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Home > What follows is neither true nor false but what I know.

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Contributed by:

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Below is a dispatch from Sister Carol Gilbert, who, along with her fellow dedicated anti-war activist, Roman Catholic nun, and state-branded "terrorist" - Sister Ardeth Platte, was imprisoned for trespassing at a nuclear weapons complex. ¹ [2] Sr. Gilbert has been writing about her experiences in prison. We're proud to post those accounts here.

May 25, 2011

Dear Friends,

Welcome to another of America's gulags – this one in Eastern TN – the Blount County Correctional Facility in Maryville, TN!

This is day number 15 and I want to begin the journey with a quote from Jarhead by Anthony Swofford and his experiences as a Marine in Operation Desert shield. "What follows is neither true nor false but what I know."...and heard, saw, tasted, smelled and touched.

DAY 1. Around 7:30 p.m. we are placed in a typical holding cell with no mattresses, 2 benches of concrete, toilet/sink combo and blanket given many hours later.

We are taken out one by one for processing which consists of answering typical intake forms, fingerprints, picture and hospital type bright orange arm bands to distinguish us from the county folks wearing blue/white armbands, the de-liceing shower and stripped uniforms (black and white if new; shades of grey if older (the color everything becomes) and flip flops for shoes. The one pair

of old socks, underpants and t-shirt must last until commissary. We were supposed to get two of everything but they have run out with 2-300 extra. So no laundry bag or crate either. We make an attempt to sleep on the concrete slabs but it's a long night. We tell stories, laugh, sing.

DAY 2 – Close to 8:30 a.m. we are shackled, given an indigent bag: one small comb, 2 tiny bars of soap, 2 sample size packages of toothpaste, deodorant and shampoo. We are handed two towels and two sheets that I'm sure at one time were lily white.

Carol, Ardeth and Bonnie are taken to the higher classification pod where all federal women prisoners are held. But Jackie and Jean go next door to the other lower classification pod – they would never keep all 5 of us together.

We are immediately surrounded by women offering us books, shampoo, etc. Because the Feds pay so much to rent this space, we are to receive a bunk and mattress which means some now go without and sleep on concrete until other places can be found.

The jail pod has a large day room holding 8 metal tables with a metal stools built in. Each table holds 4 people, for a total of 32; there's one stainless steel toilet/sink, two phones with one cement seat, one shower in the center and a small open area. 8 cells are on the bottom floor and 8 on the top floor. Each cell is 6 by 12 with bunk beds, toilet/sink combo, small metal desk-stool, and a small slotted window frosted so one can't see out. Most cells hold three women and sometimes 4. So far I have had only two other prisoners with me. 3 is crowded!

This jail has no TV, no newspapers one can subscribe to or magazines, no greeting cards, no articles, no quotes from Scripture on a letter, no puzzles, no games, no books from publishers, no, no, no, and no! They do sell a cheap radio for \$45.00 plus \$10.00 for ear phones and \$2.25 for a battery. That cost means many go without.

Twice a week we are allowed to go to a cement cage outside with a net above to see the sky and feel the air and sun.

Library cart comes once a week and each is allowed two books – a few good ones.

Commissary is on Wednesday. A stamped business envelope is \$.65 - \$.21 for the envelope makes someone profit as does our liquid Fresh Mint toothpaste from India and our 3 inch toothbrushes (1 inch brush, 2 inch handle).

Pens are only the cartridge and make writing difficult but the women get "vinegar bags" and use this as a tape to make them thicker. I'll let you, the reader, research "vinegar bags".

Lots of commissary items are "Bob Border." It would be interesting to follow the money trail for commissary. Another distributor is Maxima Supply, Holt, MI for hard candy.

Our schedule is as follows:

6:00 a.m.	Bright lights on
6:30 – 8:30 a.m.	Breakfast/Meds/Day Room
8:30 – 11:30 a.m.	Lockdown
11:30 – 1:30 p.m.	Lunch/Meds/Day Room
1:30 – 4:30 p.m.	Lockdown
4:30 – 8:30 p.m.	Supper/Meds/Day Room
8:30 p.m.– 6:00 a.m.	Lockdown

When we are in the Day room, our cells are locked. There are two stand-up counts – around 2:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. the lights are dimmed after 10:00 p.m. count but still bright enough to read.

Meals -

Breakfast	2 biscuits, Jelly, Sweet, watery Oatmeal, Carton of Milk, Coffee (the only exception is Tuesday when Cheerios replaces Oatmeal)
Lunch	Peanut Butter Sandwich – one week Bologna-Mustard Sandwich – alternate weeks

1 small bag plain Frito Lays' Chips

1 cup water

Supper

Pinto Beans, Corn Bread, Cole Slaw,

Mashed Potatoes/ Peas/ Green Beans (one of these three)

Jello or Package of Teddy Grahams

Every other night they will serve one or the other of the food below

Iceberg salad or Noodle dish,

Mashed or French Fried potatoes

Jello or Teddy Grahams

The phone calls are from a company called City Telephone Coin and expensive. A study should be done on phone companies to jails and prison – who profits! A 15 minute limit and the call could be over \$20.00

DAY 9 – All seven of us met in an intake holding cell for Mass with Fr. Brent Sheldon and Deacon Juan Hernandez from Holy Fatima in Alroa. Maryville has no Catholic church as the Catholic population in TN is 2%

This was the first time I ever went to mass in a holding cell and in leg shackles. (This jail has a practice of putting leg shackles on when moving outside the block no matter how short the distance.) What a gift to receive the Eucharist in this setting.

It was here we learned we are not getting our mail. They claim we are getting too much and they don't know how they will handle it.

DAY 10 – I was taken out for my PSI (pre-sentencing investigation) report so both probation and my attorney were present. It appears we will be taken from here and moved to a holding facility in Ocilla, GA until sentencing which looks like late September.

DAY 11 – Most of the women are here on drug charges of some kind. The drug of choice in this area is prescription drugs. The city is filled with these so called "pain clinics."

this is also a holding facility for women going to TN state prison. Because of such over-crowding in the 3 state women's facilities, women can be held here for years!

Both of my cell mates are poor and had terrible childhoods – drugs, alcoholism, lack of education, early pregnancies. Their stories and tears are like so many others in here and across the country. We are warehouses with no real help and one wonders how the cycle can end. They believe God sent us to them as angels.

A 70 year old LPN has been locked up here for three years for killing her abusive husband and trial date is now set for late August.

A disturbed, mentally ill woman here for 19 months awaiting her trip to state prison.

The unique feature for us is that the women are all white! We understand themen's blocks have lots of Hispanics from immigration and some blacks.

DAY 12 – We were taken in shackles, down the hall to medical for our T tests. A great time to visit with Jackie and Jean. We were able to sing Jean an early Happy Birthday as she turned 84 a few days later.

Our cell block was put on full lock-down at lunch. This means we are in our cells 23 hours a day with one cell out at a time for one hour. There was no fight but things were getting a little tense with a mentally ill woman and a few other women who haven't yet learned how to respond in a nonviolent way. We do not know how long, but the rumor is two weeks. That makes for a long day and so most of these young women learn the art of sleeping – such a waste!

The hardest part is that I don't get to talk to Ardeth and Bonnie!

Sometimes the entire block has been locked down for as long as 3 months or more.

DAY 13 - Today was our first serving of FRUIT since arriving! A small serving of mandarin

oranges never looked or tasted so good. It's the little things we appreciate.

DAY 14 – My first visit was from 7 – 8 p.m. through plexiglass with a phone. Four local peacemakers caught me up to date. These folks are doing the real work - SUPPORT

Visits are 1 hour a week and your day and time of visit is determined by your cell number. Starting at 8:a.m. and the last visit is 8 p.m. This can make it difficult for someone who works and has the visit during their work hours.

I heard on my visit that Sr. Mary Dennis has a sentencing date of September 21st.

DAY 15 –The day is just beginning and our cell is brighter so we know the sun is shining even though we can't see it.

Some final thoughts as I close out these first two weeks.

I'm learning about the South with their biscuits and gravy, the accents, the country music, the new words for grandma and grandpa of mamow and popow, the missing or no teeth and the Body Farm.

The University of TN is home to an anthropology Research Facility (The Body Farm). The founder and an author have written a series of fiction and non-fiction on the farm. I read Body of Betrayal (novel) which takes place at Y-12, Oakridge.

There are some women who talk about the cancers, the class action suits, the deaths from exposure of relatives and friends at Y-12.

I'm reminded once again how simple life can be, how little we need to survive. That grace is given when I see these women live this day by day and keep a sense of sanity after months and/or years in this place.

The effects of a country that continues to spend billions on bombs and prisons can be seen, felt, heard, touched and smelled in this space.

We are well and long to hear of your stories these past weeks. My gratitude, love, prayers and support.

Courage
Carol Gilbert, O.P.

Reposted with permission from Jonah House[3].

Source URL: <https://indyreader.org/content/what-follows-neither-true-nor-false-what-i-know>

Links:

[1] <https://indyreader.org/contributor/carol-gilbert>

[2] <http://www.nukeresister.org/2011/05/15/y12-nuclear-resisters-jail-update-and-final-trial-report/>

[3] http://www.jonahhouse.org/gilbert_2011_05_25.html