



Behind the Walls

by Larry Baker #35021
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Gerda Lerner once wrote: "Black women speak with many voices and expressing many individual opinions, have been nearly unanimous in their insistence that their own emancipation cannot be separated from the emancipation of their men. Their liberation depends on the liberation of the race and the improvement of the life of the Black community. They have shown the pride and strength of people who have endured and survived great oppression. This has given them a sense of their own function in the life of their race and their families and a strong confidence in their own worth." (Renown author of "Black women in White America")

It is apparent Gerda Lerner and another Black woman named Gladys McCoy never had the opportunity to meet in life, because if they had, they would have found that both have a great deal in common. Their philosophies are almost identical when it comes to the Black woman's position in her family and her community.

A few months ago Gladys McCoy, Commissioner of Multnomah County, took her office staff inside the walls of the Oregon State Penitentiary. The purpose was to meet and lecture to thirty prison inmates who had sent Gladys an invitation to come among them and speak on what a county Commissioner's responsibilities are. But before the evening session was through Gladys McCoy had impressed this group of inmates who were known as students of the Class of Legal Processes. Although only a couple of the prisoners in the room were familiar with the contributions and achievements this soft-spoken, articulate, slim and graceful coco-skinned woman had accomplished in her life.

Being a mother of seven children, Gladys was also the wife of Oregon first and only state senator, William McCoy.

As Gladys spoke with the group of prisoners she seem to instill a sense of pride within them to not let prison destroy their minds, use their confinement to broaden their education and develop a road back to their community that would be accepted.



Father Bliven, Bill and Gladys McCoy, and inmate prison correspondents Larry Baker and Asmar Abdul Seifullah (aka Joe West) at recent McCoy Appreciation Day sponsored by Uhuru Club.

"Mistakes are common in life, but it's how you over-come them is a education each one of us must learn on our own."

Mrs. McCoy always had an interest in politics, doing committee work, speaking to people on local government and in 1972 Gladys was named a delegate to the Democratic National Convention after becoming the first Black elected to the Portland School District Board in 1970. She ran unopposed in 1974. Governor Robert Straub became aware of Gladys sincere desire to work with people and appointed her to his executive staff as state ombudsman.

In 1977 Gladys McCoy wanted to try her hand at county government and ran for the position she presently holds. Gladys was easily elected.

So what is Gladys McCoy and her staff doing sitting among convicted felons in a state prison? Simple! Many of these men have families and relatives living in Multnomah County and getting a handle on how to help all concerned once they've left prison was important to her. The over-crowding of this prison and her county jail was becoming a hot subject many of the political leaders did not want to deal with. Both institutions were high in

recidivism.

It was a few days after Gladys appearance that a few of the inmates from the Class of Legal Processes teamed up with inmates belonging to the prison's Black Culture Club and gave the McCoy's a special benefit in their honor. Other inmates started working on a project that would enter Gladys name into a state-wide "Mother of the Year" contest. The benefit was a success and it gave many of the Black inmates the opportunity to become knowledgeable and to meet their Black leaders in person. Many other public and community officials attended the McCoy's March 7, 1980 benefit.

When it was announced in April that the Oregon Mother's Selection Inc., had accepted the prisoners nominee there was joy throughout the institution, but it did raise a few eyebrows around the state.

When Gladys accepted her award from Governor Vic Atiyeh at the Capitol a couple of weeks ago, the inmates and prison officials hosted a gala-luncheon for Gladys, her family, nine prior state mother winners and the public in the main prison's mess hall. Gladys next step was to go to Phoenix, Arizona as Oregon's Mother's representative for the National selection on April 29 - May 2, 1980.

Last Sunday, a "Golden Tea" was held for Gladys McCoy in Albina at Portland Cascade Community College and was hosted by the Oregon's Mother's Selection Inc., to raise funds for Gladys's trip. Inmates sent a prison official to represent them and raised funds among themselves to donate.

This is most unusual story, but its real.

Gladys McCoy is a most unusual Black leader among her people, but so are the Black women Gerda Lerner once wrote about.

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APRIL

FROM THE FRONT DOOR

by Tom Boothe

From the front door, I see a need for citizens of our community to further understand there are two levels of awareness that must be practiced intermittently and they are:

1. **The Chase** to achieve something; freedom, money, better living conditions or just basic utility conveniences.

2. **The Catch** and to maintain the catch so that it won't get away. If it does, you will just have to chase it all over again and that's not progress.

One must know the difference between chasing the deer and catching the deer, you cannot chase and catch at the same time. Thus, you must chase the deer, then catch the deer and maintain it securely before chasing again.

Remember in this world of animal and man, it takes as much energy to chase a livelihood, as it does to maintain it after you have caught it. Be conscientious of whether you are chasing a new deer or just holding down the one you just caught.

Cell Talk

Asmar Abdul Seifullah, Editor
aka Joe West 40404

Oregon State Penitentiary is a unassuming concrete structure, the towering grey walls seem to extend into the clouds, as the compound hauntingly sits in the middle of a green pasture. The prison can be viewed as one travels either North or South on I-5. At night a traveling motorist attention is immediately captured by an array of lights that shine all about the prison. At first glance the lighted prison gives the effect of a small city in the dark distant night, each light seeming to have the separateness of life and activity of its own.

The entrance to Oregon State Penitentiary is lined with colorful flowers, shrubbery and well manicured lawns. Willow trees line and hang over the driveway, giving the entrance way the illusion of quiet peacefulness. All in all the landscape that surrounds Oregon State Penitentiary is tranquil and pleasant in effect. Mill Creek runs along the southern perimeter of the prison and geese can be seen along its banks. The over all beauty and tranquility is soothing but this illusion is short lived and dissipated completely as you approach the Administration building. At this point the scene changes and you begin to feel the pull of the security that enshrouds the prison. Guards can be seen walking to and fro along the wall, their guns held at ready, their faces indistinct but somehow remembered.

As you enter the administration building the cool efficiency of professional jailers greets you, you're automatically placed in one of three categories, visitor -- occupant -- or employee. From this deduction things travel a natural course, buttons are pushed; doors slide back in electronic silence, metal detectors are strategically placed, everyone has to pass through at least one before entering the prison proper. The Control Center guard is encased in bullet proof glass and immediately you wonder if it's to keep you out or him in. Nothing distracts his routine as he goes about his duties adroitly.

If you happen to enter Oregon State Penitentiary as one of the men destined to be numbered -- labelled -- occupant, inmate, or prisoner the air of concern that pervades and hangs in the atmosphere is alarming. "Instantly you realize that this is it," for X number of months, years or perhaps even decades; this concrete tomb is going to be home and there is no power on earth short of executive clemency or death that can alter the process.

Eventually you're lead through a series of gates and placed in a room called "Receiving and Discharge" the latter being of little consequence at this stage of the game. You're strip searched, told to shower and issued a set of blues that are always either too small or too large. You're then placed in another side room to await finger printing and photographing which completes the booking process. As you wait to move to square two, you sit on a long wooden bench with other men, most of them are silent, not knowing what to expect next, while others that have been through it all before reminiscence or plan reunions with old crime partners. "I wonder if Red is still here," says one laughingly. "Man I hope that I don't get so and so for a counselor this time," says another. And you sit there wondering what the hell is going on, "doesn't anyone understand that this is prison, not old home week."

Suddenly your name is called, you rise but your stomach remains on the bench. "Alright this ain't going to hurt, so relax," says a red face guard. "Stand over there, back straight -- eyes forward -- up against the wall -- don't smile asshole -- face right -- click click -- face left -- click click -- alright over here -- left hand, thumb, forefinger and so on -- you can wash your hands over there, then fill out these forms -- any next of kin you want us to contact in the case of an emergency." You want to tell that there aren't going to be any emergencies but you aren't sure, so you mumble to yourself.

You washed your hands but realize later that the finger printing ink won't come off, your hands are black from the stains of arrival and you suddenly realize that you won't ever be the same again. The stain has already began to cast its shadow upon your heart and you feel it

growing somewhere far inside your soul.

The guard issues you a number, it's 40404 and you wonder what happened to your name, has it been stored away along with the rest of your personal belongings or is it forever lost in a limbo of time and neverness. Your name, your identity, your individuality has been unsurpassed by a five digit number. For as long as you're confined, you'll be known as 40404 -- all in coming and out going mail will bear this number.

In less than a second you've lost all three of the names given to you at birth, all you have now is the number which supersedes the sunrise and nightfall, the dream and the nightmare both bear the number -- the number -- the number that says who you are and in many ways who you will be long after you're released.

"Silently you repeat a sentence; 'God let me forget this number!'"
"Please let me forget this number and the ink stains on my hands."

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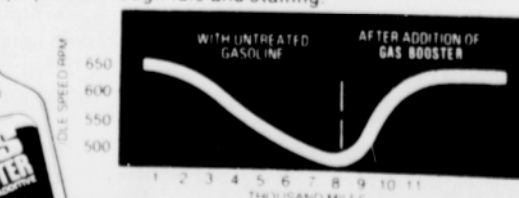
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