

QUINTE DETENTION CENTRE

S.B.

I have been meaning to write this article for a long time now, but it seems I never quite had the time. However, there are things about this "Hell-hole" that must be made public.

I was in a maximum security area in this detention centre. It wasn't all bad since there were a good bunch of women there which kept me sane. The conditions? Well ... first of all our toilet/shower area was right next to the men's weight-lifting pit, which had frosting over the plexi-glass for only about 1 1/2 feet. This means that if you peek over you can either have a chance of seeing a poor woman using the toilet or taking a shower.

The temperature in March was very cold, but because the men's area heated up much faster than ours did, they were usually too hot. The heat, therefore was never turned up and we froze. We were not allowed blankets on the range during the day and the cells were locked up most of the day. When we complained about freezing, one male guard (I'd say about 80% of the guards there are male) said, "Well, when you get pneumonia, we'll give you some medication, until then shut up!"

Another problem was obtaining sanitary products. Every time we wanted a tampon or a sanitary pad, we had to yell at the top of our lungs for one to a male guard. When they did finally arrive, it would not be what we had asked for - well, pad or tampon, it's all the same thing to them - isn't it?

As for the meal times, some women were on diets that required milk - real milk. Most often substitutions of powdered or half-powdered milk were slipped in. When you are allergic to powdered milk, it can be pretty upsetting to need to test your milk before you can drink it.

At the end of our range, there was a door which opened to the men's unit. At night, this was often left open, so the women would awaken in the morning to find two strange men watching them sleep in their cells. I'm not sure if they slept in pyjamas, but let's hope so. There was a video camera on us 24 hours a day so our every move was monitored. If you wished to change shirts (remember - cells were locked), you were forced to do so in view of male guards because there were two cameras directed at you which covered both front and back of your body.

One day I returned from court to find that I was on my way to a dry cell. I admit I was guilty of having contraband material but they put me naked with no shoes on in this filthy cell. It had not been cleaned since the last person was pulled out of it. There was urine on the floor and all over the mattress and I was forced to stand in it while the hatch was open for any male guard passing by to leer in. They often made rude comments. I didn't stay there very long. I figured if they wanted the cash I had that badly, it wasn't worth standing in urine to keep it, so I gave it up. The cash was put into my account until the police came in

with a warrant to take possession of it. The next time I came back from court I was informed I was going to segregation again. This time it was for a different reason.

It seemed that a bus load of men had come in that day and they needed the women's maximum security range, so we (about six of us) were shipped. We were never given a chance to prove ourselves in the minimum security area, even for a probationary period, but instead were caged in the transit area. This is comprised of two cells, one double-bunked. In one cell was a picnic table which was too small to accommodate all six of us at one time. We were, therefore, forced to eat on the floor. The day room was about eight feet by twelve feet which included the shower stall with NO shower curtain. One cell was left open so that we could use the toilet, however again there was no privacy, not even from one another. It was luck that two did not need the toilet at the same time.

There was no phone in this unit, the clean clothes never seemed to arrive and we had no library services. At one point an Elizabeth Fry worker came in to see us and was rudely told to get out since this was a restricted area - all this and we were being told this was "no punishment, it's just because it is over crowded - you can still smoke!". Wow, big bonus, huh? We were not permitted to keep both cells open even though there was not room enough for all of us to sit at the table.

At one point, a woman was taking a shower and a TOUR came through - Yes, I am serious. Of course, there were apologies but they didn't make up for the humiliation caused to that woman. Nothing would make me believe that the apologies were sincere anyway.

After days and weeks of complaining and calling the ombudsman, a few improvements were made, but not many. After almost a month, a phone was installed. Isn't it our right to have a phone? Everyone else in the joint did. In this Centre you have no rights! You are made to stand at attention when some old bigwig comes prancing through - like it's the army or something.

The comments from the male guards when returning from court - well, you just get used to it: "Want me to search you honey?", as they leer at you, or, "Any internals need doing?", Chuckle, Ha Ha."

Quinte Detention Centre is a really sick place and the staff, though perhaps about 10% were human beings as I define them, are not fit to work in a zoo let alone a prison. So, let me give you some advice. If you are going to commit a crime, don't do it in any area near Quinte, because you may end up there!!!