

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING 8/6/92
BY BETTY HERON

INMATES No. 1
8-5-92
House of Rep's
SCI - MUNCY
(MPL)

IN THESE HILLS OF NE PA RESIDES A RESILIENT GROUP OF WOMEN. THEY LIVE IN COMMUNITY BEHIND WALL OF STEEL & STONE. 836 STRONG 92 OF WHOM ARE LABELED INDIVIDUALLY & COLLECTIVELY AS LIFERS. THE TERM LIFER REPRESENTS A SENTENCED TERM FOR THE TAKING OF SOMEONE'S LIFE. WE HAVE SINNED PUBLICALLY AND THE PUBLIC VIEWS US WITH SUSPICION, AVOIDANCE, MISUNDERSTANDING. THEREFORE, WE ARE ALONE ABANDONED, ANONYMOUS. SOMEONE HAS DIED & WE WOMEN LIVE ON. ~~A HUGE PART OF OUR IDENTITY IS~~ LINKED TO THIS STATUS.

I HAVE THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY ^{of} TO SPEAK ^{ing} FOR ALL WOMEN LIFERS. I PRESENT MYSELF TO YOU AS EVERY WOMAN ~~EVERY WOMAN~~ SERVING A LIFE SENTENCE IN PA. CRIME AMONG WOMEN WAS NOT THE RESULT OF LONG TERM GOALS BUT THE LACK OF SUCH GOALS. IT WAS MORE ABOUT IMMEDIATE SURVIVAL FROM COMPLEX SOCIAL ~~SOCIAL~~ PROBLEMS. IMPRISONED WOMEN ^{were} CAUGHT IN NETS: NETS OF THOUGHTFULNESS ^{less} & GREED, NETS OF POVERTY, AND OTHER'S SNARE WAS DRUG ADDICTION OR LOVE ADDICTION. THE NATURE OF WOMEN'S CRIMES SUGGEST HIDDEN STORIES OF DESPERATE SOCIOECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES. AN INABILITY TO MAKE PRUDENT, INFORMED DECISIONS & A LIMITED STORE OF WORTHWHILE RESOURCES UPON WHICH TO CALL IN THEIR TIME OF NEED. SOCIAL PROBLEMS DEFINED IN TERMS OF INDIVIDUALS. COMM. JOS. LEHMAN IS QUOTED AS SAYING "WE, AS A NATION, DEFINE PROBLEMS AROUND THE INDIVIDUAL. SO LONG AS THE SINS OF THE WORLD LIE AT THE FEET OF INDIVIDUALS, WE DON'T HAVE TO DEAL WITH THEM."

WOMEN IN PRISON FOR LIFE FOR THE MOST PART WERE WOMEN IN CRISIS. BUT IT'S PSYCHOLOGICALLY COMFORTING FOR SOCIETY TO BELIEVE WE ARE SOMEHOW DIFFERENT - A BREED APART. HOWEVER, THAT IS NOT THE CASE. BEFORE THAT ONE MOMENT IN TIME THAT RENDERED US MURDERERS & OUTCASTS, WE LIVED IN YOUR COMMUNITIES AS NEIGHBORS FRIENDS, CO-WORKERS, TEACHERS. WE ARE WOMEN WHO ARE MOTHERS, SISTERS, AUNTS, DAUGHTERS, GRANDMOTHERS, GREAT-GRANDMOTHERS. BEYOND THE PUBLICALLY ASSIGNED STATUS OF CRIMINAL, WE WOMEN ARE HUMAN BEINGS WITH VIRTUES & VICES JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE. WE ARE SELVES WITH LIFE HISTORIES, QUIRKS, TALENTS, & FEARS. WHEN YOU LISTEN TO OUR STORIES RATHER THAN ANALYZE STATISTICS, ^{based on} GENERALIZATIONS ARE MUCH HARDER TO MAKE. WE ARE AS VARIED AS ^{any} IN GROUP IN SIZE, SHAPE, LIFESTYLE BACKGROUND, & HERITAGE, BUT WHAT WE 92 LIFERS ^{share} HAVE IN COMMON ARE OUR LIFE SENTENCES & OUR #1 PRIORITY--THE PURSUIT OF ^{our} FREEDOM.

FEMALE LIFERS ARE UNIQUE, ^{an} HIGHLY INVISIBLE, ISOLATED, & UNKNOWN GROUP. THEREFORE WE HAVE BECOME INSIGNIFICANT IN THE OVERALL SCHEME OF THINGS. THE CAUSES OF OUR CRIMES ARE ROOTED IN SOCIETY'S SOCIAL PROBLEMS THAT IN PART CONTRIBUTED TO

CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR--THE DIFFICULTY OF THE SINGLE MOTHER TO SUPPORT HER CHILDREN, IMPOSSIBILITY OF ECONOMIC SURVIVAL FOR THE UNDER EDUCATED WOMEN, ^{Substance Abuse} DRUG ADDICTION, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BROKEN HOMES, POVERTY. MOST WOMEN ^{are} WERE FIRST TIME OFFENDERS, & MANY ^{are} VICTIMS THEMSELVES OF DEVASTATING EMOTIONAL, MENTAL, & PHYSICAL ABUSE. A COMMON THREAD THAT WAS WOVEN INTO THE TAPASTRY OF OUR LIVES WAS OUR TENDENCY TO BE "OTHER FOCUSED" WHICH COLORED OUR THINKING & RENDERED MANY UNABLE TO MAKE INDEPENDENT DECISIONS. MOST WOMEN HERE DID NOT INDEPENDENTLY COMMIT THEIR CRIMES. OUR IDENTITIES WERE CENTERED IN OTHERS. MANY CRIMES HAVE BEEN COMMITTED IN A CONDITION THAT IS MORE A MATTER FOR A PSYCHIATRIST THAN FOR A JUDGE & JURY.

THOSE SAME JUDGES & JURIES ~~HAVE~~ SENTENCED ONE IN EVERY 11 WOMEN AT MUNCY TO LIFE. WE HAVE BECOME THE BACKBONE & A STABILIZING FORCE WITHIN THIS INSTITUTION WE HAVE NOT RESPONDED TO THE SUBLIMINAL INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES TO CONCENTRATE ON OURSELVES AS ONLY PRISONERS, NEITHER DO WE CONCENTRATE SOLELY ON OUR CRIMINALITY, NOR OUR EXCLUSION FROM FREE SOCIETY BY OUR OWN ACTIONS. WE ~~HAVE~~ ^{do} NOT RESPONDED TO THE TEMPTATION TO WALLOW IN SELF PITY. AS A GROUP WE ~~HAVE~~ ^{do have} RISEN ABOVE THE TEMPTATION & HAVE BECOME A MULTI-FACETED POOL OF WOMEN WHO HAVE SUPERIOR MATURITY, HIGHER EDUCATIONAL LEVELS, HEIGHTENED AWARENESS OF OURSELVES, & HAVE EXHIBITED A WILLINGNESS TO BE COOPERATIVE & FLEXIBLE. HOW WERE WE TRANSFORMED? IN SPITE OF PRESENT DAY LEGISLATION THAT DICTATES WE HAVE LITTLE CHANCE OF LEAVING PRISON, WE PERSEVERE IN OUR QUEST FOR HIGHER EDUCATION. I WOULD VENTURE TO SAY THAT 2/3 OF US ARE ACTIVELY SEEKING EXPANDED KNOWLEDGE. WE ARE CRITICIZED BY OUR FREE WORLD COUNTERPARTS FOR TAKING ADVANTAGE OF GRANTS IN PURSUIT OF THIS GOAL ~~we~~ ARE PERCEIVED ~~as~~ GAINING MORE THAN WE ARE LOSING. YET EVERY INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAMMING PLAN, PAROLE PLAN, LEGISLATIVE ACT, ^{Provide} WHETHER FOR GOOD-TIME OR PAROLE FOR LIFERS, HINGES ON HIGHER EDUCATION. STUDIES SHOW THAT EDUCATION NOT ONLY INCREASES JOB SKILL OPTIONS BUT ~~hooks~~ EDUCATION WITH REDUCED RECIDIVISM. EDUCATION FURTHER ENHANCES LIFE SKILLS SUCH AS DECISION MAKING & THOROUGH THOUGHT PROGRESSION. IT OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CREATION OF AN EXPANDED SENSE OF OPTIONS, THUS CONTROL OVER ONE'S LIFE. LASTLY, IT ANCHORS A SENSE OF SELF THAT IS AUTONOMOUS, STRONG, AND NON-SELF REJECTING. NEW WOMAN ^{emerge} STEEPED IN THE BELIEF IN THE EXISTENCE OF CHOICES & ^{practice} CHANGE. ^{Educate} ~~THE~~ ISN'T CODDLING CRIMINALS. EDUCATION IS A TRUE PUBLIC SAFETY INVESTMENT. ~~THE~~ ^{continuing} ADVANCED ~~ADVANCE~~ EDUCATION THAT PROPELS A PERSON OUT OF IGNORANCE IS ~~THE~~ A CATALYST FOR CHANGE. IN CHANGE LIES OUR HOPE.

PRIOR TO THE INTRODUCTION OF HB1382, APPEAL & COMMUTATION OFFERED ONLY A MORAG OF HOPE. FEW LIFE SENTENCES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY EITHER OF THESE CARROT-ON-STICK OPTIONS. WHEN THE REALITY SETS IN ABOUT THE HOPELESSNESS OF THE AVENUE O APPEAL, THE ONLY HOPE LEFT ON THE HORIZON, AT LEAST TEN YEARS DOWN THE ROAD, I COMMUTATION. THAT BUBBLE, TOO, IS DOOMED TO BURST. THE POLITICAL NATURE OF TH

COMMUTATION PROCESS AGAIN PRICKS THE BELIEF IN ANY FORTHCOMING CHANGE. WITH STATISTICS FROM GOV TO GOV FLUCTUATING FROM A 94% ACCEPTANCE OF COMMUTATION APPLICATIONS BROUGHT BEFORE GOV SHAPP, TO A MERE 10% ACCEPTANCE RATE BY GOV THORNURG, NOT ONE OF WHOM WAS A WOMAN, HOPE DIMS. IN GOV CASEY'S 7 YEARS, 18 LIFERS HAVE BEEN COMMUTED WITH ONLY 2 OF THOSE BEING WOMEN--ONE WAS TERMINALLY ILL. THIS RELUCTANCE OF PA GOVS TO FOLLOW THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THEIR OWN CONSTITUTIONAL COMMUTATION BOARD REPRESENTS A PUNITIVE VIEW OF CORRECTIONS THAT IS FED BY THE MEDIA'S FEEDING THE FRENZY OF SOCIETY'S RIGHT TO KNOW EVERY SORDID DETAIL OF THE CRIME WHILE DESTROYING THE PERPETRATOR BY AUTOMATICALLY ASSUMING GUILT, INSTEAD OF INNOCENCE, ALL THE WHILE KNOWING NOTHING OF THE MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES. THIS MEDIA BLITZ FEEDS THE PUBLIC'S PRECEPTION OF PRISONERS AS NOTHING MORE THAN "CAGED ANIMALS." THIS LEAVES LIFERS WHO HAVE GROWN UP IN PRISON & WHO HAVE VIRTUALLY BECOME DIFFERENT PEOPLE DURING THE MANY YEARS OF IMPRISONMENT, LITTLE CHANCE TO REDEFINE THEMSELVES OR TO INTERACT WITH SOCIETY. LIFE SENTENCED CITIZENS WHO EXPRESS REMORSE FOR THEIR CRIMES, WHO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CRIMINAL NATURE OF THEIR ACTS, ACCEPT THE FAULTS IN THEIR PAST LIFESTYLES, THINKING, & BEHAVIOR, WHO EDUCATE & ENRICH THEMSELVES & OTHERS WHILE SHUT AWAY FROM SOCIETY, FIND THEMSELVES AT A LOSS FOR OUTLETS FOR THEIR ENERGIES, EDUCATION, AND ACQUIRED WISDOM. ATTEMPTS TO COMMUNICATE THESE KINDS OF ISSUES TO ANY ONE IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD FALLS ON DEAF EARS. OUR GROUP'S ATTEMPTS TO NEGOTIATE NEW RELATIONS & RELATIONSHIPS ARE STONEWALLED. THE REAL WORLD DOESN'T THINK WE BELONG. CITIZENS TREATED AS UNWANTED IMMIGRANTS IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY. WE ARE AN UNACCEPTED MINORITY.

LIFERS' HOPE WAS REJUVENATED BY ^{By} ~~OUR VERSION OF THE "DREAM TEAM"~~, REPS. CARN, RICHARDS, & ACOSTA, THE COURAGEOUS SPONSORS OF HB 1382. THIS PROPOSED LEGISLATION WOULD ESTABLISH A PROGRAM TO GRANT PAROLE TO LIFE-SENTENCED INMATES. THIS BILL OFFERS ANSWERS TO INORDINATELY LONG SENTENCES, OVERCROWDING, AND BIG SPENDING ^{on} ~~BY~~ THE PA CORRECTIONS SYSTEM BY OFFERING A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM WITH THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF PAROLE FOR ONLY THOSE LIFERS WHO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE PRESCRIBED PROGRAMMING. THIS 15 YEAR LONG TERM TREATMENT PROGRAM IS AN INDIVIDUALLY PRESCRIBED PLAN THAT INCLUDES ^{extended} LONG TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS, VOCATIONAL & EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS, WITH PERIODIC REVIEW BY A COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED BY THE D.O.C. COMMISSIONER. OUR CONDUCT RECORDS MUST BE ABOVE BOARD, NO INFRACTIONS OF ANY KIND.

WITH THIS BILL WE WOULD EARN OUR PAROLE. WE MUST WANT IT SO BADLY FROM OUR CORE THAT WE ARE WILLING TO FOCUS OUR WHOLE SELVES ON THIS GOAL. WE DON'T EXPECT YOU TO HAND US ^{the keys} ~~ANYTHING~~. LET US KNOW HOW FAR, HOW FAST, & HOW HIGH WE MUST CLIMB & WATCH US GO. GIVE US GOALS & YOUR EXPECTATIONS & WE'LL EXCEED THEM. GIVE US ONE CHANCE & WE WILL SEIZE IT.

PA IS ONE OF ONLY SIX STATES WHICH OFFERS NO HOPE FOR THE RELEASE OF LIFERS. IN PA, LIFE MEANS LIFE, NOT SENTENCES OF 7 YEARS, NOR 15 YEARS, NOT EVEN 20 YEARS. LIFERS IN PA ARE FOUR TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE IN PRISON THAN TO BE COMMUTED. THE OTHER 44 STATES IN THE US OF A GRANT PAROLE TO ALL LIFERS. THOSE LIFERS WHO HAVE COMMITTED CRIMES OF EQUAL DEGREE ARE GIVEN ANOTHER CHANCE. WE, TOO, WOULD LIKE THAT CHANCE.

CONVERSELY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE WHAT HB 1382 ~~DOES~~ IS NOT. IT IS NOT ABOUT COMPASSION. IT IS NOT HANDING LIFERS ANYTHING WE DIDN'T EARN. IT DOES NOT OPEN UP ALL THE PRISON GATES & LET ALL OF US COME TUMBLING OUT. THIS BILL PROVIDES FOR A LONG TERM, HIGH EXPECTANCY, CLOSELY MONITORED, ON-GOING PROGRAM. IT FURTHER ~~REQUIRES~~ NOTIFICATION OF & INPUT BY THE VICTIM'S FAMILY. ^{Even} THEN PAROLE IS NOT GUARANTEED. IT MUST BE EARNED, STEP-BY-STEP, AT ^{3/5} YEAR INCREMENTS. IF WE FAIL ANY PHASE, WE LOSE. IT ULTIMATELY PLACES THE DECISION SQUARELY IN THE HANDS OF THE D.O.C. PERSONNEL WHO KNOW US BEST & THE LESS POLICICALLY MOTIVATED PAROLE BOARD. FURTHERMORE, IT LIMITS THE TOAL NUMBER OF INMATES WHO CAN BE PAROLED FROM A LIFE SENTENCE PER YEAR. THIS BILL IS A BEGINNING. IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO BEGIN ONE STEP AT A TIME.

HB 1382 IS ABOUT JUSTICE. ALL WANT JUSTICE TO BE SERVED BECAUSE IT IS ONE OF THE ~~MOST~~ FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES & TRADITIONS OF OUR NATION & STATE. JUSTICE OF OLD MEANT "AN EYE FOR AN EYE. I HUMBLBY REMIND YOU WHAT GANDI SAID ABOUT THAT PHILOSOPHY. HE SAID, "AN EYE FOR AN EYE ULTIMATELY RESULTS IN THE WHOLE WORLI BECOMING BLIND." JUSTICE SHOULD BE A BALANCE A LIFE GIVING BLEND OF PUNISHMENT & MERCY, RETRIBUTION & FORGIVENESS, DEPRIVATION & RESTORATION. THE HIGLY PUNIT-ITIVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM OF PA CONCENTRATES ON PUNISHMENT WHILE EXCLUDING THE POSSIBILITY OF MERCY, DEPRIVATION WHICH DENIES RESTORATION, & RETRIBUTION WHICH IGNORES FORGIVENESS. JUSTICE IS NOT ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER. THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION IS LACED WITH EXAMPLES OF JUSTICE: IN THE O.T., MOSES IN THE HEAT OF ANGER SLEW A MAN, HE WAS CAST OUT BUT RESTORED. DAVID CONTRACTED IN THE DEATH OF HIS LOVER'S HUSBAND. HE RECEIVED HIS JUST DUE, BUT MERCY, TOO. SAU OF THE N.T. CONSPIRED IN THE DEATH OF STEPHEN BY HOLDING THE CLOAKS OF HI MURDERERS. ~~HIS~~ IS THE SAME PAUL WHO BECAM^E THE "ROCK"^{like} CORNERSTONE OF THE CHURCH IMAGINE THE BIBLE WITHOUT THESE MEN FOR IN PA MOSES, DAVID, & PAUL WOULD HAV SPENT THE REMAINDER OF THEIR NATURAL LIVES IN PRISON.

"PENNSYLVANIANS HAVE COME TO SO NARROWLY DEFINE INCARCERATION + ONLY EQUATIN PUNISHMENT WITH INCARCERATION. SENTENCING POLICIES ARE FASHIONED OUT OF TH PERCEIVED FEAR OF CRIME, NOT OUT OF WHAT IS BEST FOR SOCIETY. WE NEED TO DECID WHO GOES TO PRISON BASED ON WHAT PRISON CAN & CAN'T DO, NOT ON POLICIES BASED C FEAR." THOSE ARE NOT MY WORDS. THOSE ARE THE WORDS COMM. JOS. LEHMAN. AT TH PRESENT TIME STATE LAW MANDATES THAT A MAXIMUM & A MINIMUM PRISON SENTENCE F BIKERSENSE THE HAVE TO BE ONLY ONE WORDS WERE PAROLED WITHIN THE YEARS OF THE PRX.

Because we never taken a life

given to every one convicted of ~~GIVEN TO EVERYONE CONVICTED OF~~ ^{felony} ~~felony~~. TH
 IS TRUE FOR ALL EXCEPT LIFERS. YET WE ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES WHO HAVE TAK
 ANOTHER'S ~~LIFE~~. MURDERED ^{the public believes that all the worst criminals are locked up} APPROX 50% OF THOSE WHO HAVE TAKEN ANOTHER'S LIFE
^{a man} ARE PAROLED WITHIN 10 YEARS OF THEIR STATUTORY 10-20 YEAR SENTENCES. MOST OF
 THOSE INMATES WITH THIRD DEGREE MURDER CONVICTIONS ARE FIRST DEGREE CASES WHICH
 RECEIVED ~~a plea~~ A PLEA BARGAIN, OR WHO JUST HAD A BETTER LAWYER. ^{which directly affects innocent & working men} FOR ALL THIRD
 DEGREE MURDERERS, THERE ARE NO SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS NEEDED FOR RELEASE, NO
 EXPECTATIONS OR QUALIFICATIONS NOTHING AT ALL SIMILAR TO COMMUTATION. PAROLE IS
 ALMOST AUTOMATIC. ^{usually} WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT THAT ALL HUMAN LIFE HAS VALUE - EQUAL ^{price}
 VALUE. HOWEVER, SENTENCING GUIDELINES PLACE MORE VALUE ON THE LIFE OF THE ^{some}
 VICTIMS OF ~~FIRST DEGREE MURDER~~ ^{with a number of} THAN ON THE LIVES OF ALL OTHER VICTIMS WHOSE
 LIVES WERE TAKEN. ^{was the murderer at 10 p.} THIS SYSTEM LEADS ONE TO BELIEVE THAT SOME MURDERERS DESERVE
 LESS PUNISHMENT & ^{these} SOME PRISONERS CAN LEAVE WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVE DEMONSTRATED
 POSITIVE CHANGE WHILE OTHERS WHO HAVE DEVOTED THEIR ^{of us} TIME & ENERGIES ^{to have turned their whole being over} TOWARD ^{our} ~~THEIR~~
 BETTERMENT CAN NEVER HAVE A CHANCE. THAT'S THE PREJUDICE WE FACE BY THE DIS ^{hear}
 CRIMINATION OF THE PRESENT LAW. ~~XX~~ ^{mind}

VICTIMS" FAMILIES HAVE ENDURED THE HORRIBLE WRONGS OF OUR CRIMES. OUR RELEASE
 SHOULD IN NO WAY BE INTERPRETED AS DIMINISHING THE SERIOUSNESS OF OUR ACTS. BU
 HOPEFULLY & PRAYERFULLY THEY CAN REALIZE THAT AFTER SO MUCH TIME, INCARCERATIO
 IS ~~COUNTER PRODUCTIVE~~ IS NOT THE ONLY ANSWER. IF LIFE SENTENCES COULD BRIN
 BACK OUR VICTIMS, THEN THE SEVERITY & THE INDEFINITE LENGTH OF OUR SENTENCE
 WOULD BE UNDERSTANDABLE. ^{as long as the sentence is a deterrent to crime} UNFORTUNATELY, THIS IS NOT THE CASE.
 THE VICTIMS" FAMILIES & THE ^{lifers} PRISONERS WILL LIVE THE REMAINDER OF THEIR LIVE
 WITH WHAT HAS HAPPENED: THE SURVIVORS WITH THEIR MEMORIES: THE MURDERER WIT
~~THEIR~~ ^{the memories & the} CONSEQUENCES, & BOTH WITH THE PAIN THAT HAS NO CURE.
^{& her conscience}

LIFERS" WORLDS HAVE BEEN DISFUNCTIONAL. BUT THERE IS NOTHING WE HAVE BEI
 THROUGH, OR SEEN, OR DONE THAT CANNOT BE USED TO MAKE OUR LIVES MORE VALUABL
 ALL ARE CAPABLE OF GROWING FROM ANY EXPERIENCE. ^{even do} THE EXPERIENCE OF THE JOURNI
 INWARD IS THE LONGEST JOURNEY, BUT OUTWARD PROGRESS IS MEASURED BY THAT INWAI
 PROCESS. WE ASK YOU TO READMIT INTO YOUR WORLD THOSE OF US ^{live} WHO HAVE MADE TH
 JOURNEY, ^{have} HAVE RETURNED, & ^{have} HAVE CHANGED FOR THE BETTER. LIFERS" HAVE TRANSCEND
 OUR EXPERIENCES.