

I'm writing in response to your letter of October 10, 2013, requesting submissions from prisoners answering the question: "What do TV and movies get right and what do they get wrong? ~~about~~ ~~prisons~~ prisons? What would surprise the general population about the system from the inside?"

I'm a 44 year old transgender woman activist and prisoner in California. I have been incarcerated for the past 24 years, and I've witnessed every imaginable aspect of the prison system from the inside.

Initially, I was sentenced to "seven years" in state prison after being convicted of a robbery charge. I'll admit that I'm no angel, but I served

the time which fit the crime.
I'm a drug addict and ex-gangmember,
who has made a lot of mistakes
which I now regret.

Much of what people think
about prisons, or see on TV
and in movies, is accurate —
corrupt prison officials, rogue
cops, senseless violence & murder,
prison gangs, mentally ill inmates,
transsexuals, and sex-offenders.
I've seen it all, from the
dirtiest cops to the sickest
sexual predators.

The TV and movies don't
always give an accurate or
realistic portrayal of these
things, but what they do get
right is the fact that shit
happens in here. SERIOUS
shit! LIFE & DEATH shit!

What most people get wrong
about prisons is that they
think prison rape is something
to laugh at, something to joke
about... it's not. I assure you
that if it were your mother or
father, brother or sister, that's

thrown in a prison cell with a sexual violent predator twice their size, or if it were you in that situation with no one around to help, you would not think it was "funny!"

Prison rape is no laughing matter, I assure you!

Another thing people often wrongly assume about prison is that prisoners have it "too good" in prison, or that we have it too easy. They wrongly believe the political propaganda that we're such dangerous criminals we should not be afforded basic human rights, other than food and a bed to sleep in — a prison cell with a toilet & sink.

Again, I assure you that prison is not a fun place to be, nor is it easy in any sense of the word. If it were YOU in this maximum-security prison, going through what I've gone through, you would have an entirely different perspective on the prison system.

What might surprise people about prisons is how cold and uncaring people can actually be, how widespread the corruption is in this system, how many inmates in California die from medical neglect and suicide.

A federal court has found that there is at least one unnecessary inmate death per week as a result of substandard health care and overcrowding.

I have survived 24 years under these severely punitive conditions of confinement, including over 15 years in solitary confinement at control units such as Pelican Bay SHU. I have witnessed first-hand the illegal and inhumane treatment of prisoners.

Believe me, I have personally experienced brutality, discrimination, harassment, medical neglect, torture, and sexual abuse. I've been through it all, I've seen it all, and I've never ceased to be amazed and outraged by it all!!!

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What also might surprise people is how a "seven year" sentence for robbery can become a 104 years-to-life sentence under the "three strikes" law for Prisoner Resistance actions. Yes, I defended my self, I fought back against guard brutality, I was forced into gang violence as a matter of survival. Prison is a dog eat dog world, it's "kill or be killed" in here!

Under these circumstances, I've continued to suffer the blatant injustice of a life sentence under the "three strikes" law. I continue to suffer sexual harassment, medical neglect, and fabricated disciplinary write-ups. I continue the struggle for vindication and liberation!

What might surprise people is that I'm a human being! I have a GED and college credits, a desire for rehabilitation, a mother who loves and supports me, and a family who wants me to come home. I have hope!!!

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I hope for a sentence reduction under California's newly enacted Proposition 36, the "Three Strikes Reform Act." My petition is currently pending in Sacramento Superior Court.

I hope you will write a letter of support to the judge in my case urging that my petition should be granted because I am not an "unreasonable risk to public safety." I am not a murderer or rapist. The "three strikes" law was not intended for people like me.

I hope you find this letter of interest and would like to hear more. I have a lot more to say, and a lot to contribute toward positive and productive social change.

Sincerely,


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