

## Bureaubabble and the Beep

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### PART ONE

Like few Canadians, I followed the press coverage of the Arbour Commission hearings held in Kingston, Ontario, an Enquiry commissioned in 1995 by Canada's Solicitor General on the tail of the C.B.C.'s *The Fifth Estate*'s televised airing of portions of a videotape taken in April 1994 at the Prison for Women in Kingston. To those who believe that Canada is a most humane nation but are unfamiliar with Canadian prisons, the sight of sleeping women prisoners, bound in chains, being stripped of their clothing and pulled from bedless cells by "Darth Vader" suited, armed, male guards was sickening. This could not have happened in Canada seemed the general consensus. But those of us who know Canadian prisons, from the inside, were not shocked. To us these actions were mild in comparison to what we know goes on inside segregation cells in prisons throughout this country. The Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) called the event an "aberration," but the aberration is, in truth, the fact that the public even saw the brutal strip search and that an Enquiry into such an occurrence, the first of its kind, was ever called.

Unlike most Canadians, I attended some of the Enquiry sessions and there observed closely the way in which Commission lawyer, Patricia Jackson, and the prisoners' lawyers, attempted to extract from CSC officials their thinking in not only calling for and condoning such a procedure but in covering up the fact that they had done so for nine months afterwards. Ultimately, given mountains of evidence revealing numerous illegal acts on the part of members of CSC - the stripping of women by men being just one - some officials did admit that it was probable that the Service had acted illegally. But officials prevaricated. Well, they argued, no one but CSC officials and staff know what happened before the Emergency Response Team was sent into those segregation cells. Madame Justice Louise Arbour, the presiding judge, presented her recommendations to the Solicitor General based on Enquiry findings in late March 1996. However, because so few journalists were covering the Enquiry itself - seemingly having lost interest once the more titillating aspects of the show drew to a close in September - it is unlikely many members of the public will ever hear another word on

the subject of the P4W Enquiry, and thereby, few will ever understand the way in which CSC in truth metes out “justice” in our prisons.

I have a personal stake in Madame Justice Arbour’s findings. Four years ago I married a man who has been, since 1985, serving a federal prison sentence, also in Kingston. My husband and I met when I entered a prison as a journalist. I had long lived near this city that houses eight of Canada’s federal prisons, but I knew little about them, media coverage having focussed primarily on high profile cases. For five years previous to my first visit to prison I had written a weekly column for *The Whig-Standard*, the highly-respected Kingston daily. In April 1992, I was a columnist of some renown, and Joyceville Penitentiary administrators rolled out the red carpet when I entered. I met dozens of staff, administrators and prisoners, among them a man who was then Chairman of the Inmate Committee. The Committee was, then, politically active, the Chairman vocal about administrators’ illegal acts; acts resulting in grave consequences for prisoners and, by extension, the public. After this man and I had talked to each other for just under two weeks, the red carpet was suddenly jerked from beneath my feet. CSC officials directed the publisher of *The Whig* to censor me. The publisher complied, forbidding me to write about the prisons, instructing my editor to carefully scrutinize each column I wrote. One month later, when I wrote a column about a former junior high school teacher’s abuse of power, the publisher warned me that I was, “treading too close to the line.” Two weeks after that, a new editor cut my column to twice monthly. Three months later the column was abruptly cancelled. I was, at the same time, removed from my position as editor and writer of a feature I had created for the paper, which had been syndicated to eight other papers. I no longer had work in my hometown.

I sought work elsewhere. I tried, briefly, to tell the publisher and other journalists about the administrative cover up in the works at Joyceville, but no one listened. And besides, by then I had begun to understand that I would never be able to write truthfully about the institutions which employ so many of Kingston’s denizens. I applied to become a personal visitor of the Chairman of the Inmate Committee. I was approved after the standard “investigation.” He and I fell in love with each other, and meanwhile we spoke openly to each other about illegal and demonstrably harmful acts. He and other Committee members continued to challenge administrators with paperwork and in meetings

about many of their more heinous acts. He and I decided to marry. During the months following our application to marry, prison officials consistently “lost” those papers which required the warden’s signature. These were “discovered” very suddenly, five days before our scheduled wedding, one hour after my husband had been transferred out of that medium security prison to a maximum security in what is known in the Service as an Emergency Involuntary Transfer.

We should not have been surprised. Over the weeks preceding the transfer, several prisoners released from segregation had told my husband-to-be that a member of the prison’s oligarchy had approached them with offers of transfers to minimum security if they would tell him something damning about my husband. My husband’s Case Management Officer warned him to get off the Committee if he was serious about his marriage. He did not have time to heed warnings. Five days before our wedding, officials shipped him off to a maximum security institution far from our home. There we did, ultimately marry. Since that time, nearly every decision taken in my husband’s case has been based on the allegation which prompted transfer. “One Informed source” (who we learned was a prisoner who was a diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic, had been taken off his medication, and owed thousands of dollars to other prisoners for drug debts) informed the prison’s Internal Preventative Security Officers (IPSO, the prison’s secret police) that my husband and another prisoner, also transferred, were “conspiring” to “seriously injure” a third prisoner. Five days after officials at Regional Headquarters rubber stamped the transfer, the alleged victim-to-be, a friend of my husband’s and a relation of one of the IPSO officers, wrote an affidavit stating that there was no animosity between himself and my husband; ten days after that the “one credible source” recanted his story in another affidavit. A year later we learned that the informant had, in fact, never even mentioned my husband’s name to IPSO officers. To cover their tracks, IPSO officers searched for more “proof.” Two months after my husband had been removed from the Institution, a “second credible informant” surfaced; the next month, astonishingly, a “third credible informant” appeared. A third inmate was offered a transfer to a minimum security if he would add his name to the list; he refused and sat in segregation for two months, after which he was transferred to a prison in British Columbia. The transfer prevailed, and the wholly invented story about my husband enabled officials to label

my husband dangerous and to ensure additional punishment. Beyond that, "news" of our marriage and "news" of my husband's alleged "conspiracy" were published anonymously in Frank Magazine, though there the conspiracy turned into "conspiracy to murder." No one at the magazine ever contacted me to check facts - most of which, including my husband's sentence, were wrong. No matter. Apparently a lot of people read the "news." My husband's security ratings escalated to the highest levels possible, the invention remained on file, represented as truth, and my husband sat in his cell in maximum security for nine months while we fought for an investigation. I, meanwhile, struggled to find work, emotionally distraught by the bumpy landing I had taken when the red carpet was pulled away.

My husband and I have, for three and one half years, tried to redress in all legal ways available to us, the unlawful acts committed against us. Redress has been impossible. Few people believe a word either my husband or I say, and that includes many of my former colleagues. Meanwhile, nearly everyone who works for the Service, and everyone who does not, believes the word of Service employees, particularly those who choose to speak against us, or against most any prisoner.

As a result of my experience, I am acutely aware of and distressed by the absolute power of CSC and by its vividly apparent goal: to protect not the public, as mandate proclaims, but to protect itself in whatever manner possible, no matter the cost, in both dollars and lives. I am made aware daily of the fact that the Service, at nearly every juncture, disregards policy and law in its treatment of prisoners, and in its treatment of their families, and that the use of "informants." The privileges granted informants in return for their stories (true or false), puts the public at risk, for the ability to spin a yarn in exchange for favours does not a reformed criminal make. Though I have long shied away from the term "victim," I know that my husband and I are but two of thousands of victims of unimpeded abuse of power, victims of the way in which suspicion, rumour, and innuendo guide the manner in which the Service determines, in its recommendations to the National Parole Board, who will be set free and who will not.

**PART TWO**

My husband and I have friends and family. We had become especially close to Claire Culhane, one of the few stalwart prisoners' rights activists who has, in her four books and more than twenty years of outspoken activism, tried to make the public aware of the heinous abuses by "the system," and the way in which the evil running rampant in our prisons harms us all. Our family survives, but sometimes only barely. We have written to every official, including MPs of every political stripe, to two Solicitor Generals and to their critics. We have submitted grievances and have hired lawyers. In nearly every instance our attempts to redress wrongs have been met by the Service's stonewalling and protection of its own. It is stonewalling, lies, innuendo, and threat which often hobble me. The abuse of power, when employed behind closed doors, will destroy whomever it must.

When CSC's unlawful acts are made evident, as they have been at the P4W Enquiry, Service officials must rationalize these. It did not startle me to hear officials at the Enquiry explaining away their actions in exasperated tones. The public, they reasoned, could not begin to comprehend how dangerous these women are, how at risk his staff was at that prison, and by extension, the public is. Innuendoes focussed on portraits of dangerous women with violent records and untamed impulses. Officials claimed that these women had engaged in unceasing violent attacks on guards for four days prior to the strip search and justified the womens' subsequent eight months in segregation. Journalists and readers swallowed whole the story officials told, despite the images we saw on screen. On video we watched small women, chained and stripped naked, manhandled by club wielders. We were told that these women had, prior to this search, thrown urine at guards and lit fires, though no one had explained how these women managed to do this while locked in segregation cells emptied of all belongings. On screen we saw that none of the women resisted when the Emergency Response Team entered their cells. Some were asleep. And still, letters to the editor which followed the public airing commended guards for their bravery and courage in handling such a life-threatening job.

I do not know any of the women prisoners personally, but I do know that implications, innuendoes and lies told to my publisher about me and about my husband resulted in the publisher's swallowing whole the

notion that what I might write would be not only untrue but might be dangerous. At first the publisher seemed concerned that I could love a "con" (whom he has never met or talked to). Later I came to be perceived as a possible Bonnie to my husband's Clyde. Unfortunately, we have no videotape of our own actions taken prior to allegations levelled against us. The Service's word sufficed. If a prison official said we had done something wrong, in the absence of proof (beyond our word) to the contrary, it must be true.

Prisoners and their families are nearly always portrayed as capable of any and all criminal acts, and not to be believed, unless of course it is other prisoners or prisoners' family members against whom we allege transgressions. For instance, the former Police Chief of Kingston went so far as to state in a letter to *The Whig-Standard* that one explanation for Kingston's crime rate was the influx of prisoners' families into this community (as if we move here to bring heavy arsenal and criminal intent rather than to maintain contact with our partners and to offer love, stability and hope). Although such slander, had it issued from any disempowered source, might well have resulted in criminal charges under Canada's new Hate Law, not one word of dissent met Chief Rice's letter. In 1993, The Assistant Deputy Commissioner of the Correctional Service in Ontario gave a speech in which she explained that when she was a warden, the prison's visiting room broke her heart; for there, she said, she saw the children who would be the next generation of prisoners. Members of her audience sighed dejectedly at this thought. No one pointed out that the statistics do not bear out her beliefs or that she had just labelled our children and all prisoners' parents. Those who do not sigh, instead lock their doors and shudder when they hear we are near. If our children do let others know where their fathers or mothers reside, they are on occasion forbidden to visit "the good people's" homes, and so, they often keep their parents' whereabouts a secret, protecting themselves from castigation. Nonetheless, trauma they experience is never attributed to society's rejection and labelling. When sympathy is given a prisoner's spouse or parent, we are assumed to be unlovable wretches whose only hope of finding love sent us to prison or whose parental failures sent our children there. Those wives I have seen appear on daytime talk shows enliven this caricature. Why, after all, would Rolanda wish to interview a calm-voiced, intelligent and deeply loved prisoner's wife?

The despoiling of our images has been effective. With no credibility and almost no political support, we have few avenues left for addressing abuse committed against us. We can, of course, go to court, but few can afford the lawyers' fees necessary for mounting a case against a system with its plethora of "file material" (sometimes wholly invented) and the Service's stable of lawyers. Besides, on those few occasions when a prisoner or family member has taken a case to court (where secret IPSO sources must be revealed) and has been awarded compensation for crimes committed against him or her, vocal critics make political hay: "Look!" they cry, "its only the criminals who are protected! What about the victims!?" "Those prisoners are spoiled!" Crimes committed against us are considered, simply, our due.

Those crimes include the petty, such as the theft of prisoners' personal belongings (a daily occurrence) and disregard for policy and mandate. But they include heinous crimes as well. Consider, for example, that in October 1993 a black prisoner named Robert Gentles died in Kingston Penitentiary after six guards visited his cell. Whatever those six guards did inside that cell was not videotaped, though prisoners in the cellblock alleged wrongdoing by guards. Those prisoners were, of course, deemed incredible because they are prisoners, though in my husband's case, as in thousands of others, the word of one prisoner sufficed as proof enough to proffer devastating punishment. Prisoners are, all the time, punished on the "word" of other prisoners whose words are set in stone in IPSO files. Because informant prisoners' identities are cloaked by IPSO confidentiality, we seldom know what their privileges might be, but we know that any stories told about us will be believed, if necessary. On the other hand, prisoners' allegations against guards are deemed irrelevant as Robert Gentles' mother pursued justice. The Attorney General of Ontario refused to press charges in the death of her son. When a coroner who is not employed by either CSC or the Attorney General's office found the cause of death to be asphyxiation, a Justice of the Peace did find cause for pressing charges; it seemed the guards might have their day in court. The Attorney General dropped the charges. Mrs. Gentles presses on, though most of us suspect that she has no hope of finding justice.

### PART THREE

As Carmelita Gentles has discovered, the public's argument against pursuing allegations - even of murder - against the Service, goes like this: "Prisoners have committed crimes. That's why they are in prison, and there they deserve whatever punishment the Service deems appropriate." And, further, because we are their loved ones, we too are suspect at all times, deserving of whatever we get. One small example might help illustrate.

In March of 1995, my husband was a prisoner at Collins Bay Institution, a medium security institution. While there, the Institution introduced a new machine known as an Ion Scanner. It appeared in the entryway one day, without warning or explanation. That day I came to visit my husband as I do regularly and frequently. Members of the community and employees of the Service who know me and my husband well are well aware of the fact that neither of us indulge in either alcohol or drug use. Despite our "clean" record (the exception being the "suspicions" lacing my husband's IPSO file), every prisoners' visitor is required by policy to submit for "inspection" all of our belongings. Items we are allowed to bring into visiting rooms include I.D.'s, change, diapers and, sometimes, depending on the Institution's whim, letters and photographs. That day in March I handed over an envelope containing both a manuscript my husband and I were working on and a letter his son had written to him. The routine had heretofore been this: I would take the envelope into the vestibule outside the visiting room. There I would place it in a mailbox where guards would extract it, check for "contraband," and finding none, deliver it at some later time to my husband in his cell.

The ion scanner added a new hoop. I was instructed to hand over the envelope to the guard manning the contraption which looked benignly enough like a microwave. The guard placed the envelope inside the machine's belly where it was electronically scanned. A beep sounded. The guard withdrew the envelope, and, pen poised, she asked for my name.

"For what"? I asked her.

"I have to record this."

"What are you recording?"



“I can’t give you that information, ma’am. I’m required to record all information received.”

“What information did you receive?”

“You beeped. That means you tested positive.”

“Tested positive for what? How? And who gets this so-called information?”

“We haven’t yet devised our policy on that.”

I persisted. I asked what the guard was writing down for inclusion in my file, or in my husband’s, or in both of ours, for I knew from past experience that sooner or later this “information,” however false or misrepresented, might come back to haunt us. The guard persisted in her refusals. She informed me that if I wished I could take the matter up with the warden. No, she would not contact the warden. “There are people in line behind you” she said, and then she handed me the envelope to take inside. “But,” she warned me, “once policy is established, a beep might result in your losing visiting privileges or in a strip search. A beep might necessitate police laying criminal charges on you if we do find contraband.”

I am well aware of the fact that because I visit a prisoner in prison, everything I carry, say and do is at all times subject to search, scrutiny, recording and to interpretation as to meaning or implication by any and every CSC employee. My husband and I have been accused of all manner of “inappropriate” behaviour, though no charges have stemmed from any of the innumerable “suspicions” which lace our files. These suspicions include the belief by some that my husband and I sometimes argue; that he might, one day in the future, commit an illegal act; that we might write something damning about “the system;” that we might have behaved sexually prior to our marriage; that my husband’s changes might be “superficial.” A young officer recently asked us to explain an argument we had three years ago in what is called a “Private Family Visit.” Nearly all of our personal information has been made available to any and all members of the Service who wish to avail themselves of my husband’s file. Our telephone and visiting room conversations are subject to electronic eavesdropping, and again to interpretation. Our letters and manuscripts cannot, by law, be read by Correctional Service officers, but two years ago our “privilege” to write a novel together was withdrawn after a guard “chanced” to read one of our manuscripts. He thought our book was inappropriate. We were writing a thriller. Two

weeks later, after the exchange of many phone calls and letters, our "privilege" was reinstated. We requested a letter stating precisely what we were permitted to write and how we were to exchange manuscripts. That letter never surfaced, despite four further requests.

And now this "beep" from this electronic nose. The machine, I learned, measures in nanograms (billioneths of a gram) for traces of cocaine, heroin, amphetamines and marijuana. I had and have still no idea how many nanograms my envelope recorded which prompted the machine's hideous squawk and the recording in a secret file (so secret that I was refused a copy or even knowledge of its contents). I do know that my envelope had, prior to that day, passed through both U.S. and Canadian postal services, through U.S. Customs, through my postmistress's hands and, too, because I had used the same envelope prior to that day, it had passed through the Institution, through many guards' hands, and possibly many prisoners' hands as well. I was, that day, permitted to give the envelope to my husband.

National Headquarters later informed me that the Ion Scanner is used, frequently, by U.S. Customs. I learned, later still, that researchers have found that more than 65% of U.S. currency tested by the ion scanner measures positive for illegal substances. I also heard that when a Service official visited Collins Bay Institution, his \$50.00 bill beeped. I doubt very much that either his name or this information were recorded anywhere, and as I understand it from people witnessing this "test," observers laughed to think that a man of means and circumsntace might ever indulge in any form of substance abuse -- or even shake the hand of someone who had.

Over a period of several weeks, I sought, with the help of the John Howard Society, more information pertaining to my beep. The Institution informed us that at some point in the future those individuals bringing in items which tested positive in some measure (as yet undetermined) would or could be denied visits with their incarcerated loved ones. As the guard had told me, it was possible that we would lose visits altogether, or that we could be charged, and that we most certainly would be asked to submit to a body and cavity search if we tested positive.

Over the ensuing months I often stood in line awaiting "testing" while watching guards and other "Official Visitors" enter and leave the Institution, without scrutiny. In most cases these individuals carried some kind of bag. In one case a guard entered carrying a duffle bag, and

as we waited impatiently in line, he waltzed inside. "Isn't it possible," I said to the guard doing the testing, "that some individuals other than prisoners' visitors might smuggle contraband inside? In a duffle bag, for instance?"

"He's staff," she laughed, "Why would staff bring in contraband?"

I politely suggested that financial gain was the goal of those who traffick in drugs and that even those individuals who are not prisoners sometimes seek such ill-begotten gains.

"You're paranoid," she said.

I watched one elderly father who spoke little English break down in tears after his I.D. beeped and he was sent away without seeing his son. I listened as family members pleaded with guards to let them know what this machine was saying about them. On occasion I asked about the way in which the testers sometimes neglected to change their gloves, or to clear the desk on which a tainted item had just lain. I was deemed a troublemaker, a label given to all those who challenge the system in any regard and to many who simply ask rational questions. Consider, for example, the case of Dr. Bob Bater, who, on viewing the P4W strip search asked what the Institution could have been thinking in ordering such a horrendous act. In return for his question, he was forced to resign from the Citizens Advisory Committee, a group designed to serve as "liaison" between the community and the prisons, but a group that is forbidden by policy to "advocate" for prisoners in any regard.

For the first several months, the women who were assigned by the warden to take responsibility for the Ion Scanner testing were polite and even, on occasion, outspoken in their compassion for us. However, the guard's union protested the warden's decision to place only certain individuals at this post, and thereafter, on occasion, a less-than-pleasant guard greeted us. Some guards are, frankly, less equipped than are others to meet and greet the public, which contrary to popular opinion and to portraits painted, we prisoners' visitors are.

"I don't do drugs!" became the cry heard most often in that vestibule after the sound of the beep, even though we all were well aware of the fact that few would listen to or believe anything we might say in our own defense. Sometimes a woman we all knew would test positive and cry out for help; to our despair and shame, we sometimes turned away from her. Association (that is with others alleged to have committed an offense) is a punishable crime in prison, and if we spoke with her, we

could, by suspicion, be considered “associates.” We grew more and more depressed.

#### PART FOUR

Ultimately, in efforts to unearth my secret file as it pertained to the beep on the Collins Bay Institution Ion Scanner, CSC officials informed me and the John Howard Society that on the day that I beeped, they had not yet determined “levels,” and that, therefore, the “information” collected about me and my envelope had been destroyed. I sought written confirmation of this destruction of records but never received such, though three John Howard Society representatives were told the same thing. We were also promised answers to our questions: how were these tests being conducted? on whom would the experiment’s findings render judgment and what would the judgment be? what were the levels considered too high? and what punishment would follow? The Service never did provide this information. Warren Allmand, the single MP who did attempt to aid me in my quest for information, wrote to me to say that the Solicitor General had advised him that the machine’s purpose was to help to stem the flood of drugs into the Institution.

I contact the Civil Liberties Association as it seemed clear that the civil liberties of prisoners’ visitors were being violated. Despite numerous calls, faxes and letters sent to the Association, I received no response of any kind.

And meanwhile, other prisoners’ visitors and I would often wait up to forty-five minutes to enter the building for our two hour and forty-five minute visits, now reduced to less than two. We were told that staff and/or other visitors were also tested, but only once in eight months, in five visits weekly, did I observe such an occurrence. A volunteer teacher’s wallet beeped. “I don’t do drugs,” she cried. “How can this be happening.” I’ve never ever done drugs!” Some wives lost their visits for a day. A few women lost their private family visits when their suitcases beeped. Some women were strip searched, and then - when nothing was found - they were granted their visits. Our denials of wrongdoing met with smug disinterest and the continuing recording of “information.” I suppose in some cases charges were laid, and I suppose too that in some cases some individuals were stymied in real attempts to smuggle in contraband.

Nine months later, I learned one end to which my beep was to be employed. My husband had by then been transferred to a minimum security institution. One day his new Case Management Officer - a thorough and apparently fair man whose primary interest seems to be in keeping me from writing him letters ("it makes so much more work" he told me) - informed my husband that in reading through his file he had come upon an Incident Report written in early March. (Any and all staff can provide for any and every prisoner's file Incident Reports which are not necessarily shared with the prisoner). My husband's Incident Report alleged that in March 1995 an (unnamed) visitor tested positive for traces of cocaine and when informed of this fact by the officer challenged the officer's findings. My husband's new Case Management Officer said he thought the report must be referring to Amy. He smiled knowingly, for by that time he knew that I was someone who would likely challenge, and he half-believed me when I told him the facts, though it was obvious a shade of suspicion remained in his mind. "This is what we mean," I said to him, "when we talk to you about the innuendoes and suspicions - meaningless misrepresentations that are used against us to increase punishment."

"Oh, c'mon." he said, "you're overreacting." And then he stipulated that my husband's Correctional Plan include regular urinalysis tests (costly affairs). And besides the newest implication now embedded in my husband's file, we know that if necessary, some day in the future, an overzealous official might infer from this little "beep" that my husband had a visitor who was bringing him drugs as late as March 1995, an "inference" that would be useful if and when the Service chooses to produce another "credible inmate source" with a story about my husband and drugs.

My husband's new Case Management Officer calmly told us to "put the past behind us." Their past, not my husband's, that is.

If I have learned anything over the past four years, it is this: challenging the system is a most heinous and punishable offense. It is a fact made clear at the Arbour Commission hearings to anyone who listens with an eye and an ear for the truth. At that hearing, the Deputy Commissioner grew red, then white, at the lawyer's questions as to whether he believed his "investigative" staff might have prepared an investigative report about the strip search (a report which neglected even to mention that male guards had stripped women prisoners) in an effort to please

their bosses. The Deputy Commissioner waxed indignant. He talked about how easily the Service would be “found out” were anyone to willfully lie. When Jackson pushed, asking how they might be found out, he said that, for instance, all prisoners have, at all times, access to the public.

This statement was so painful and demonstrably false to me that I ran at once to one of the only two reporters covering those final days of the Enquiry. After all, one aspect of the Enquiry has to do with the established fact that the P4W women were denied access even to their lawyers for seven days after they were locked in segregation cells and to the fact that in order to release the tape to the public, one of the women had to take the matter to court. The statement was personally painful to me because it had been this same man - the Deputy Commissioner - whose letter to the publisher of *The Whig Standard* called for my censorship and resulted in my losing my job.

“There,” I said to the reporter who had once been a colleague of mine at *The Whig*, “That’s the gist of it all. If all prisoners at all times have access to the public, why was I censored?”

The reporter looked suspiciously at me. “I never understood what happened back then.”

“What happened was this. I spoke to the man who is now my husband. One official told me I was not permitted to speak to him, but I continued to talk to him. And then the Deputy Commissioner wrote to the publisher and informed him that I had behaved inappropriately and was, therefore, denied access to any of the prisons.”

“Why did you speak to him after they told you not to?” the reporter asked.

I felt bereft. “Look,” I said, “you’re covering this Enquiry. If I tell you that you can interview anyone you wish here today, but you cannot speak to the Deputy Commissioner, what will you do?”

“I won’t speak to the Deputy Commissioner,” he said flatly.

“You won’t ask why you can’t speak to him?”

“Well, yeah,” he wavered. “I’d ask.”

“And if I told you, you couldn’t speak to him because he’s dangerous?”

He shrugged, and I - too wracked by emotion to walk this man down the logical path - left the room. It felt hopeless, for I had already listened to the testimony of the woman who had led the “internal investigation”

into the “P4W incident.” Listening to her, I experienced a terrifying déjà vu. This “investigator” (promoted days after the finalization of her report) was the same woman who three years earlier had been the Deputy Warden at Joyceville Institution, the woman who approved my husband’s transfer and supplied this same Deputy Commissioner with whatever lies she found necessary during the course of the same kind of specious in-house investigation into my husband’s emergency involuntary transfer.

Later I learned that even if I had been able to encourage *The Whig* reporter to understand that statements are not facts, particularly when those statements issue from individuals who have discredited themselves in later testimony, it would not have mattered. On that last day of the Enquiry testimony - before final arguments and recommendations - *The Whig* ended its “prison beat.” From mid-December on, coverage of prisons in Kingston at least will be done on an ad hoc basis only.

During cross examination of Correctional Service officers, much evidence of illegal acts and cover up of those illegal acts was made available to those few members of the public who attended, and to the only two reporters who covered the event to its near conclusion. *The Whig* reporter reported as fact that the women prisoners had staged a “riot” prior to the strip search, despite the fact that proof of this depends upon the veracity of the officials’ word, and many of these same officials have been shown to have lied about other salient facts. The reporters fell victim to the images and stories about all prisoners that have been branded on the public’s mind.

Each time I realize that so many otherwise intelligent, educated and reasonable human beings are so easily convinced that all men and women in prison, and nearly all of their families and friends, are incredible, criminal to the core, never to be believed, I grow more frightened and sad. It is certainly true that there are many members of the Service who lawfully and in some cases humanely attempt to protect all members of society, including prisoners and their friends and families. It is certainly true that there are prisoners and family members of prisoners who do engage in illegal activities, just as it is true that some individuals in the community at large do so, even if undetected and unpunished. It is also true that thousands of prisoners and their family members, and the public as well face horrors in a thousand different

ways because a few members of the Service choose to abuse their unchecked power.

Prisoners and their families seldom speak out or challenge openly. When we do, we are sometimes severely punished. We are frightened of a press and a public which has labelled us so thoroughly, and we know that the prison officials hold the keys to our very lives. Our fear has allowed us to permit the deceptions and misperceptions about us to go on. We can only hope that Madame Justice Arbour has begun to see that internal investigations and the dependence for such on suspicions, lies, innuendo, rumor and implication, will not only harm prisoners and their families, but will harm us all.

#### ADDENDA

On March 31 1996 Madame Justice Arbour issued her 300-page findings. She found the Correctional Service to be systemically unlawful and adjudged the culture of the system to have no regard for the law or for human rights. The Commissioner resigned. A clone has been assigned to take his place.