to the deafening roar of a huge locomotive with the loudest whistle imaginable passing the foot of my bed. At least that's the impression my befuddled brain gave me at the time. The railway line was actually about 200ft from the main road that ran along side the motel complex, but what distance is that when the noisiest, biggest locomotive with miles of trucks was trundling by? I thought back to when my boys were kids. They loved trains. I'd get books out of the library and we'd learn about the railways of the world. The noise comforted me in a way and I was thrilled the next day to see 'Union Pacific' written on the sides of each locomotive as it passed through. We'd read stories together of how the Union Pacific railway had been built in the eighteen hundreds. I couldn't wait to tell my sons when I got back home.

As I drove to the prison the next morning, my mind was whizzing around wondering what kind of reception I'd get when I arrived at Visiting Control. Would they know I was coming? I walked into the tiny cabin; filled in my details using a form I'd taken from a clipboard lying on the narrow counter and handed it to the female officer sitting at the computer. I gave her my passport and drivers license for identification. She looked for the usual paperwork, but there was nothing to verify Jerry had a special visit. All I could do was explain that approval had come from Bobby Boone and that if she phoned his office she'd get confirmation. She looked at me aghast; there was no way she would phone the Regional Director. Thankfully she made a phone call to someone and they must have confirmed I was telling the truth because within 15 minutes I was sitting in the visiting room. I'd been so preoccupied with wondering what would happen that morning that I'd clean forgotten to bring any quarters with me to be able to buy food, I could have kicked myself. Still the main thing was our special visit had been sanctioned even though there was nothing in writing, and not one person had taken the time to inform the officer in Visiting Control. How easy it was for those in charge not to follow policies and procedures yet Jerry and I were supposed to abide by their rules to the letter.

Relief crossed his face as he sat himself down in the chair opposite. Until they'd come to collect him from his cell, he'd had no idea if I was in McAlester or whether I'd managed to secure our visit. I can only imagine what kind of stress that placed upon him. When I told him I'd phoned Bobby Boone, he agreed I'd done the right thing and was thankful to Tami for her advice. He pointed out that once I'd brought my predicament to his attention, as Regional Director he had to act in our favour. He reminded me that whilst prisoners have no right to receive visits from family and friends and that visits are a privilege that can be given or taken away, there are rules laid down for visitation that have to be abided by and must be applied fairly and equally. There was no legitimate reason to deny our special visit. Mike Pruitt was using his personal long-standing grudge to make it as difficult as possible for us. Still, once I'd made Boone aware of my plight, he had no choice but to intervene.

Each visit passed smoothly and we were allowed four hours on those days when the visiting room stayed quiet, in all we spent over 13 hours together. We discussed the visiting ban and writing restriction placed upon Katja, our struggle to get married, our future and a myriad other things. The freedom to talk was exhilarating. We mulled over the fact Katja was waiting for a reply to a second letter she'd sent Warden Mullin. He had little faith her letter would do any good and his feelings were that he'd lost her for good. He predicted that without contact between them daily life would soon side-track her into other interests. All we could do was hope she'd get a positive response to her latest attempt to get the restriction lifted, from his standpoint with one rejected grievance, there was nothing more he could do.

I did meet up with Tami. She called for me at the motel early one evening. We went for a drive around McAlester visiting areas I'd never seen before. She also showed me another way to get to Wal-Mart and the expressway that allowed me to believe I could drive there myself. At the time I was still restricting myself to familiar routes and hadn't ventured out of town at all. We ate at a Mexican restaurant having quite a job to get them to put together a meal that was free of meat as I've been a vegetarian from childhood. I enjoyed being with her, but was a little disappointed that Eddie had some prior engagement and hadn't been able to eat with us as planned. Still, I hoped I'd get the opportunity to meet with him on my next visit, whenever that might be?

On our last day together, I let Jerry know I intended to write a letter to Boone to highlight the discrimination and retaliation we'd been enduring. Once again, he'd tried and failed to get our marriage application acknowledged. I explained how I would write a letter and this time I'd send all the evidence I could to prove our allegations of retaliation and discrimination.

Our parting was as poignant as ever but neither of us would show the extent of our feelings each wanting to prove to the other our strength and ability to handle whatever was demanded of us. It was our choice and decision to love one another and marry under conditions that most would describe as insurmountable. With this reality foremost in our mind, we had to grin and bear it.

When I returned home, it took several days of concentrated work and eight pages using the smallest legible type to finish my letter. I sent it to Boone with copies to the Director, the Governor, a member of the Parole Board, and a senator. I included in each envelope, 24 individual documents proving my allegations of retaliation and discrimination. They cost a fortune to mail but it would be worth every penny if I could just get them to follow their own rules and allow us to be able to visit and marry in peace.

Jerry eventually received a reply to the request to staff he'd sent to Lee Mann on April 27th highlighting Pruitt's denial of our special visit. He also received a reply to the grievance he'd submitted to Warden Mullin. His reply was dated May 5th, 2005, we were actually visiting on that date. The Warden backed Lee Mann, agreeing that an extended visit was not necessary as the visiting officers could determine extra time if

space allowed. Warden Mullin emphasised that this courtesy is extended to all visitors from other states and countries.

I wrote another letter pointing out that his reply was making the bold announcement that it was now no longer necessary to have an approved special visit with an inmate at OSP, a change of procedure going directly against the advice he'd given me in his letter of 2004 when Jerry and I had been banned from seeing one another. Back then he'd told us only the Warden or Deputy Warden had the authority to approve a special visit. I let it be known I was aware of the fate awaiting me if I'd listened to them. Jerry's thoughts mirrored my own *"If it wasn't for you phoning as you did and explaining the situation, you would have come all this way and we'd only have been able to visit for a total of 4 hours. That was their plan Sharon, to stress you out so that in the end they will be able to drive you away."*

Katja eventually received a reply from Mullin. It had been written on May 11th, the week after I returned. Her letter hadn't persuaded him to reverse his decision. His final remarks were interesting, "Your allegations that Inmate Hamilton is somehow the object of discrimination and ill treatment is without merit. Recently he was granted special accommodations in regard to an extended visit with his fiancée. To the staff at Oklahoma State Penitentiary, Inmate Hamilton is an offender, to be treated fairly, with respect and dignity, and to be afforded every opportunity to make a positive adjustment to incarceration. Clearly, your motives are to create discontent among the offenders with whom you correspond, rather than fostering an environment conducive to rehabilitation and successful re-entry into society. In this area, you truly could have made a difference by choosing to be a positive influence in Inmate Hamilton's life."

On the last day of my visit while waiting outside Visiting Control, I struck up a conversation with another woman. It was sheer coincidence but she was also seeing her fiancé and although she lived in America, her home was in another state over a thousand miles away from McAlester. She hadn't been told she could just turn up unannounced, as Lee Mann had wanted me to believe. She'd been granted a special visit in a straightforward manner approved by the Deputy Warden. Her fiancé had recently applied for them to be allowed to marry. She gave me her email address and we kept in touch, they were married just four months later.

Chapter

16

Letter 375, May 25, 2005
Wednesday

"Everything they have done to you has been to try to intimidate you, to scare you and to get you to cut me loose. This is what they were hoping for. But by these letters you have written, you have made it very clear to the powers that be that you will pursue this matter and make them stop. I'm proud of you. You've worked your butt off to write these letters. I don't know how you do it, but you do.

You asked if maybe this moving to C-side was for the better? Sharon, the answer is no for the simple reason on A-side Mike Pruitt and associates tried everything they could think of to manipulate me into threatening them or catching an assault of an officer case. I saw through their bullshit and games and refused to let them manipulate me into doing what they wanted me to do. Plus, I'd been on the waiting list for a job in the print shop for over a year and now all of that counts for nothing.

All the lies and bullshit they have done to you, to Katja was perpetrated on ya'll to make me sick and tired, to stress me out, piss me off to the point where I wouldn't care any more and would just go ballistic on their asses. Then they would be justified burying my ass out there on H Block and no doubt try to transfer me back out of state to Texas or some other state where I'd have no hope of ever getting a parole. That's what they want and you better believe it's true. I know the type of people we're dealing with. As you've seen and experienced for yourself they plan on continuing their retaliation games, not because I give them a rough time or that I'm a maniac or anything like that, but because I'm a man who refuses to be intimidated, threatened by them and I try to expose who the real liars are. They are the ones who manipulate the rules and break the laws in order to cross out certain prisoners they don't like. They thrive on inflicting their sense of punishment, their sense of retaliation and paybacks and once you get people like these on your case, they never let up. That's why all these years later I'm still facing retaliation.

What you need to understand to an old convict like me the worse thing they can do to me is fuck over you and my friends. To someone like me who's been locked up for all these years my only life lines and connections to the outside world is through the people I correspond with, through visits. Sure there's the TV, the radio, magazines with pictures and articles of that outside world, but in a sense all of that is fantasy. But to write to someone I love and care for and know as a friend where there are mutual feelings, respect and things in common, it makes that outside world real, if that makes sense?

Same with our visits, when you and I are up there visiting, able to look at each other, hear our voices, see the eyes and facial expressions, it makes us real.

These people are aware of what is important to a prisoner such as me and everything they have put us through has been directed towards me to make me act crazy. Why Bobby Boone intervened and seemed to help us is because you put him in the mix of things and therefore he could not claim later on that he wasn't aware of what was happening. Once you made him aware of this special visit bullshit being played on you, he had no option but to agree with you because you qualified for a special visit. You placed him between a rock and a hard place by rules that are supposed to apply equally to everyone.

I was talking to an old convict here on C-side, dig this, he's got several stacked sentences, two or three escapes and he told me he's getting 44 days a month earned credits and that he's level 4. I explained to him how they've got me as level 2 and he agrees I'm getting screwed around big time."

Three days after I flew home Jerry was moved without any warning to C-unit. He saw this forced change as a step backwards. On A-unit he'd finally found a cell partner he was compatible with and they'd settled into a routine that was working well. Stuck in a tiny cell with another prisoner all day and every day with no real break from each other, it's important to have common ground and consideration. For long periods he'd been forced to cell with men who were gang members, men who spent their days at the cell door hollering to their "bros". "Doing time" is much harder under those conditions, for both men because gang members like to cell with fellow gang members.

The cell he'd been placed in had problems with the lighting and plumbing and he was back to square one in every respect. At least he now had a new unit and case manager so the first thing he did was to test the waters by submitting a request to staff to be given a job. Those prisoners on A-unit with jobs were mostly employed in the print shop; their units designated area, while the majority of workers in C-unit were consigned to the kitchen. He made a formal request to work there but his unit manager would not let him for security reasons. If this was the case, why were there men already working there who'd escaped and had similar or higher security points? They wouldn't allow his name to be placed on a list to attend a self-help program maintaining that he'd already participated in it when he'd not. Experience had taught him these negative responses didn't bode well for the future.

Throughout all his years in prison, he'd never had a writing or visiting restriction placed upon him and the way his grievance had been prevented from progressing through the chain of command was a source of great disappointment and irritation, *"See, by them being able to stop the processing of issues against individuals, they actually distort and hide their actions. They keep the records from reflecting their true performance. Let's say there are 50 prisoners and Warden Mullin has removed someone off their visiting list, put them on writing restriction and their grievances, just like mine, were all rejected and returned. What this amounts to, is these people have kept these 50 incidents from being logged against Warden Mullin. Then along comes an investigator at a later date to investigate complaints and grievances filed against the Warden and there's nothing there. See what I'm saying? This is how these people are able to operate the way they do because if they are investigated there's nothing documented. If I ever filed a lawsuit against Warden Mullin for all of this, for his manipulating the grievance process they insure there are not too many damaging grievances to taint his record."*

Just as he'd predicted, not being able to communicate allowed other interests to take precedence in Katja's life. He thought about trying to appeal by letter to Director Ron Ward. Knowing that it would be pointless trying to file a grievance, he saw a letter as a last ditch attempt to get the writing restriction lifted, but in the end he decided

it wasn't worth the risk. His inability to file a grievance about his Level and Earned Credits had prompted him to write in 2004. This had resulted in an official warning from the Director's Designee advising him that he'd been told of the proper procedure for filing a grievance and if he continued to abuse the grievance process it would result in restrictions being imposed.

In early June, to my great joy a fiancée marriage application arrived with instructions that I should complete it and send it to the Chaplain. I may not have received a reply to the letters I'd written in May and never would as it turned out but at least it looked like they'd had a positive effect because we were being allowed to begin the marriage process at last.

If you remember, when I met the Chaplain on my first visit in 2003, he'd told me I would have to fly out six separate times. This had now changed; they would allow us to have our counselling in one block, spread over three days during my next visit. At the same time, a memo was sent to Jerry highlighting the need for us both to have a statement of legal competency from a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist.

Searching through the Yellow Pages I found the phone number of a psychiatric practice based in the city of Cardiff. Listening patiently while I explained the reason for my call the Practice Manager told me she didn't know if they would be able to provide that kind of service, all she could do was take my number and get back in touch the next day with the answer. True to her word she called the following afternoon, the psychiatrist was willing to conduct the evaluation for an initial fee of £1,100! This would allow him access to all of my medical records and pay for the time it would take for him to study them. After this, there would be further charges for a consultation and his written report. I decided to ditch the psychiatrist and returning to the Yellow Pages I contacted a Chartered Psychologist.

For the relative small fee of £70 I was able to arrange a meeting towards the end of June. When the day arrived, I drove to Penarth, a genteel seaside town not far from where I worked at the museum. My appointment was for a Thursday morning at 9am and my supervisor allowed me to start work a little later so I'd be able attend. Arriving at his private residence, the psychologist greeted me with a warm handshake revealing that mine was the first request of its kind he'd ever been asked to undertake during his long career. At the end of what felt more like an informal chat than a serious psychological evaluation, he took the name and address of the Chaplain and promised to mail his letter of competence directly to his office within the next few days and to send me a copy at the same time. My copy arrived the following week. It was quite short and gave a brief description of my family background, my education and current employment. The last two paragraphs summed up his analysis, "I questioned her closely and bluntly about her attitudes to life and people around her. She is sociable, determined and sympathetic. (The last of these qualities clearly led to her present endeavour). Although not religious she is highly principled and has firm ideas of right and wrong. I made her outline her plans for coping with the various possible outcomes of her application. They were realistic and showed no sign whatsoever of wishful thinking.

In view of the foregoing it is my opinion that she is level headed, has a very clear idea of what she is about and has the intellectual and emotional resources to cope with any outcome."

In the meantime, Jerry sent a request to the psychologist at OSP; she replied that when she'd telephoned the Chaplain he'd insisted a psychological evaluation was no longer needed as a matter of routine. He was concerned with her answer but brushed it aside. At least he had proof he'd made enquiries and had tried to get a consultation. He'd done what he could to cover his back.

Marriages are performed at OSP in March and September only. Our first request had been submitted in September 2003, but from that point onwards, every obstacle had

been placed in our way to prevent this initial request and subsequent others from being processed. Two weary years later, my telephone conversation with the Chaplain revealed a welcome change of attitude and I was told to contact him 30 days before my next visit so that he could fit us into his busy schedule. We decided my next trip should be in October 2005; this would give me breathing space to clear my credit card after my visit in May.

I wasn't idle through the summer although I felt very alone at times because I didn't have the comfort and stimulation that talking to Katja had brought me. She was the only one who had studied Jerry's Situation in depth. However, things were changing fast as new information was coming my way allowing me greater insight and increasing my knowledge. It wasn't long before I could see an unbridgeable gap opening up between where Katja's understanding left off and my own continued to grow. We emailed now and again and she helped when I asked if she could find contact numbers for lawyers.

We were considering whether to hire somebody who could get a complete copy of his prison records, including all video films and tape recordings. I insisted that if it was that important to him, I would find the money from somewhere. My enquiries with one law firm began with them asking for \$1,000 to retain their services. This had shot up to \$5,000 when I got back to them a few weeks later. In the end everything fell through because they accused me of mistrusting them by my having asked for an assurance in writing that they would be able to get copies of everything. I was so fearful of spending money for no gain and was loath to put Jerry through further disappointment. He agreed with my decision and the idea was shelved. It was frustrating because he was emphatic that with the right legal help getting hold of his records shouldn't be a difficult process and wouldn't necessitate a fee of \$5,000.

The whole incident on D Block in '87 with Boone had been filmed and disciplinary reports were filed. But when Jerry had finally reviewed his prison records, this paperwork was also missing. He'd had his own copies at one time but they'd been in the bag that had disappeared in Texas. He felt this was deliberate because during the incident on D Block, prison policy and procedure and the law had been violated. He wanted a lawyer to get hold of the disciplinary reports and an unedited copy of the video footage hoping these would back up his claims of abuse even though Jerry had been the one to charge out of the cell.

He continued to gather information concerning his Level and Earned Credits. While he'd been in Texas, a new law had been introduced in Oklahoma, or so he'd recently heard, with the result that prisoners with convictions pre-dating its introduction automatically got a third knocked off their sentences. We weren't sure if this information was correct or not but it seemed to be judging from the experience of others in a similar position. He'd known nothing about this cut in sentences. Over the years, he'd written many letters to the ODOC begging for information that was never forthcoming. He'd been sure changes to the rules were being applied illegally to him if it was to his detriment or withheld if it was to his benefit. Every prisoner has a right to be able to see for themselves amendments to prison policy and procedure, after all, it affects them directly, but between 1988 and 2003 for the most part they'd deliberately denied him this basic right.

Ever hopeful of a breakthrough I decided to write to another state representative in August but was faced with the same insurmountable task to try to condense everything into as short a letter as possible. It was my frustration at not being able to achieve anything of real worth that led to Jerry making a tongue in cheek suggestion that as I had so much to write about I should set it all down in a book.

A letter he sent me not long before my October visit was to be more important than I realised at the time, *"Well, there's been some sort of disturbance there at Granite, a*

race clash or gang related thing. One prisoner killed, 3 others seriously injured and several others hurt and injured. It seems there were 70 or so prisoners involved in the melee and supposedly Granite is now on permanent lock down status just like us? OSP has got to be the only prison in the US that has kept their general population prisoners on permanent lock down status since 1985. Mifers who've not had any disciplinary cases for years or caused any problems at all are locked down, fed in their cells, fucked around on their yard, showers etc. And these are general population prisoners. All other prisons allow their general population prisoners to work, have regular daily yards, showers, better privileges, in other words, not locked in their cells and treated no differently than Ad Seg prisoners. The only difference between prisoners in general population at OSP and those in Ad Seg is that we're not handcuffed every time we come out of our cells for showers or yard and we get contact visits. If only all of this could be exposed. Sharon you should write a book."

Prior to the riot, general population prisoners had freer movement; they ate at communal tables and could socialise. The vast difference between OSP then and OSP today was something Jerry had tried on several occasions to explain but really it had been beyond my grasp. My visit in October would change all this and give me a depth of understanding I never dreamed I would have, it would also give me the determination to write this book.

A big change came in August when my mother hurt her back. We thought it was a pulled muscle that would heal of its own accord but two weeks later the pain was unbearable prompting me to take her to the hospital casualty department. An x-ray gave us the unexpected news that she had osteoporosis and a fractured vertebra. The time had come for me to leave the home I'd shared with Ray for over twenty years. We'd been mentally prepared for this move long before I began writing to Jerry simply because we knew it was inevitable that caring for Chris would become too much of a physical burden for my mother who was now nearing her eighties. I'd always helped as much as I could, but from here on out, I'd have to help a lot more. Ray had warned me long ago not to expect him to accompany me and so the day of my leaving was not traumatic to either of us. We came to an amicable financial arrangement and within weeks our house became legally his.

On the plus side, our splitting up meant I now had enough money to pay for my visits to Oklahoma and I wouldn't have to go into debt each time, but this was offset by concern over my mothers condition. Her back was so bad we had to bring a bed downstairs and she and Chris became my sole responsibility for several weeks. I couldn't go to work during this time and had to rely on my holidays to cover my leave. At no point though did I think of cancelling my visit in October. My mother wouldn't hear of it either and the whole family said they would chip in while I was away. Mike, my elder brother promised to come and stay during the week I'd be in McAlester. My mother was determined to be up and about well before my departure date and by the middle of September she no longer needed Chris's wheelchair to get to the bathroom and could hobble around well enough for me to return to my part-time job. Out of a bad situation came a lot of good because Ray and I needed to bring to an end our unusual living arrangement. It seemed ridiculous to think of us still sharing a home once I was married to Jerry even though we got on well like brother and sister.

In complete contrast to the stressful uncertainty leading up to the visit in May, I was able to make the necessary arrangements over the phone with the Chaplain and the request was processed and approved with no trouble at all for a four-day visit in October. The Chaplain told me I'd need to be at his office for 8am, on the Monday. This would mean I'd have to fly out two days earlier than usual in order to keep the appointment, but it would be worth being away from home the extra days knowing we'd be able to complete our counselling sessions in just one week.

My long journey from South Wales to McAlester went without a hitch. The fear that had gripped me on previous trips was now a memory as I surprised myself by driving out of the airport with a confidence I hadn't experienced before. I'd booked a room at the same motel and the next morning I awoke in plenty of time for my appointment. I was under the impression that having been asked to arrive on the Monday, a non-visiting day for Jerry we would be having our first counselling session that day and was excited at the thought of seeing him. To my disappointment, my meeting with the Chaplain lasted no more than five minutes and I was given the news that we wouldn't begin our counselling until 9am on the Wednesday.

I returned to the motel and called Pastor King arranging to meet with him for the first time later that afternoon. I ate the last of the cheese rolls I'd brought with me from home, and then decided to visit my favourite park. Strolling along the path that bordered a large central green I amused myself by trying to find similarities between Oklahoma trees and the trees I'm familiar with back home, but could only recognise Oaks for definite. I stopped to peer through the fence enclosing a small outdoor swimming pool, I had yet to see it filled with water and assumed it must only open when the schools closed for the long summer vacation. I walked for three miles in total; easy to work out because the path was exactly one third of a mile in length, at least that's what Mary had told me. Daily exercise over, I drove to the library and spent the next hour emailing friends and family.

My meeting with Pastor King went very well. He invited me into his house and I was given a welcome cold drink. He was amused to find I'd left my car near the library and had walked the half-mile or so to his home, but it didn't occur to me to bother driving there. I was able to choose the marriage service I felt would be most appropriate for the occasion, short and to the point. The Pastor was a breath of fresh air and I was so pleased all my efforts to find someone willing to marry us had led me to him. As I made my way back to my car I felt a great sense of relief that things were finally falling into place and in five months time, we would realise our dream of becoming husband and wife.

Later that evening, using the phone number Tami had given me in one of her emails, I was able to speak with Eddie and much to my delight he asked if I'd like to join him on his lunch break the next day at a little café a couple of blocks away from the main post office. Early retirement can't have suited him because he'd found another job. He assured me he'd be happy to answer any questions I cared to ask. I wrote out a list of questions knowing full well there wouldn't be enough time for me to have answers to everything, as Eddie would need to get back to work.

Oklahoma State Penitentiary has the largest "Behind the Walls" rodeo in the United States. For one weekend in September the public is entertained by prisoners and professional rodeo stars as they perform in the prisons' own purpose built arena. There is one event, however that every inmate would like to win if they could. It's called "Money the Hard Way" and is by far the most popular and dangerous event of the Prison Rodeo. A big Brahma Bull with a small sack of dirt tied between its horns is let loose in the arena along with around two-dozen volunteer prisoners. The one who can grab the bag of dirt from between the bulls' horns wins a hundred dollars in today's money, that's four months prison salary for the lucky contestant. In the late 70s Jerry had won Money the Hard way, injuring his shoulder and getting pretty bruised and shook up in the process that's how he'd gotten his nickname of Too Mean. Whilst researching for my degree I'd used my local library to scour archive material including old newspaper reports stored on microfilm. I had the idea that maybe the library in McAlester would provide a similar source of reference and I'd be able to find some seventies news articles of the prison rodeo to send to Jerry for his interest.

On Tuesday, I got to the library just after 9am and was grateful to a member of staff

for taking the time to show me how to work their microfiche machine. Two filing cabinets crammed full with reels of micro-size copies of McAlester's daily newspaper were mine to plough through until it was time to meet up with Eddie. By the time I was ready to leave, I'd managed to fish out several articles and photographs about the rodeo that I hoped he might find interesting, all I'd have to do was bundle them into an envelope and mail them to him.

I made my way to the café on foot, enjoying the excuse for a walk. The width of McAlester's roads were a constant source of amazement to me, I'm a fast walker and had come to the conclusion early on that it must be impossible for an elderly person to reach the opposite side of some of the wider roads before the 'Walk' sign was replaced by 'Don't Walk'. Having negotiated the roads safely, I bought some envelopes in the "Dollar General" timing my arrival at the café for a few minutes before our arrangement to meet. It was empty so I sat down facing the window that looked out onto a gas station forecourt.

I had no idea what Eddie looked like except that he was in his early fifties. I was so lost in thought wondering about the questions I'd like to ask first, that I didn't notice a tall, lean man with medium length brown hair had entered the café. Making a beeline for my table as I was the only customer, he said my name and I jumped to my feet, feeling a little shy. Jerry had told me about him even before he'd left Texas and in a strange way I felt I already knew him. He wore glasses and although he'd been stabbed and blinded in his eye during the riot, glancing at his regular features I couldn't detect anything to suggest his horrific injury. He may have lost his sight in one eye but I was pleased to see that from a physical perspective they were both intact. At the time, I never gave a thought about the hidden scars he might still be carrying.

His friendly manner put me at my ease. He asked me what I'd like to eat and after placing our order with the young lady behind the counter he joined me at the table. Knowing time was at a premium I began firing questions straight away. I started with the riot and the incident Jerry had been involved with in the F Cell House. He explained that he'd been on duty in C Unit the place where the riot had begun. He'd been attacked and stabbed several times right at the start of the riot. He'd been helped out of the unit and rushed to hospital. It was his friend, officer Williams that had been held in the F Cell House and he confirmed how Williams had walked out of the cell unharmed and back to the picket after fifteen minutes. He didn't think Jerry's actions had been that serious during the incident and smiled as he recalled he'd heard that Mike Pruitt had arrived with a shotgun. He agreed with me when I suggested the real riot had happened in a completely separate part of the prison and that it was unfair for them to have tagged Jerry as a ringleader.

I asked why he thought they'd sent Jerry to Texas over two and a half years later when he'd already spent six months in Washington State, and been punished severely in other ways for his actions. He told me it was to do with his reputation. He explained that although in his opinion he'd never been a troublemaker, he'd been highly respected by the other inmates and as such he held a lot of influence with them. The DOC feared the fact that Jerry stood up for himself, stood up to the regime if he thought the reason was genuine. He told me how Jerry would stand his ground even if it meant a beating. Any convict wielding that kind of respect is seen as a threat by those in charge; this had been the reason for his transfer to Texas and the reason they'd refused to allow him to return.

Eddie had tried his best to get them to let him come back to Oklahoma. He recalled that Jerry had written to him several times asking for his help. I wondered if he knew what stopped them from bringing him back? He explained, "My own appeals and Jerry's fell on deaf ears. You have to remember, he was pretty wild back in his younger days and earned his nickname "Too Mean", but he was not a troublemaker. He never

went looking for trouble; trouble had a habit of finding him. He is a good solid convict and I would rather be in a room full of men like Jerry than be in a room with today's inmates."

I then tried to tell him as quickly as I could some of what had happened in Texas and how every time Jerry stepped up his campaign to be returned, he'd receive a set up disciplinary. He listened intently and didn't try to disagree or dismiss all I said but nodded as though he understood. I spoke of how Texas had disciplined him by their rules dropping him in level and taking away his earned credits and how Oklahoma had then punished him for the same offence. However, once Texas had restored his level and earned credits, Oklahoma had refused to follow suit. I told him how he'd been kept at level 1, Oklahoma's lowest level for 9 years and prevented from earning any credits whatsoever. He agreed that it sounded very suspect. He said that Texas did not have the authority to administer Jerry's Level or Earned Credits.

Judging by the way Eddie spoke it was plain to see that he liked and respected Jerry. When I mentioned that he was being kept at level 2, he said he'd worked with Tami to sort all of that out and thought they'd succeeded. I told him how everyone we contacted within the DOC maintained he could rise no higher than level 2. He said that was correct under the new policies but by law Jerry fell under the old policies and was able to rise to level 4. When I mentioned how he'd been made to serve over 22 years of a 25-year sentence, he agreed that this was almost unheard of and very unusual. I went on to tell him of my struggle to be allowed to visit and when I explained about Interpol his whole face lit up with amusement. I let him know that I doubted OSP had ever been in touch with Interpol in the first place and that it was all a sham on their part. He nodded his head in agreement.

The time seemed to fly by, I'd have loved him to stay longer but he had to return to his work. Shaking his hand as he got up to leave I thanked him, expressing my appreciation at his willingness to meet me; he told me it had been his pleasure. As he was leaving, he said he sympathised with the situation we were facing.

Left alone, I took out my notebook to write down our conversation while it was still fresh in my memory. I felt very pleased and relished the thought of telling Jerry during our visit the next day that I'd met Eddie. I knew he'd be extremely interested in his explanation for his transfer to Texas. I didn't know then but my encounter with Eddie was not to be my last.

I returned to my car my thoughts whizzing around in my head as I walked. I needed something to distract me so I took a drive along the expressway for the very first time to explore the out of town stores. I was so pleased not to be restricted in my movements by lack of confidence. I didn't know why my fear had been so great in the first place, but the relief that it had disappeared apart for the odd nervous flutter was wonderful. I was very pleased with myself as I lay in bed later that night and drifting off to sleep I wondered what we could expect during our first meeting together with the Chaplain the next day.

I arrived at OSP in plenty of time and the Chaplain came to greet me in reception. I signed the logbook and followed him up the flight of stairs and into his office. He made a quick phone call to arrange for Jerry to be brought up to the visiting area. The room we'd be using was situated right next door. For some reason there was a delay and after half an hour I was beginning to get a little nervous wondering what was happening. But I needn't have worried because after one more phone call we were given the all clear.

While we waited we made pleasant conversation and he treated me in a friendly way, I thought how nice it would be to have had this considerate treatment from the beginning rather than having to face the stress and uncertainty of the previous two years. Leaving the office I followed him down the stairs and along a passageway that led to

the bottom of the familiar concrete steps leading up to the security bars and shake down area. We waited at the top of the steps. Two women visitors stood with us. To my delight Jerry suddenly appeared on the other side of the double barred security area accompanied by an officer. He was in handcuffs and leg chains, waving his hands at me he shouted that he'd been tied up and waiting for over an hour. One of the women turned to me and said, "Oh, is he being released"? I laughed in embarrassment unsure if the Chaplain had heard her comments. She nodded her approval when I told her the real reason for our meeting.

We were seated around a large square table in the wood panelled room. There was just the three of us, the Chaplain was nearest to the main door, I sat on his right side and Jerry sat opposite. The room was small and the table took up almost all of the space. We gazed at one another so pleased to be together again while the Chaplain handed us two sheets of paper filled with questions offering multiple-choice answers. Jerry became very concerned, not realising he'd have to fill in a questionnaire, he hadn't brought his glasses with him and there was no way his poor eyesight would allow him to read the small print. Years of confinement in a cell with dim light had taken its toll. Much to my great surprise, the Chaplain allowed him to borrow his and Jerry remarked how much better they were than the glasses he had to struggle with. I was quite touched by this kindness and again I was struck by the contrast of the last two years.

We were told there really wasn't a wrong answer to any of the questions, and that once we'd completed them it would signal the end of the counselling for that day. He would check through our choices and in our next meeting we would have an informal discussion about them. Jerry left by a side door while the Chaplain and I walked out into the shakedown area. The whole process had taken around half an hour. One minute later I walked into the visiting room and was able to collect the quarters I'd left with one of the officers. After a short wait Jerry appeared and we spent four hours together. I told him about the rodeo news articles I'd found and he said he'd look forward to seeing them, but was disappointed that I'd been unable to find any mention of his name. He remembered having been interviewed by a reporter and was hoping I'd have come across the interview.

His face was a picture when I revealed who I'd met the day before. He was very pleased when I explained how Eddie had given me the strong impression he liked and respected him. When I relayed Eddie's personal thoughts about the reasons behind his transfer, how he felt it was connected with his reputation and the respect he'd received from the other prisoners he was in agreement completely. We spent a lot of time going over old ground with him drumming into me the many facets of his Situation while I listened soaking up as much as I could glean any new bits of information and storing them away in my head to mull over later. He placed emphasis on the fact that if I'd not been so determined, if I had not listened to him and believed in him, I'd have been driven away long ago. I knew that this was true because it is extremely intimidating and daunting to stand up to authoritative figures that have so much opportunity to abuse their power and can hide behind a veil of professionalism and respectability while enjoying political and public approval. I'd tried to look for help and advice from individuals and organisations in Oklahoma in my efforts to be allowed to visit and marry Jerry and to highlight his Situation. I'd even written to John Kerry, Democratic nominee for the Presidency. In the end, it had been the overwhelming documented evidence of lies, unprofessional behaviour and discrimination I'd been able to send with my letters that had finally tipped the scales in our favour. For this visit especially, it was obvious "Someone" had told those at McAlester to toe the line.

On Thursday, the Chaplain and I followed a similar procedure to the day before except we didn't have to wait so long before being able to make our way to the meeting room. Jerry remembered to bring his own spectacles with him this time. The Chaplain

handed the questionnaires back to us. Although he'd emphasised how we couldn't go wrong as such, each question did have an answer that was considered the most appropriate. Out of a total of approximately 30 questions I believe I had six that failed to give the optimum answer and Jerry had around eight. Neither of us was given a copy of our own to keep and for the life of me I can't remember any one question in particular and I doubt that Jerry could either. We discussed the ones we'd "failed" agreeing or disagreeing with the Chaplain's reasoning as we ploughed our way quickly through them one by one. We'd hardly had time to warm our chairs when the second session ended and we found ourselves in the visiting room enjoying the wonderful freedom to talk in relative privacy. My quarters dwindled down to nothing as we ate our food and shared a can of Pepsi rationing our drink for fear of needing to use the bathroom and the unthinkable scenario of one of us being forced to leave.

Friday morning arrived; the Chaplain and I had a half hour wait together in the drab, featureless counselling room until Jerry could join us. Chaplain Franzese was nearing his retirement, he'd been born and raised in Italy and had spent some time in Britain based there with the military, so we found plenty to talk about while we were waiting. Just before Jerry's arrival he looked at me and clearing his throat, he said it was his duty to try to dissuade me from marrying although it was obvious by his resigned expression that he knew he was wasting his time. How does anyone explain why he or she wants to marry the person they love? I expressed my thoughts as clearly as I could; I spoke of our love, mutual liking and respect, our compatibility. I didn't see our desire to marry as being different from that of any other couple. Maybe he'd heard the same thing many times before, I'll never know because just as I finished speaking Jerry walked into the room.

Together we discussed the final arrangements for our being able to marry. He asked if Jerry had undergone his psychological evaluation. Jerry reminded him how he'd told the psychologist himself that it was no longer routine to have one. I had proof of this at home because he'd sent me her reply. He asked me to send him a copy together with our divorce papers once I'd returned home.

Before our final counselling session was over the Chaplain made one final touching gesture that contradicted once again our experience of the past two years, he let Jerry try on his own wedding ring so we could figure out his ring size. He even told me they sold reasonably priced rings at Wal-Mart emphasising that an expensive one would not be allowed for security reasons. He shook our hands as he left.

Waiting for Jerry to join me in the visiting room, I quickly totalled the amount of actual time we'd taken to complete our counselling it came to just under two hours. How on earth could the Chaplain's original demand that I fly out six separate times to be spread out over three years have been justified? It wasn't as if it was a general ploy used to deter innocent free world women from making a terrible mistake because other couples were able to marry after six months or less. I already had evidence of this. Still, our counselling was over and all we had to do now was wait for March to arrive. That seemed straight forward enough.

Chapter

17

Letter 475, October 29, 2005
Saturday

"I've read all the articles you sent me and needless to say they made me recall the events surrounding those incidents that I haven't remembered or thought about in years. Like that hunger strike on D Block, no, I did not get involved because I was not going to do anything that Boone and gang could use to justify keeping me from seeing mom and dad or going to her funeral. Everyone out on D Block Ad Seg knew what the deal was with me and about my mom's illness and they all understood. Just like all the guards working on D Block Ad Seg knew I wasn't participating in the hunger strike. They also knew I did not participate in the disturbance on D Block where 7 of us were locked out there on the Rock and Bobby Boone was told this at the time but he was out to fuck over me. This is the same incident I was telling you about where there's no disciplinary case or guards statements in my records at all now, at least that I was able to see and get copies of.

Anyway, even these newspaper articles verify the incident on D Block where 7 of us were moved out to the Rock, how there were disciplinary cases written up and guards' statements surrounding the incident. So ask yourself, why isn't any of these statements or copy of disciplinary in my? Why did they put a copy of a statement and incident relating to another prisoner in my records? Why was the release classification paper work verifying my release to general population before the transfer to Texas missing? Are the powers that be scared to let us get our hands on these records? Sure they are because it proves how I was singled out for paybacks, retaliated against. Reading about these incidents has brought so much back to me."

On the Thursday after our visit had ended I was wondering how I could amuse myself for the rest of the day. I drove to the park and whilst walking along the path there enjoying the warm sunshine I suddenly had an idea to look in the newspaper archives stored at the library to see if I could find articles about Jerry's escape and the riot in particular. For the rest of that day and the next, my spare time was spent in front of the microfiche trawling my way through two years worth of the News-Capital and Democrat, McAlester's daily newspaper. The library stayed open until 8pm on the Thursday and apart from the odd trip to the water fountain and rest room I stuck at my post disregarding hunger pains and strained eyes. I knew the exact dates of the escape, the riot and Jerry's return from Washington State but I only had a rough idea when the incident on D Block with Boone had taken place so my plan was to plough through every page from May 1985 onwards and just tune my eyes to words such as "escape",

"riot" and "OSP". When I walked out at closing time on Friday evening, I'd managed to copy 87 pages of relevant reports to send to Jerry, making a duplicate set for myself in the process.

There wasn't time to read each report, it was as much as I could do to make sure it was relevant, enlarge it if necessary, frame it correctly and make the copies. A story that might start on the front page would often finish on another page and this all added to the time and effort needed to make sure I copied everything, not missing bits out. I made this mistake several times on the Thursday without realising it until just before closing and had to back track the next day to find the missing paragraphs, an annoying task because time was at a premium.

Leaving the library on Friday I returned to the motel to sort through the jumble of papers, not as easy as it sounds because most pages were not numbered having been enlarged before they were copied. I managed to get to sleep around midnight and was up again by five to drive over to Wal-Mart so that I could buy a stapler. Some reports took up three sheets of A4 and I wanted to staple them together to make it easier for Jerry to follow because I'd already discovered what a confusing nightmare it was when one article got mixed up with another. I needed to get them sorted so that I could hopefully mail them on Saturday before the post office closed around midday. If our visit stretched past this hour I would have to take them all the way back to Wales with me and mail them from there. As it turned out, our visit ended around 11am because of demand for space in the visiting room. It was never easy to say our goodbyes, but at least we could take comfort from the thought that the following March I'd be back again for our wedding.

I left the prison and drove straight to the post office to mail everything to him. The weather was lovely and I'd already decided the day before to explore the southern tip of Lake Eufaula, the largest lake in Oklahoma. Heading out of town on Highway 69 it wasn't long before I picked up a sign for "lakeside camping and fishing". The exit road for the lake was impressive by British standards and for this reason I was amazed when it led to a deserted dirt road. I drove for a mile leaving a trail of dust in my wake before parking my car near the waters edge. There was one family camped amongst the trees while two men pottered with a small motorboat that was moored to a wooden jetty. Apart from a tiny cabin that housed the toilet I couldn't see any other building. I walked along the shoreline, stopping to examine shells and bits of driftwood, when I tired of this I found a suitable rock to sit on and wrote to Jerry describing everything that I could see.

The sun had already set as I drove back to McAlester. I felt pleased that at long last I'd done my first bit of out of town exploring. It was dark by the time I reached the motel having stopped to buy some things. Lack of sleep the night before meant that I was feeling very tired, I packed my case and spent the evening watching TV having decided that the news articles would have to wait until I got home.

When I'd returned from our visit in May my thoughts were preoccupied with writing to Boone, this time the news articles were my priority. Beginning in date order, I started with the reports of the escape that had taken place on May 28th, 1985. Five prisoners, including Jerry escaped together from the F Cell House sometime before 9pm. Climbing onto the roof of the abandoned West Cell House they'd crossed to the roof of the old administration block. From there they'd made it onto the massive perimeter wall where they were able to lower themselves to the ground with the help of rope made from volleyball netting. Jerry filled me in with the details, *"At this point, we gathered under the shadows of a tree discussing how to get across the well lit street in front of the prison, should we dart one at a time across the road or crawl through a drainage pipe? While we were considering what to do, the nightrider, a guard assigned to patrol the perimeter of the prison, turned on his headlights. He was parked about 70 ft from where*

we were standing, that's when we took off across the street, and it was at this point that we were spotted."

Despite being seen, all five got clean away. Jerry and his partner made their way to Oklahoma City where they stayed hidden in a motel room until an anonymous call to the police led to their capture eighteen days later. The escape was quite daring and a source of embarrassment to prison security. Discussing the news reports he explained that they'd climbed up the outside of the five-story F Cell House, clambering from one window to the next. The tallest of them had gone first as he would have the best chance of reaching the roofline from the last windowsill. Unfortunately his reach fell short by almost a foot. Left with no alternative, the next one in line scrambled onto his shoulders and onto the roof. Having reached safety he was then able to help the others do the same.

I soon decided it would be best not to accept everything I was reading in the reports as gospel because according to one account he was supposed to have used the exact same escape route two years before. Apparently, he'd jumped from the prison walls, fractured his leg and been captured immediately. I knew from our letters and his case history that this was not true. Someone may have escaped from OSP in 1983, they may even have fractured their leg in the process, but that person was not Jerry. The most creative account claimed he'd once stolen an aircraft! Despite my concern about inaccurate reporting, I felt anything that tied in with what he'd talked about in his letters probably wouldn't be too far from the truth. Having decided to work in this way, I studied the reports in an effort to build a clearer picture in my mind, especially as far as the riot and the incident with Bobby Boone on D Block in 1987 was concerned.

A full enquiry into the escape by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation eventually led to the dismissal of Warden Brown and his Security Major. Gary Maynard and Bobby Boone were appointed in their place. One news report claimed, "Two employees have been disciplined and a third fired as a result of the investigation. An OSP Lieutenant identified only by the last name Fry, was fired, sources said." I guessed this must be the same man that had backed Mike Pruitt's statement six months later during the incident on 1 row in the F Cell House at the time of the riot on A and C Units. Jerry had told me Fry had been fired in May yet was back at work by the following December.

He maintained that Pruitt made more of what had actually happened in the F Cell House at the time of the riot in order to retaliate against him for the escape, *"The truth is, yes, four of us acted crazy, but the picket windows were not smashed, the photo of the picket window you've seen in my records was that of A or C Unit. We didn't burn or flood the place or injure anyone, hell, we were all back in our cells within two hours. The reason we were thrown in with the rioters and hostage takers of A and C units where the riot actually happened, was down to retaliation by Pruitt and Fry. This was with the backing of Boone and others within the McAlester classification, plus the administration and big wigs in the ODOC because of the escape 5 months prior to the riot. They were out to retaliate on me and Archie and the other 2 involved got crossed out right along with us. I only wish we could get our hands on a copy of Pruitt's statement, then you'd see how he lied about the incident in the F Cell House. Pruitt and Lt. Fry backed up each others stories of how we intended to go out to the rotunda and take over the button cage or control center so we could get the rifles, go up to Protective Custody and kill some catch out inmates; then he said we planned to escape. This is more or less the content of Pruitt's witness statement. He made up all these lies and stories to try to fuck over us big time. But the deal is, when you compare his statement with Fry's witness statement and the witness statements of the other guards, you can clearly see how those two were out right making up lies and stories to retaliate. I know it was Pruitt who pulled his statement out of my records and replaced it with another statement that had nothing to do with me whatsoever."*

I had copies of the officer's statements including Fry's. His was the only one to claim that Jerry and the three others had been intent on getting to the rotunda so that they could take over the Captain's office and the button cage. When he'd reviewed his prison records, he found a statement from Pruitt to Boone. The statement recounted a different incident that had taken place later that same evening concerning another prisoner and had no connection with Jerry whatsoever. Why would this unrelated account have been placed in his records and why was Pruitt's statement of what happened when Jerry and the others were out of their cells the only one that was missing? Pruitt's accusation that Jerry had intended to kill prisoners in protective custody was to have more significance than I could possibly understand until a later date.

When all those who'd been transferred to various prisons throughout the US returned to OSP, they'd been placed into Administrative Segregation on D Block to await trial for a variety of offences they'd been accused of committing during the riot. Jerry was interviewed by the District Attorney and warned if his case went to court they'd make sure he'd get at least 50 - 70 years. He didn't doubt that this could happen. He had no money to hire his own lawyer and rather than rely on someone appointed by the state, he accepted a plea bargain. He was given three twenty-year sentences to run concurrent for kidnap, assault with a dangerous weapon and injury to a public building, to be served consecutive to his other sentences.

He'd taken the threat by the District Attorney very seriously. However, he has always believed had he been able to be sure of fair legal representation he stood a good chance of receiving a more lenient sentence. This might be true given that when George Stidham, known as Archie, chose to stand trial for his part in what happened in the F Cell House, he'd been facing the exact same charges. He was sentenced to 10 years even though he'd been the one who'd threatened Officer Williams with a knife. The act of threatening someone with a weapon can sometimes constitute an assault, even if no blows are struck. Jerry did not have a knife with which to threaten Officer Williams and as unit orderly he had a legitimate reason to be out of his cell at the time.

One news item described how Larry Meachum, the Director of the ODOC had called the hospital that was treating Eddie. According to the reporter's account both Eddie and his wife had refused to talk with the Director. I wondered if this was correct?

In another article recounting the preliminary trial of two prisoners who'd been housed on A and C units, it was stated that Captain Jerry Holt had testified that he and another captain, Charley Grey had told Security Major Bobby Boone on the afternoon of December 17th 1985 that the convicts were warning of trouble. They were angry about being fired en masse from jobs they worked at in the prison rotunda. He'd asked for this warning to be given to the deputy warden but he'd been told that it wasn't possible as he was in a meeting. Rather than leave after he'd talked with Boone he decided to stay on duty in order to make sure the guards beginning the evening shift were told of trouble brewing. According to the report a prisoner called Kinney had told Captain Holt the inmates would not put up with the rotunda workers being fired and replaced by protective custody workers.

In the 1970s conditions in Oklahoma's prisons were very bad. There was severe overcrowding, not enough jobs and mistreatment of prisoners. Black prisoners in particular were discriminated against when it came to being able to work and overcrowding had led to single cells being used to house two prisoners. Bobby Battles was a black prisoner who together with his attorney Louis Bullock, of the American Civil Liberties Union, won a successful landmark civil lawsuit first filed in 1972. Overcrowding continued to be a severe problem and when Louis Bullock filed for supplementary relief in 1978 the Courts were so concerned at the deteriorating conditions control was taken away from the Department Of Corrections and placed into the hands of Judge Luther

Bohanon. Under the direction of Judge Bohanon there was a dramatic and sustained improvement. However, in 1983 Judge Frank Seay gave control back to the ODOC and soon overcrowding and violence became an issue once again.

According to the reports, Louis Bullock, Battles attorney, had been asked by the prisoners to speak with them as part of their negotiations with the DOC to end their take over on A and C Units. He'd talked with a small group who'd taken it upon themselves to air the grievances of everyone. He held an interview with reporters when the meeting ended to express his concerns that living conditions and safety at the prison had deteriorated. A Dallas attorney John Albach, who'd served as a fact-finder for Judge Bohanon, backed him in his claims. He'd called the idea of double celling to alleviate overcrowding as absolutely appalling, pointing out how the prison's population had been reduced and improvements made while under federal supervision.

When I'd read Captain Holt's testimony, Jerry's words in an earlier letter came racing into my mind, *"Sharon, I guarantee you if you were able to talk to Captain Jerry Holt, he'd tell you how he and Eddie both talked to Security Major Boone and Warden Gary Maynard about a riot coming down."* It wasn't that I doubted Jerry's word, it was just that at the time it seemed unbelievable that the two men responsible for safety and security in Oklahoma State Penitentiary would chose to ignore the advance warnings of their own officers, yet here was evidence in the news reports that supported his claims.

In 1984, a year before the riot the East and West Cellhouses at OSP were condemned. Displaced prisoners had to be re-housed but there was nowhere to put them. The DOC resorted to their solution of old by fitting extra bunks in the cells belonging to general population forcing two prisoners to share a space designed for one. A and C Units were two out of four new housing units erected at OSP to ease overcrowding under the directorship of Judge Bohanon after the Battles lawsuit. By the time of the riot, each unit originally designed to hold 112 inmates now held 224, making a total of 448, a doubling of capacity to unconstitutional levels.

Kinney and James Clayton were two of the prisoner representatives who'd met with Louis Bullock on A and C-units. They'd been placed on D Block with Jerry and the others to await prosecution once they'd been returned to OSP in 1986. I knew things had not gone well during the period they were there but despite everything we'd talk about in our letters, I still didn't know the full extent of what had happened. The news reports were the catalyst that allowed us to discuss things further and for Jerry's reminiscences to throw light into the darker areas of my understanding.

"Inmate Hunger-Striker Claims 'Fast' On 'Til Changes Made" announced one headline. The treatment Jerry and the others had been facing on D block was so bad that on January 1st, 1987, 14 prisoners signed a petition that announced their decision to begin a hunger strike. Most of those involved in this protest had been caught up in the riot. Subjected to months of constant harassment and mistreatment they didn't know what else they could do to relieve their distress. They declared their intentions in a letter sent to the News-Capitol and Democrat, "We will begin a fast to protest the conditions at Oklahoma State Penitentiary, especially on D-Block, and bring attention to the lies Warden Gary Maynard has repeatedly spoken to the press."

Judging by the content of the reporting their campaign didn't arouse any sympathy with the press. I read with interest an article called "An Interview With The Warden". Assuming the content was accurate, Maynard gave the impression the hunger strikers were not united each seeming to be protesting about a different issue. When asked if they had a spokesman, he said they did not. He also confirmed they were not violating any rules by going on hunger strike - today this is no longer the case. At the end of the interview, he was asked if anyone cared? According to Maynard the people on the streets had told him they couldn't care less about the inmates and whether they were eating. He said he understood their reasons for thinking this way, but stated the DOC had

an obligation to ensure the safety and welfare of inmates and as such, the prison administration was concerned. He would prefer to downplay the fast to the media and not make it a hunger strike otherwise the inmates would only end up physically hurting themselves.

After approximately ten days the fast was reported to have ended. Convict Walter Pierce stated in another letter to the press that Maynard had promised if they'd end the fast he'd begin making positive changes to conditions at the prison. The majority of those who'd refused to eat accepted his word, warning at the same time that if this was just more lies and deception from the Warden they would begin their protest fast again.

Conditions did not improve and on April 11th, three months after the ending of the hunger strike State Representative Walt Roberts was called to D-Block to assist in negotiating the release of a guard who'd been taken hostage at knifepoint by inmate Steven Wainscott. The guard was released unharmed and Roberts was said to have met with two prisoner representatives allowing them to voice the extent of the mistreatment they were enduring. Roberts told reporters he thought there were legitimate gripes about things at the prison, stating there had to be some answers for the frequent disturbances and assaults on employees. He said, *"Inmates in D-Block stay for indefinite lengths of time and that can create problems. It's a day-to-day deal with inmates not knowing when they'll get back privileges or get out. My fear is that we are taking away hope. You don't want these people to lose hope because they begin thinking that they have nothing to lose by acting in any manner."* Two weeks later, the disturbance began on D-Block that led to the incident where Jerry charged out of his cell, *"Now that one incident about the Rock. As the newspaper article pointed out, the Rock was not condemned according to the DOC but Sharon, the Rock had been shut for ages, it had been deemed unsafe for living and housing, yet the DOC claimed in this article it hadn't been condemned?"*

This was when mom was dying of cancer. D-Block has 2 quads and each quad had approximately 30 prisoners. There was only one prisoner to a cell because it was Ad Seg. During this period a lot of things were happening, Wainscott taking a guard hostage, all of us getting fucked around big time by the guards under the orders of those higher up. Now the incident that caused Boone and his troop to run down on us was when almost all the prisoners on D-Block started smashing the windows out of the front of their cell doors and threatening the guards, generally raising hell because we were getting treated badly. Many of the prisoners put cardboard over their cell door and their back cell windows because the guards were outside the building patrolling around with shotguns, pistols, looking into the cells. That's why the prisoners blocked up their cell windows on ground level so that those guards walking around outside couldn't see what they were doing. Now remember, I was not involved in any of this, I did not block up my cell window, I did not threaten, yell and curse or make any noise at all. I lived in a ground level cell and not only did those guards working on D-Block know and could see for themselves I was not taking part in anyway, those outside on patrol, the ranking officers and Bobby Boone knew I was not in any way involved. When Boone came up to my cell ordering me to cuff up I asked him why he was doing this to me because he knew I was not involved in the disturbance? I saw at least 2 guards tell him I was not involved and his only response was, 'I'm going to give you a second order to cuff up'. You see, by policy they are supposed to give a prisoner 2 to 3 direct orders to get handcuffed before they use force. I knew what his reasons were and when the door opened and he ordered the guards to get me out of the cell, I rushed it and grabbed hold of his shirt. A Captain Bobby Bryant stepped in between us, but I yanked Boone down with me as several guards wrestled me to the floor. And of course, this one incident has given Boone a purpose and reason to make it a personal vendetta.

Before Boone got to my cell, he'd already ordered the guards to whip 3 other pris-

oners so I knew what was happening and how if they came to me I was going to get the same. After our beating, each of us was marched in handcuffs and leg irons down a gauntlet of guards and taken to the Rock. We were stripped of all our clothing except for our under shorts, we were cut up from our beating and the glass that strewn the floor from the broken cell windows. We were put in single cells out on the rock. The bunks there are solid stone slabs that you just put your mattress onto them. I think the first 48 hours we had nothing except for what we were wearing. Then we were given a blanket, face towel, a cup and a roll of toilet paper as I remember. They starved us, only giving us the occasional sandwich. We were freezing cold and used old newspaper and plastic from the sandwich wrap to place around our feet because they were frozen. The Rock had concrete walls and there was no heating. The place looked like a condemned warehouse. I'm not sure how long we were there, but I think it was probably after a week when they came and read our disciplinary cases to us and this is when we complained about being frozen etc. They had a prison paramedic with them so they could claim they offered us medical attention. Each of us had been cut up pretty badly by the broken glass and the fighting. All the paramedic did was look on; he didn't attempt to treat us.

I know for a fact this particular incident was video taped from the moment Bobby Boone came to my cell and ordered me to cuff up, to the actual fight and the marching out to the Rock. All this was on video camera and DOC policy and laws make this videotape a permanent part of my Records. Plus the incident where I fight with the laws, had a shank and got the stitches in my head, this was also all on video tape and the DOC still possess records and video tapes. It's these video recordings, classification and disciplinary hearing tape recordings that we're especially wanting a lawyer to get hold of for us."

The news reports stated that institutional charges would be made against the inmates and a report may be submitted to District Attorney Don Robert's office for possible criminal charges. The DOC had filmed everything that night. They'd filmed Jerry charging out of his cell and assaulting Boone yet in the end there were no criminal charges filed against him? Next to the Warden, the Security Major is the highest-ranking official at OSP, and Jerry had knocked him to the ground and threatened him verbally. Why didn't they prosecute him? They couldn't because their actions infringed prison policies, procedures, and the law, they dared not allow the full extent of what happened that night be revealed in the courts. Out of the seven sent to the Rock, five had faced serious charges for their part in the riot. Jerry has always maintained they were singled out and tortured for good reason, to set an example that would send a warning to every other prisoner at OSP not to complain about the conditions of their confinement.

I'd come to the conclusion the only way to tell Jerry's story would be to write a book, and although he'd suggested it as a joke at first, the idea had grown in both our minds. At the beginning of November, a week after my return I began thinking of how I could tackle such a demanding task. It took me around 80 hours of trial and error, but eventually by using his letters, mixing his words and experience in with mine I found a way that allowed me to write. Jerry expressed his thoughts; *"You must write from your perspective, from your experience and use my words to help describe my world. Write how it has become clear to you "The System" has allowed a few specific prison officials to dictate my future as though I am truly an incorrigible prisoner who should spend his entire life caged up like an animal with no hope to live out the last years of my life with the woman I love in a simple home. How they have locked me up and punished me long enough. There are no more years or punishment they can inflict upon me. I've learnt my lesson, paid my debt for the crimes I committed. If I haven't paid enough years and been punished enough by now then there is never enough years and punishment a per-*

son like me can pay to society. It's that simple and the truth is, yes, I deserved to be punished and thrown in prison because of how I was, but I am no longer like that anymore and haven't been for a long, long time."

Was everything that had happened to him since 1985 really true? I had studied his paperwork enough to know that prison policies and procedures, state and federal law had been broken at the time of his transfer to Texas and during his stay there. I was positive the same could be said up to the present day with regards to his Level and Earned Credits. It was also a fact that he was being denied access to the most important of his prison records. There was no justification why statements and disciplinary reports were missing. I also had proof that high-ranking members of staff had misused their position of authority to try to prevent us from seeing each other and marrying.

I decided the people to ask about the riot, besides Jerry, would be the two men who should know best, Eddie Morgan and Jerry Holt, but I had no idea how they would react to my impinging on their time and privacy. Yes, I'd met Eddie but we'd not really spoken about the riot and although I could tell he liked Jerry it was by way of an old-fashioned "convict/guard" relationship with clearly defined borders governed by their own rules of respect handed down from older guards and convicts to younger guards and convicts that the newer generation of officers and prisoners at OSP wouldn't really understand. They all came from the "Ole School" and things had changed dramatically since those days before the riot.

It wasn't easy to catch Eddie at home what with the six-hour time difference and his working pattern but one Sunday in early December, 2005 he finally answered the phone. I told him about the news reports and asked if it had been true that he'd refused to speak with Director Larry Meachum. He said it was true, explaining that he'd been too angry and upset to speak with anyone from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections because the riot should never have happened. If they'd listened to his warnings and the warnings of the other officers it could have been prevented. I was both amazed and relieved to hear him confirm what Jerry had always maintained was true. Eddie spoke quietly giving brief unemotional answers to my questions. He explained how on the day of the riot Boone had fired inmates in general population telling them their prized jobs were to be given to men in protective custody. Prisoners housed in protective custody were placed there for their own safety. For the most part, they were disliked and looked down upon by those in general population especially if they had been suspected of being informers or had harmed children.

My conversations with Eddie were always brief and to the point and he didn't usually solicit more than I asked from him but during one phone call he surprised me by asking me if I knew what the date was. I paused for a second to think before telling him it was December 16th, he said, "It's the 17th tomorrow, twenty years exactly since the day of the riot. I always give myself that day off work because I figure I deserve it. You know, Sharon, not a single day goes by that I don't think about that riot. Every time I look in the mirror I remember I lost the sight in my eye that day. Every year in the run up to Christmas, I lose all sense of Christmas spirit, that's just how it affects me." I was struck by the irony of Jerry and Eddie, the prisoner and the prison officer and how the events of the night of December 17th, 1985 had caused anguish and suffering to them both but in different ways and for very different reasons. It hadn't occurred to me to think about what it must have been like for Eddie and the other officers on duty that night; suddenly I had gained a whole new perspective.

In December my mother contracted pneumonia and I had to organise extended unpaid leave from work to look after her and Chris, but once again her illness was a blessing in disguise because in every quiet moment I could work on the book. The more I thought about the riot the clearer the picture began to build in my mind that those at OSP and within the ODOC had planned for it to happen. This is what Jerry had been

telling me of late and I was beginning to think it really was true. I called Eddie to tell him my thoughts. I asked him straight if he thought the condemning of the East and West Cellhouses was linked with the riot? I explained why I'd come to this conclusion. The DOC knew that forcing two prisoners to share a cell that had been purpose built for one was unconstitutional. When Judge Seay had given control back to them in 1983 conditions began to deteriorate within a short period of time. Louise Bullock and the American Civil Liberties Union had an appeal in the Courts in an attempt to take control away from the ODOC and place the running of the prisons back into the hands of the federal government. OSP was at bursting point with too many prisoners and not enough jobs, there was increasing drug and alcohol abuse and violence. They'd suffered the embarrassment of the May 85 escape and the subsequent damning report by the OSBI that had led to high profile dismissals. The safest thing to do with a maximum-security prison under those conditions is to lock it down, forcing everyone to stay in their cells. But how could they justify locking men in their cells 23 hours a day who were not trouble makers, did not have active disciplinary cases? Wouldn't there be outrage amongst the prisoners and their families; prisoner rights movements? No doubt such unwarranted harsh treatment would gain a certain amount of public sympathy. On the other hand, what if those prisoners had rioted and caused hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of damage to a public building for which the taxpayers of Oklahoma would have to fork out their hard earned money to repair? Wouldn't that turn everybody against them? Wouldn't it make putting OSP on permanent lock down feasible? Eddie agreed with my analysis.

Jerry hadn't been exaggerating when he'd told me, *"The riot was instigated by certain DOC members so that they could get us on lock down status and keep us on lock down status for all these years. All these years later and we are still locked in our cells, fed in our cells and most of us stay in our cells all day and every day because we don't have a job. They did it so that they could go back to their old ways before the Battles lawsuit but this time they can get away with their unconstitutional treatment because all they have to do is point back to the riot of 85 and this gives them every bit of support and sympathy they need and god damn us prisoners for starting the riot in the first place."*

Eddie was off work for over 9 months. He'd been stabbed in the lung, the eye and other areas of his body. There were injuries that couldn't be seen as he was beset by terrible nightmares for months. I asked him why he'd returned to work at the prison, had he been afraid at the time? He said he'd felt afraid the first day he walked into C-Unit where the stabbings had taken place but likened his return to getting back on a horse after a nasty fall; "You have to get back in the saddle and not let the fear win."

After speaking with Eddie I wanted very much to hear what Jerry Holt would have to say. Eddie gave me his phone number and to my delight, he was willing to talk. He had a great deal of experience having started working at OSP in the 1950s. By the time he retired in 1994, he'd completed 38 years service. He'd spent 18 of those years working as a day shift Captain. He agreed completely that the riot had been started deliberately by the actions of Security Major Bobby Boone working under the direct orders of Warden Gary Maynard and Director Larry Meachum. He didn't pull any punches; he placed the blame for the riot squarely on their shoulders. He told me how Boone had called Eddie, Charley Gray and himself to his office on December 17th and told them what he intended to do. When they heard his decision they were appalled. There'd been rumours going around for a while and the convicts had already been threatening serious trouble if they lost their jobs to the men in protective custody. The three officers warned him it would be an act of insanity, but he insisted it would happen; he would follow orders and expected them to do the same.

That day, he went ahead and sacked around 15 to 20 runners. These men had been

working for years under the direction of Jerry Holt, Eddie and Charlie Gray holding down jobs that were the best the prison had to offer. The prisoners were livid. Confronting Captain Holt, they warned him they intended to take over the prison that day.

He didn't leave work when his shift ended at 4pm, filled with fear for the safety of his fellow officers he decided to go to see Boone for the third time and plead with him to talk to the convicts in order to calm the explosive situation. On this third occasion, Jim Cline, the DOC Investigator was in Boone's office. Boone told Jerry, "I'll talk with them in the morning." Jerry replied, "The morning will be too late".

Meanwhile in the F Cellhouse, inmate Jerry Hamilton knew nothing about the intended take over of A and C Units until around 4pm when two prisoners on maintenance duty explained what Boone had done and told him to watch out for action down on A and C Units. When he saw signs of a take over he was to do whatever he could to cause a distraction. He passed the news around to those he felt could be trusted on 1 row where he was housed. The F Cell House has five tiered rows, four of which were used as housing for prisoners. He had no idea what would happen, all he could do was to keep looking for any tell tale signs of unusual activity.

Around 6.30pm, Jerry was working on the run, peering through the window he could see officers with shotguns milling around and men being carried on stretchers. Determined to keep his promise, he told Officer Williams that Stidham's "stool" was flooding, Williams asked Officer Potter, a female officer on duty in the control room to open the cell door. When the door opened, Stidham produced a knife and told Williams to get in the cell and hand over his keys. Jerry took the key that unlocked the shower releasing the prisoner inside, he then ran to the control room and putting his hand in through a small access door he managed to flick switches that opened around eight cell doors before Officer Potter beat his hand away and shut the opening. Only one prisoner chose to join them while the others remained in their cells. All four began to attack the control room window while Officer Potter called for help.

Pruitt, Lt. Fry and several other officers all armed with shotguns rushed into the F Cell house. Approximately fifteen minutes from the time Officer Williams was told to get into the cell, he made his way safely to the control room. Jerry and the others asked to speak with the Deputy Warden or Security Major Boone. The control room officer phoned the Deputy Warden and he gave orders to put the men back in their cells.

It was at this point when they fought with the officers, "Lt. Pierce swung at me with the night stick to try to shatter my knee cap and when he did that I hit him in the mouth. I bet you won't read anywhere in those statements how once they had us on the ground Lt. Pierce had his night stick braced with one knee over my head using all his body weight to smash down on my skull and the only thing that stopped him from doing so is luckily I was able to pull one of my hands away from the guard before he got it handcuffed to the other one and used it to keep some of the pressure of the night stick from smashing my skull. All of this was filmed. Mike Pruitt put a twelve-gage shotgun to my head. He was on the other side of the crash gate steel bars telling me how he was going to blow my head off."

In his report to Boone, Williams stated, "Approximately 6.30pm, Inmate Hamilton came up and said that Inmate Stidham's stool was running over. When I had his door racked open so that Hamilton could mop up the water, Inmate Stidham pulled a knife and ordered me in his cell. He immediately ordered all my keys and especially the Sally Port Key, which was the Control Room. They left and began trying to break the windows out of the Control Room. I was able to get off the run through 3-door into the Control Room at approximately 6.45pm."

Jerry Holt was furious with Maynard, Boone and Director Larry Meachum for instigating the riot, and just like Eddie, he's still angry all these years later. Investigating

officers for the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, Tommy Graham and B. G. Jones took statements from prison officers who witnessed what happened. As part of their investigation Captain Holt and Jim Cline were interviewed. Both of them refused to change their statement of the events as they witnessed them that day despite intimidation by Warden Maynard who let them know he expected their full cooperation. When the report was published it didn't disguise that the blame for the riot lay directly at the feet of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. Jerry Holt revealed how he'd kept a copy of the report for years before finally throwing it away in disgust. During our telephone conversation I asked him why those in command were not reprimanded and punished for their reckless behaviour, he said, "When Governor George Nigh read the report he ordered the Oklahoma Bureau of Investigation to cover up their findings. I knew the two investigators Tommy Graham and B.G. Jones, they told me there was nothing more they could do" I asked him to explain the reasons for the cover up, he said, "Everyone from the Governor, to the Director of the ODOC, to Warden Maynard and Bobby Boone intended for that riot to happen. I don't think they expected it to go as far as it did, but their intention was to rile the convicts, get them to do something crazy so that they could have a legitimate reason to put the prison on permanent lockdown and their plan worked."

Both of them have confirmed that Jerry was released from D Block Administrative Segregation in March 1988. He had paperwork to show he was no longer seen as a threat to the security of the prison. He was living on C-unit with no inkling of what was about to happen. Maynard had just been appointed Director. Bobby Boone was still Security Major. Out of the blue in April, Boone told Eddie they were sending Jerry to Texas. He gave him orders to lie to him, to tell him he was being taken to the infirmary or anyplace he could think of. He didn't care what reason Eddie came up with to get him to cooperate as long as he didn't tell him he was about to be transferred. What they were doing was against policy and procedure and Boone knew Jerry would raise hell. There was no way Eddie would lie to him but he had to obey an order from his superior officer. He went to see Jerry Holt to ask his advice; they both agreed he should tell Jerry the truth. Eddie explained he was under orders to take him to Lexington in preparation for his transfer to the Texas Department of Corrections. He told him if he didn't come quietly, Boone would send in the goon squad to whip his ass and hogtie him. Jerry's mother had died the previous August and with the promise he'd made to her to avoid trouble foremost in his mind, he decided to leave quietly with Eddie.

Once Maynard became Director his position as Warden was given to James Saffle. As soon as Jerry arrived in Texas, he wrote to Terry Hull, Assistant Appellate Public Defender for Oklahoma. He had an appeal on his sentence of 115-years already going through the Courts in Oklahoma so for this reason alone, he should never have been sent out of state. There was no declared state of emergency to warrant his transfer and it had already been decided he was no longer a threat. Saffle had been one of those who'd signed the papers to release him from Ad Seg. Ms. Hull wrote to him on Jerry's behalf. A month later, Saffle replied, "Please be advised that Jerry Hamilton was transferred to the Texas Department of Corrections on April 27, 1988 due to his involvement in the riot at Oklahoma State Penitentiary on December 17, 1985. Jerry had been identified as a "ringleader" among the inmate population during this riot. This transfer was discussed with him on more than one occasion and he understood the reason for his transfer.

Under Oklahoma Department of Corrections classification policy, he would have remained at maximum security. It was felt that his best interest would be served by transferring to a new Department of Corrections where he would not have a reputation and could make a new start working his way back to society.

Jerry is not expected to return to the Oklahoma Department of Corrections in the near future."

Chapter

18

Letter 510, December 17, 2005 Saturday

"Can you believe in just 14 more days 2006 will be here? Sharon, sometimes I just sit back and reflect upon the first time I walked into prison at 19, a young, head strong, naïve stupid kid really, but back then I thought I knew it all. It fucked me up to see that photo of me at 19 because I really looked young. Hell, I was only a kid, but of course I always thought I looked mean, tough, rugged - Ha! Here in prison I've always been a man of character and integrity. A man who prided himself in being a solid stand-up mifer whose word was good. And yes, like you pointed out, it's my being a stand-up convict, wanting the respect of all the other men and convicts that's led to a lot of heartache for me. But, Sharon, I was very young when I came into prison and the gaining respect, being known as a solid stand-up mifer was a reputation a person had to have in order to survive because in prison if you had any weaknesses, showed any sort of fear you would be preyed upon and taken advantage of by the predators, those prisoners who think they can use or bully you into doing whatever and of course, even at a young age I was never one to let anyone tell me what to do, how to act or let them put fear into me.

In prison during the time I first came in there was such a thing as honor amongst us convicts, a code of conduct we lived by and it all involved respect for each other. It goes without saying; many a prisoner, who is a solid convict, is put in situations where he has to show his true color. So it's been my word and true character that's gotten me through rough times and has made it possible for me to walk around in here, survive with my head held high all these years. Yes, now that I can reflect back on it all, it has come at a high cost and caused me many, many hardships and hard times through the years. Quite possibly, if I had it to do all over again, I might have done a lot of things differently - hell, I know I would. I've wasted all my best years locked away behind prison walls. My whole adult life more or less and I will regret this for as long as I live because who really suffered and paid the price for my wild, stupid life style apart from the people I stole from were my mother and father. They were the ones who worried and no doubt spent many a sleepless night. I never really understood the true punishment and price I paid for all the crimes and years I've spent in prison until I choose to turn my life around, to change and even then it all seemed too late, a hopeless situation that could never be reversed and yet I've stood by my promise to my mother all these years. Not only that, I made my mind up that I was sick and tired of the life of drugs and crimes. I made myself promise that unless I knew without doubt that if and when I ever did get

out that I could stay out and make something of my life then I didn't want out.

Sometimes I look back and think how did I ever make it this far, this long? Why did I survive all these years of madness when so many others didn't? What was the deciding factor in all of this? Now I look back at all the many, many prisoners I met along the way who are no longer around, many of them were killed by other prisoners - and all the old prison staff who've either retired or are on the verge of retiring after years of service and here I sit with no actual get out date in sight. I wonder have my crimes and behavior really been so terrible that I should never get out? Yes, my prison record is bad, my many felony convictions look bad, yet I've seen and known hundreds of other prisoners who have had just as bad or worse prison records and criminal convictions than I have and some how they have been able to work and show they've progressed, changed and deserve to be let out. It seems like no one even cares if Jerry's changed, has out grown his wild, stupid lifestyle and ways. My age and the fact that I have been punished and incarcerated for decades is something the powers that be can't dispute and this surely counts for something? Who has the power or authority to decide if and when a person has spent enough years in prison anyway? Yep, It's these prison officials, the same people who out of hatred and personal revenge will see to it, if they can, that I spend the rest of my life in prison. After all, if a few prison officials can use their positions and influence to prevent a prisoner from having a fair and equal opportunity to place positive reports in his records, something the Parole Board members demand and expect, isn't that corruption in itself? Remember, these prison officials who've stopped me from making positive progress are the same people who've told me I must prove myself by working, take advantage of the programs, and keep a clean disciplinary record. The courts punished and sentenced me Sharon, but these prison authorities have punished and sentenced me to a harsher sentence than the courts ever did and that's a sentence for the duration of never being afforded the chance or opportunity to show and prove to the parole board that I'm a better person, I am no longer the dope fiend I once was and I am no longer a threat to society.

Thank you for shooting me this information about the "Commission On Safety And Abuse In America's Prisons". Yep, that's Gary Maynard. Remember when Warden Brown got ran off, that's when Gary Maynard became Warden here at McAlester. He wasn't Warden too long before he got the Director's position of the ODOC. It was Maynard who approved my release off Ad Seg just before I got transferred to Texas."

In December 2005, Jerry sent me a page he'd torn out of Prison Legal News a magazine full of reports of successful prisoner lawsuits and other relevant legal information. The page contained an article that had been published in July 2005 under the heading, "National Prison Reform Commission Started." The reason he'd sent it to me was not just because it was the first Commission of its kind for thirty years, but because amongst the 20 prestigious Commissioners, was a Gary Maynard, Director of the Iowa Department of Corrections and American Correctional Association President-elect. He wondered if this was the same Gary Maynard, Warden of OSP at the time of the riot?

At the first opportunity I logged onto the Internet, it was such a surprise bearing in mind my very recent conversations with Eddie and Jerry Holt to find that it was indeed the same person. The Commission, co-chaired by The Hon. John J Gibbon, former Chief Judge of the US Court of Appeals had already held three out of four public hearings, the last of which was scheduled to take place in Los Angeles in February 2006. There were statements of support from US senators and representatives including Representative F. James member of the House Judiciary Committee. He pointed out that it was their duty to do everything possible to ensure the safety of both corrections personnel and prisoners.

The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation had placed the blame for failure to prevent the riot upon those in charge at OSP but somehow it had all been swept under

the carpet and forgotten. Yet its 20-year legacy is as fresh as ever because the lockdown born in its wake is still in full operation forcing everyone in general population to live in overcrowded, unconstitutional conditions. And let's not forget the detrimental effect it has had upon the life of retired officer Eddie Morgan

The Commission was addressing issues such as violence and severe overcrowding by listening to hundreds of witness accounts from prison personnel and prisoners, their close relatives and a plethora of experts. The Vera Institute of Justice claimed that while President Bush was calling the abuse at Abu Ghraib "un-American" many Americans themselves were raising similar questions about the mistreatment of prisoners at home. The Commission was in the process of examining the consequences of unsafe and abusive correctional environments for both prisoners and correctional officers alike.

The riot hadn't harmed Maynard's career, he became ODOC Director two years later and twenty years on he was about to become President of the American Correctional Association, an organisation, celebrating more than 135 years of global excellence to use their own description of themselves. They prided themselves in holding a modern day belief in the principles of, "Humanity, Justice, Protection, Opportunity, Knowledge, Competence and Accountability."

I registered to receive updates about the work of the Commission and wondered what kind of a report they would publish. Jerry reacted to the news about Maynard's rise through the ranks in a matter of fact way, he wasn't surprised at all. He said as far as the media, politicians and citizens in Oklahoma are concerned, the prisoners rioted therefore they were to blame. He hoped the Commission might lead to prison reform of some kind but he was highly sceptical it would come in time to benefit him.

We'd tried every way we could to get his Level and Earned Credits adjusted but those in charge of his classification were still insisting that under present policy he could rise no higher than level 2. Yet at the same time they admitted he fell under the old policies and as such they were allowing him level 4 privileges?

I was still writing letters to the ODOC presenting what I believe was a watertight case to show Jerry should be able to rise in Level. Jim Rabon, the person responsible for sentence administration and offender records insisted he could not. I had actual proof to support my claims, but I couldn't present it without compromising the prisoner who'd let me have a copy of his paperwork. He'd recently been raised from level 2 to 3 despite having a similar background to Jerry and higher security points. We were fighting a losing battle and it was pointless taking our argument any further.

The week allotted for our marriage, Monday through to Friday, March 6th - 10th, 2006 was confirmed in an email I received from Chaplain Franzese in early January. He told me he did not foresee any problem for the dates I'd picked and reminded me to be at his office first thing Monday morning. I was elated and wrote to give Jerry the good news. I booked our flight with American Airlines to travel to Texas on the Sunday. My youngest son would be coming with me this time, it would be a first in every sense of the word for twenty-year-old Gareth, his first time to meet Jerry, first time to fly and first ever visit to the US.

Once he received my letter Jerry sent a request to the Chaplain to ask how much he would have to pay to be escorted to the Courthouse in town in order to sign the marriage register. We knew it was policy for this payment to be deducted from his inmate fund well in advance of the actual day we would marry. The Chaplain's reply sent us reeling, Jerry hadn't had a mental capacity evaluation so the fee for transportation could not be withdrawn from his inmate fund, as such our marriage application would not be finalised. Chaplain Franzese had told the psychologist the evaluation was no longer needed as a matter of routine when she'd called his office the previous June. Sick to the stomach at this latest plan to prevent our marrying, Jerry wrote to Lee Mann asking her to intervene and help him to organise a meeting with the psychologist, she did not

answer his letter. He submitted a request to the psychologist asking that she conduct the evaluation, he never heard back. What can a man in his position do when those who have total charge of his life and welfare routinely ignore him? The answer to that question is simple; there is nothing he can do.

As soon as I discovered what was happening, I sent an email to Bobby Boone and Lee Mann. I reminded them of the discrimination Jerry and I had been facing for over two years highlighting everything they'd put us through, plus the fact that in January the Chaplain had confirmed he could envision no problem for our forthcoming marriage in March. My email had the positive effect I'd been looking for. Lee Mann replied assuring me everything was in order and that the Chaplain would work with us to finalise our marriage arrangements. She apologised for any misunderstanding that may have occurred. I wanted to make doubly sure this was the case so I wrote a letter to the new Director of the ODOC, Justin Jones. I enclosed copies of all the documented evidence in my possession and asked that he make sure we would be treated fairly and with dignity, emphasising that we were not looking for special treatment but only to be allowed what others are allowed within the guidelines. I sent copies to the Governor and Ernest Godlove, Secretary of the Board of Corrections. The Board of Corrections is made up of seven bipartisan members appointed by the State Governor. Their role is to establish and review policies for the operation of the Department Of Corrections.

Once we were back on track again, I emailed Pastor King giving him the dates of the week the Chaplain had set aside for our marriage. I would not know the actual day we'd marry until our meeting on the Monday. I asked the Pastor if he could be available any time during that week in March. Unfortunately, he would not be available on the Wednesday because of a court appointment. My mind went into overdrive and I became paranoid that this prior engagement on the Wednesday might be seen as another excuse to cancel our wedding. With this in mind I contacted Jack, a volunteer minister at the prison. He'd conducted Valerie's marriage, the woman I'd met at OSP the year before. She'd given me his phone number in case I had any problems. I contacted him to explain my predicament, he gave me his assurance he would be pleased to marry us.

As well as posting my letter to Director Justin Jones, I sent him an email. I didn't receive a reply but within a few days I was given reassurance from the Chaplain that he would not schedule our marriage for the Wednesday. When I read this news, I felt some of the tension leave me. For over two years Jerry and I had been fighting an uphill battle to see each other and to marry, at last I believed we'd turned a corner and would not have to face any more discrimination. I should have known better. With some disbelief I found out in February that Deputy Warden Harvanek had crossed through our application for four-hour visits replacing it with a maximum of two hours despite the fact I'd be travelling thousands of miles and hadn't seen Jerry for six months. I emailed Boone asking him to intervene. Five days later, I was still waiting for a response. Disappointed and frustrated, I emailed the new Warden of OSP, Marty Sirmons to ask for his intervention and received a reply from Acting Deputy Warden, Teresa Alexander. She told me they had evaluated special visits, and from now on they would be no more than 2 hours in length due to space limitations. She also said the Warden had established new guidelines and all visiting correspondence must now go through the US postal service. Email enquiries regarding visitation were no longer allowed.

In 10 days Gareth and I would be flying to the US, there was not enough time for me to pursue this matter by letter and receive a reply before we left. I felt that on this occasion, we were beaten. Even though I was positive this so called change to special visits was something that existed only for us, how could I prove it? I couldn't see there was any way around this latest development. I felt helpless especially as I wasn't entirely convinced they would not try at the very last minute to find a way to prevent us from

marrying. I decided that I would make copies of every single piece of evidence in my possession to show the extent of the discrimination we'd been suffering. I would take it with me and in the event that I should be faced with the unthinkable, the cancellation of our marriage, I would approach a lawyer, maybe even the media or anyone I could think of who might help with our predicament. I arranged finance in case I needed to hire an attorney and my family agreed that I should stay in McAlester for the whole of March. I was determined not to come home until we were married; we'd waited long enough and been put through too much stress only to fall at the last hurdle.

It was while I was in my local supermarket photocopying all my evidence that I was reminded of a grievance reply Jerry had received the year before from Warden Mullin; he'd insisted an extended visit was not necessary as the visiting room officers could determine extra time depending on how busy it became. I wrote to the Warden sending a separate copy each to the Director, the Board of Corrections and the Governor pointing out that on the basis of this statement how can OSP restrict special visits to a maximum of two hours? What about relatives and friends who might want a special visit because they live out of state but due to family or work commitments are only able to stay in McAlester for one or two days? Would they be asked to leave after two hours regardless of whether the visiting room was crowded or not? The implementation of this two-hour limit would mean they would get no more than those who were able to visit on a weekly basis, a total of 4 hours. These changes would make a mockery of the whole concept of special visits. I argued that in effect, OSP no longer offered special visits, yet policy stated they did. Warden Sirmons had changed policy and procedure when he did not have the authority to do so; only the Board of Corrections had that power. I knew these comments would set the cat amongst the pigeons because it's one thing to discriminate against me and Jerry, we were only two, but they failed to see that this latest tactic was a gross violation of their own policies affecting everyone who applied for special visits. Of course, in reality this new rule only existed for us, but by my making everyone aware of this violation, I knew they could not ignore me. I wouldn't know the effect my letters would have before I left the UK because there would not be enough time for a reply to reach me. With this in mind I wrote in my final paragraph that I would ask to speak with Warden Sirmons after I had visited with the Chaplain on the Monday. Once I'd mailed my letters there was nothing else to do, I'd done everything I could think of to offset the retaliation and only time would reveal the outcome.

Apart from a little airsickness, Gareth enjoyed his first experience of flying. The sights that greeted him as we drove through Dallas kept him spellbound. He soaked up the unfamiliar scenery every step of the way until we reached McAlester.

Pulling up outside OSP the next day I enjoyed watching his expression as he took in its colonial style grandeur, it must be unusual for first time visitors not to be impressed by its size and position. Chaplain Fanzese greeted us warmly in reception and made us feel welcome once we arrived in his office by offering coffee or a soft drink. I declined while Gareth accepted a coffee. My reaction was one of complete surprise when he announced our marriage was scheduled for 3pm that same day. This was something I just hadn't been expecting given everything that we'd been through. I was mentally prepared to face every kind of delay. The Chaplain let me phone Pastor King, unfortunately he was not at home but his daughter gave me the number for his cell phone. When we spoke, he explained that he was on his way to Tulsa for an appointment with his doctor. We needed him to be at OSP no later than 2.30pm and although he assured me he'd do his best to be there, the Chaplain and I felt we couldn't take the risk that he'd be delayed in some way. I phoned Jack and to my delight he told me he'd be very pleased to have the opportunity to marry us and assured me he would arrive in plenty of time. I called Pastor King once again to explain the situation apologising for my having to forego his services at the very last moment. I arranged to visit him at his

home later that evening to thank him in person for all his support.

I handed Jerry's wedding ring to the Chaplain and before Gareth and I left, he gave me a letter to present to the Court Clerk so that I would only have to pay \$5 for the marriage license instead of \$50. He advised me to go there immediately to sign the marriage register. In Britain the signing of the register takes place after the ceremony, I hadn't realised in Oklahoma this procedure is reversed. As Gareth and I were leaving, I mentioned I'd planned to speak with Warden Sirmons regarding our special visit, but the Chaplain assured me everything would be fine and there was no reason to be concerned. Given all that had just transpired, I decided to take him at his word, guessing that my letters had done the trick.

We walked back to the car my feet hardly touching the ground as the reality set in that Jerry and I would actually marry in a few hours. Gareth and I rushed straight to the courthouse situated just a few blocks away from the library. I knew from the experience of others that it was usual for the officers escorting the prisoner to the Courthouse to allow one unofficial "wedding photograph" to be taken. This would be our only opportunity as photographs of inmates with family and friends were not allowed under any circumstance at OSP. Unfortunately, when we arrived at the grand, double fronted red brick building, the Court Clerk informed us that Jerry had already been there. He'd signed the register at 7am, long before they opened to the public. I learnt later, that when the armed officers had bundled him in through a side entrance, he'd wondered if I'd be waiting there for him because usually the bride and groom sign the register together even when the groom is an inmate at OSP, but the powers that be made sure we would not have an opportunity to share that experience or have our photo taken.

Just before 3pm, Gareth, Jack, the Chaplain and myself were waiting in the shake down area of the passageway that leads to visiting and the tiny room where we'd received our counselling in October. This was where our marriage would take place. Just as he'd done the previous October, Jerry suddenly appeared in handcuffs and legs chains, he waved, calling out a greeting to Gareth and myself before they led him off to the holding pen to be searched. While I waited for a female officer to arrive, the male officer searched the men, including the Chaplain and they were allowed into the room. When I joined them a few minutes later everybody was waiting for me in a scene somewhat reminiscent of the bride keeping the guests waiting in church, except that a tiny, windowless room in Oklahoma State Penitentiary is not exactly the venue most would have in mind when they plan their wedding. As far as we were concerned however the surroundings didn't matter because at last our deep desire to seal our love in a legal way was about to be realised.

My eyes were focussed on Jerry's as I walked around the table to stand by his side. We smiled at each other and he nodded a greeting across the table to Gareth who was seated next to the Chaplain. There was just enough standing room for Jack, Jerry and myself. At the opposite end of the table, next to the closed door I'd just come through stood three prison officers each trying their best to look official and respectful. There was no waiting on ceremony as Jack began to speak. This was the first time Jerry and I had ever stood side by side before. He caught hold of my hand despite the restriction of the handcuffs. I was very touched by this gesture because I knew it wasn't an easy thing for him to do in front of these very masculine officers, especially as he'd always warned me not to expect any hand holding in public once he was freed claiming his rugged, mountain man reputation would be at stake if he should do so. Complete brava-do as it turned out. We repeated our lines faultlessly, Jerry struggling to keep hold of the tiny wedding ring as he placed it on my finger. I concentrated on pushing the ring over his knuckle, swollen from the effects of arthritis while Gareth grinned like a Cheshire cat all the way through. At the finish we kissed briefly and Jack asked us to turn as a couple so that he could present us to everyone. We faced the three officers who

looked on with expressions that ranged from slight embarrassment, a mirror to our own feelings at that moment, and friendly curiosity. The ice was broken when the oldest of the three asked Gareth if he'd brushed up against wet paint. This was a joke reference to the fact he had bright red streaks of dye in his dark brown hair. We all laughed. Gareth, Jack and a prison officer signed the marriage certificate. Jack and the Chaplain congratulated us and once this formality was over everyone left including Gareth who wasn't allowed to stay. The whole proceedings had taken no more than 15 minutes. The youngest officer was assigned to stay with us while we were allowed to spend some time together. Although there was no official visiting that day, a half-hour visit was allowed by policy and we were extremely thankful to be given this privilege.

We sat side by side, another first, conscious of the officer sitting near by. I felt sorry for him because he tried to make his presence as unobtrusive as possible while we recounted our experiences of the last few weeks leading up to our actual wedding. Jerry had had no warning when they came to take him to the courthouse that morning. On his return, he'd been left in his cell not knowing if our marriage was to take place that day until they came to collect him once again just before the ceremony. I'd sent him a copy of my letter to Warden Sirmons and he agreed that it had made all the difference. Once again, someone had told those in charge to stop what they were doing and allow us to marry straight away. The only power they had left was to deny us the opportunity of having a photograph taken together, but at the end of the day what really mattered was that we were finally husband and wife.

It was so nice when Jerry and Gareth were able to meet properly two days later during the first of our five-day visit. Jerry walked into the visiting room sporting his new wedding ring, relief lighting up his face as he bent to kiss me before catching around Gareth in a great big bear hug. It was a happy, joyous moment for the three of us and set the tone for all of our time together. The visiting room remained quiet and rather than being asked to leave after two hours, we were allowed to stay for the maximum extended time, the full four hours. Once again we were sure my recent letters were responsible for this positive change of attitude.

The next day confirmed our belief without any doubt. Gareth had decided to take a wander around town so that we could spend some time alone. Half way through our visit Jerry announced in a surprise voice that his unit manager had just walked into the room. He spoke with the officers at the duty desk and then walked over to our table to tell us he'd just received orders from Bobby Boone to allow us 6 hours visiting on each day, time and space permitting. Six-hour visits were unprecedented for maximum-security prisoners at OSP. Jerry remarked, "Big time heat must have come down on Boone for this to happen."

We'd always known Boone was the main person behind the ill treatment we'd been facing, but it's impossible to prove when those below are acting upon the orders of their superior. Warden Mullin and Deputy Warden Harvanek had no reason to subject us to the discrimination we'd faced for over two years. Neither had recently appointed Warden Sirmons, other than they were acting upon the orders of Bobby Boone. As Regional Director, his word was final at OSP and only the Director could override his decisions.

Gareth left us before the end of our final visit, allowing us some private time together. We made the most of our last hour pleased we'd finally achieved what sometimes felt like an impossible dream. We could hardly believe that I would be returning to Wales as Mrs. Sharon Hamilton, yet all too soon it was time for me to leave. The officer gestured for Jerry to follow him and we scrambled to our feet afraid of missing our kiss goodbye. As he walked away, I called out his name and he looked around, "I'll be back!" I said. I always ended my letters that way, our eyes locked in firm commitment for a second and then he was gone.

Making polite conversation with the Chaplain in his office the afternoon of our marriage while we waited for Jack to arrive, I'd asked if he'd any marriages scheduled for the following September, he picked up a form that was lying on his desk and told me he'd just received a new application from an inmate, "I have one marriage already" he said. Six months? That's all it would take for this new couple to marry? In 2003, I'd sat in his office while he explained that according to prison policy and procedure, I would have to make six separate trips to McAlester and it would take at least three years before we would be able to marry. I'd believed every word he said back then, experience has since taught me that Jerry was right all along, *"What good are their policies and procedures if they don't enforce them correctly and equally? What good are policies and procedures if they allow those at McAlester to ignore them or change them to suit their own ends as a means to discriminate and retaliate?"*

As soon as I returned home, I received a letter from Director Justin Jones; it was dated March 9th the same day Jerry's unit manager came to let us know we would be allowed to visit for six hours. He told me my circumstances had been re-evaluated by staff at Oklahoma State Penitentiary. They were now taking into consideration the distance I had to travel and the high costs involved. As such we'd been granted 6 hours visiting time each day Thursday through to Sunday. I replied straight away thanking him for his intervention.

It's now February 2008, and Jerry's Situation remains the same. He's on C unit the same unit he was in when Eddie took him to Lexington to be transferred to Texas all those years ago. He's still classed as Level 2. Does he have a job? In December 2005 he was assigned to the paint crew. Months passed and he remained in his cell. The following May he asked why he'd not been called out to work, they told him the paint crew was no longer considered a Job? Once again, I sent letters presenting evidence to show he was being denied the opportunity to work. The Director assured me Jerry had been on a pre-approved list for a maintenance position since July – this was news to both of us? That was twenty months ago and there's still no sign of him being allowed to work. He continues to sit in his cell. Jerry had never heard of anyone being placed on a pre-approved list except for the print shop and he was on that list for a year to no avail. At this rate they could prevent him from working and therefore from placing anything positive in his records indefinitely. What kind of message does this send out for any future parole reviews?

Director Justin Jones has made it clear to me that OSP is a maximum-security facility and this is why jobs are so scarce with the result that most prisoners cannot work. After the riot, men classified as medium-security were moved into the prison and it's these inmates who now undertake most of the work. This is the real reason why jobs are so few and far between for Jerry and others like him. It's unusual, to say the least, for medium-security prisoners to be housed "behind the walls".

There was a directive in 2006 allowing men who've been discipline free for 5 years to be put forward by their case managers for transfer to medium-security. Many applications have been approved, Jerry's has been denied twice. His last disciplinary in Oklahoma was in 1987.

According to his prison records, he is a member of the Aryan Brotherhood. An independent investigation would prove that this is completely untrue. He spent years locked in the tortuous confines of administrative segregation in Texas for this very reason and the irony is Oklahoma doesn't have a policy of segregating its gang members. His deep desire remains the same, to be given the opportunity to move forward in positive ways.

Last January, Tami Wagoner, ODOC case manager was dismissed from her job, despite 16-years service. She was accused of conduct unbecoming of a State Employee. After filing a successful lawsuit, she declined to return to the prison preferring instead to tender her resignation. She is still an Oklahoma State Employee but with a different organization and is satisfied she made the right decision.

Six months after Tami was fired, Eddie's partner, Jeanne was also accused of conduct unbecoming of a State Employee and her job as a prison counsellor was terminated. She'd worked for the ODOC for over 19 years. Her case for unfair dismissal was stronger even than that of Tami's and so with confidence in his ability to do for her what he'd done for Tami she hired the same lawyer. Inexplicably, he somehow missed the deadline for the submission of vital paperwork and returned her retainer stating he could no longer represent her? Jeanne has since hired a new lawyer and they are working towards what will hopefully be a successful outcome. Tami and Jeanne are both convinced their jobs were terminated in retaliation for their connection with this book.

The Commission On Safety And Abuse In America's Prisons published its report. One chapter entitled, "Invest In External Oversight" began with a quote from, Jack Cowley, former Warden of the Joseph Harp Correction Center, Oklahoma, "When we're not held accountable, the culture inside the prisons becomes a place that is so foreign to the culture of the real world that we develop our own way of doing things." The finding of the Commission agreed with his testimony, "Most correctional facilities are surrounded by more than physical walls; they are walled off from external monitoring and public scrutiny to a degree inconsistent with the responsibility of public institutions." I think it's fair to say that at Oklahoma State Penitentiary they have mastered the art of doing things their own way. "In the most severe conditions - which are more likely to occur in disciplinary segregation units and supermax prisons - individuals are locked down 23 or 24 hours a day". This quote taken from the Commission Report could easily be used to describe the way men in general population exist today at OSP as a direct result of the riot of 1985 except they are not in disciplinary segregation, neither is OSP classified as a supermax prison.

Did Gary Maynard reflect upon this during his time as a Commissioner? Does he think of Eddie, one of his own men blinded during a riot that need never have occurred because he chose to ignore direct warnings from his officers when he was Warden at OSP? As President of the American Correctional Association, does he adhere to their principle that, "Accountability is a keystone of sound corrections practice; therefore, all those engaged in corrections activity should be held accountable for their actions and behavior." Would he remember inmate Jerry Hamilton released from Administrative Segregation on his authorisation because he was no longer seen as a threat to the security of the prison, or recall that he was sent out of state 45 days later against his will? Of course, he wouldn't have known how long he stayed there, or that he was locked in solitary confinement for most of the time, denied meaningful access to the courts and consistently prevented from moving forward in any positive way because Mr. Maynard had long since left the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. As Jerry would say, "What good are their policies and procedures"? I'll leave you with these words from ex-Warden Mike Mullin, "No one here wants to punish Jerry, we all understand that inmates are sent here *as* punishment and not *for* punishment. Our jobs are difficult enough without us trying to make them more difficult by violating our own policies and procedures. Again, I assure you Jerry's rights are not being violated."

Author's Note

In order to disguise their identity some names of free world people have been changed. The names of the Department of Corrections personnel remain the same. I have done everything in my power to be truthful and accurate.

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“When we’re not held accountable, the culture inside the prisons becomes a place that is so foreign to the culture of the real world that we develop our own way of doing things.”

Jack Cowley - former Warden of the
Joseph Harp Correction Center, Oklahoma



Sharon Hamilton

“ . . . there’s hundreds,
probably thousands,
of books about
prisons and prisoners
in the United States,
it’s a huge subject, but
I bet none of them
are like this one. Of
course, I’m not asking
you to take my word
for it . . . ”

~ Sharon

