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# Reviews

Book Review

## **Prison: A Survival Guide**

By Carl Cattermole

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(2019)

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(paperback)

Price: £8.99 (paperback)

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Boris Johnson promoted a “serious about fighting crime” narrative, and simultaneously the expansion of the penal system.<sup>1</sup> Calls to expand the carceral web have since intensified during the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> These approaches often appeal to those who have been programmed to uncritically accept the penal equation “crime plus responsibility equals punishment”.<sup>3</sup> However, as Carl Cattermole illustrates in his book, *Prison: A Survival Guide*, these accounts often erase the multi-layered suffering endured by people within these institutional settings and lack any practical guidance for anyone faced with a “stretch” (p. 181).

*Prison: A Survival Guide* is a raw, comprehensive, and accessible four-part guide to navigating and surviving one of the core symbols of the carceral nation: the prison. The author, Carl Cattermole who was formerly incarcerated, re-positions lived experience to the centre of contemporary penal discourse. His text responds to the need to equip those currently inhabiting the penal system in Britain with a practical and critical account of incarceration that is formed in light of his lived knowledge of incarceration, which presents as a kind of penal literacy. These insights are interspersed with a range of perspectives from the experts such as formerly and

presently incarcerated people, combined with reflections from family members whose loved ones are currently incarcerated. Cattermole resists the parameters of more traditional penal discourse by injecting reality back into the centre of the conversation. In doing so, he unceremoniously unveils “what the prison really is: a mix of technical legal systematic bullshit mixed with emotions that are really hard to understand” (p. 12). This is a sombre, yet witty account of penal survival. Fundamental to Cattermole’s book, is his appeal to the reader to progress the conversation beyond sorrow and dismay and into “proactive action” (p. 176).

In Part 1 of the book, titled “The Basics”, Cattermole provides the reader with a 101 on the day-to-day; covering areas such as day one, relationships with cellmates, staff, race, and religion, food, and the Incentive Earned Privileges system (IEP). In this section, the author details “nicking”—the process whereby insiders are subject to the internal penal adjudication process for minor charges (p. 39). Importantly, he highlights incarcerated people’s lack of access to legal aid to support them in manoeuvring this process. This scarce access to justice arises despite the detrimental impact of a potential guilty verdict on people’s liberty, and as Cattermole highlights earlier on in the text, the reality that the collective literacy age of around half of all incarcerated people is 11 years old (p. 40, p. 10). Cattermole sheds important light on many of the underdiscussed fundamentals of life in the penal system in Britain.

In Part 2 of the book, “Taking Care of Yourself”, Cattermole discusses health, sex, drugs, alcohol,

art, education, and even tattoos within the prison. Here, Cattermole passes the mic to his friends—Julia Howard, Lisa Selby, Darcey Hartley, Jon Gulliver, Sarah Jane Baker—to provide a multidimensional insight into incarceration in terms of sexual intimacy, parenthood in prison, having a partner in prison, being an incarcerated child, and gender identity on the inside. Sarah Jane Baker’s account on being LGBTQ+ in prison is particularly effective in highlighting both the increased contemporary focus on incarcerated transgender women and the comparative neglect of transgender men in the penal system. Meanwhile, Julia Howard discusses the difficulties of caring for children in prison and the strength she derived from regular contact with her children (p. 120–125). She highlights the work by Birth Companions who support pregnant women and new mothers who are incarcerated. All of these rich insights enhance the diverse and universal reach of this book.

In Part 3 of the book, “What’s Next?”, Cattermole looks to the future and “returning to the real world” post-incarceration. As part of his suggestions to transform the mainstream acceptance of incarceration, he compels the reader to examine the underlying meaning of the language used by the Ministry of Justice, the media and MPs on all sides of politics. He questions “what is a ‘reform’ if it really means building a USA-style private ‘super prison’ over the hills and far away” (p. 176). As part of these smaller steps to proactive action, Cattermole also emphasises the importance of establishing community and for us all to be engaging with a variety of networks on the pathway to transformative change (p.178). By

1. “PM to create 10,000 new prison places and extend stop-and-search”, BBC News, last modified August 19th, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-49309112>.

2. See: Adams, Felicity and Emmerich, Fabienne. 2021. ‘Caring, not carceral expansion!’ Punishment, Prisons and Detention EG Working Group Newsletter, European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control, March 2021 Issue 13, pp1-4.

3. Norrie, Alan. 1996. The Finding of Fault in the Criminal Law. *The Modern Law Review*. 59: 540-556.

urging the reader to interrogate seemingly progressive “reformist” approaches and by reinforcing the value of community in the context of the prison estate in Britain, Cattermole develops the abolitionist terrain established by the likes of Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson-Gilmore.

Subsequently, in Part 4 of the book: “Resources” Cattermole shifts his focus to actualising these smaller, yet transformative future steps. Initially he does this by sharing a valuable set of contacts to support currently and formerly incarcerated people who are engaged with the criminal legal system at various stages. These include (to name but a few) the Bent Bars Project, a letter-writing project which provides support to LGBTQ+ incarcerated people; The Empty Cages Collective, a small anarchist group dedicated to ending oppression in all forms who have engaged with the prison system in varying capacities; and Community Action on Prison Expansion (CAPE), a collective of grassroots coalitions opposing prison expansion across England, Wales and Scotland.

The author contributes to a growing and diverse body of scholarship within the criminological and socio-legal research terrain by centring lived-experience accounts of incarceration. Cattermole and the recent additions by scholars such as Baker (2017) and Sanchez (2019) aim to “bring readers into the lived reality of our prison system – its effects, its contradictions, and its failure to rehabilitate offenders or promote public safety”.<sup>4</sup> By bringing together a range of traditionally marginalised discourses about incarceration, *Prison: A Survival Guide* constitutes a rich and distinct addition to this contemporary research landscape. Cattermole provides a valuable critique of the penal system in Britain that is underpinned by an abolitionist

spirit in tandem with a penal survival praxis, which is primarily designed to support presently and formerly incarcerated people in navigating the penal system. As such, the book constitutes a refreshing, trustworthy and supportive ally for those faced with a prison sentence, or for those with loved ones who are engaged with the penal system.

By setting the record straight on the multitude of reductive and click-bait media narratives of incarceration, Cattermole ensures that the value of the text extends beyond those directly engaged with the criminal legal system. Within his account, he turns his attention to a different, but an interconnected cog in the carceral system – the court system. He persuasively advocates an avenue for further research: *Court: A Survival Guide* (p. 3). Fundamentally, Cattermole’s considered combination of varying forms of knowledge equips the reader with a deeper appreciation of the complexity of incarceration, and as such the text is a vital source for all. Simultaneously, the book prompts readers from all backgrounds to confront the violence of the carceral state and to search for alternatives in an increasingly punitive age punctuated by loss, suffering, and violence.

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### **The Prison Doctor**

By Angela Brown

Publisher: HQ (an imprint of Harper Collins) 2019

ISBN:978-0-00-831144-5

Price: £8.99 (Paperback).

For many years, literature on prison health care was relatively sparse and under former Home Office policy, was generally shrouded in secrecy and

discouraged. An exception was the pseudonymous Dr Theodore Dalrymple whose unhelpful, jaundiced view of prisoners frequently appeared in sections of the press. Vivien Stern, in *Bricks of Shame*<sup>1</sup>, records a prison doctor being rebuked for writing about prison hygiene in *The Times*. External access to the then *Prison Medical Journal* was denied. When Professor Joe Sim published his *Medical Power in Prisons*<sup>2</sup> he noted that research in this area had often led to litigation against individuals and he had needed to pass his drafts to lawyers as a safeguard.

Secrecy led to suspicion of poor quality medical provision in prisons and indeed, there was evidence to support this. There were, of course, doctors, nurses and hospital officers (roughly the equivalent to medical orderlies in the military) who were models of professional practice. It was Dr Shan Biswas who, in the 1990s, advocated the founding of a College of Prison Medicine to recognise the unique nature of medical practice within prisons and to share best practice with colleagues. Thankfully matters are different today and the Royal College of General Practitioners Secure Environment Group has taken Biswas’s aspirations perhaps further than he could have hoped. Since the abolition of the inward-looking, self-protecting Prison Medical Service, there has been the opportunity for prison doctors and nurses to contribute to the public debate. Dr Angela Brown’s book is a welcome addition to the field.

Not being an academic text, nor pretending to be, she charts her career from being a GP in a comfortable Buckinghamshire practice through prison doctoring at HMP Huntercombe, Wormwood Scrubs and Bronzefield. She left 20

4. Sanchez, Angel E. 2019. In *Spite of Prison: Developments in the Law*. Harvard Law Review 132: 1650-1683

1. Stern, V. (1993) *Bricks of shame: Britain's prisons* London: Penguin

2. Sim, J. (1990) *Medical power in prisons: Prison medical service in England 1774-1988* London: McGraw Hill

years of general practice in the face of NHS reforms that she feared would change her personal holistic, almost pastoral, approach to her job, in favour of tick boxes. But why prisons? An article she wrote for *Pulse* magazine, explaining her departure, attracted Prison Service attention and she was invited to apply. HMP Huntercombe presented her with a challenge and she believed that, though a different sort of medical environment, she might just make a difference.

She rapidly discovered that the reasons for seeking medical help were not always straightforward. How could she have suspected, from general practice, that repeated complaints about patients' painful feet were attempts to be 'prescribed' their own shoes? Many appointments were attempts to cajole her into prescribing extra drugs. Angela Burns soon became attuned to these manipulations. After five years and amidst rumours of closure, she left to face a qualitatively different challenge at HMP Wormwood Scrubs. And what a challenge it was. Suicides, attempted suicides, hostage taking, serious life threatening and disfiguring assaults, accompanied by intractable problems of rats and cockroaches. Dr Brown paints a vivid picture of a health care regime just about managing to get by. She emphasises the necessity for and general success of teamwork within the health care function and beyond and the reliance of staff, of all grades, to look to each other for mutual support. They were all part of the same family. Strangely, amidst the mayhem of daily life, she found appearing in Coroners' Courts one of her more stressful duties.

Amanda Brown's sympathy for the plight of many of her patients shines through but her compassion never obscures objectivity or

professionalism. It must have been a shock to be required to work alongside a locum doctor described as a bully who treated prisoners with contempt. He lasted only a few months but there is a clear warning as to the care needed in recruiting people for a job calling for endless patience and sensitivity. There are one or two nods to a dynamic many readers will find familiar: the sometimes prickly relationship between Security and Health Care. How can a hospital escort be provided at the weekend when staffing is cut to the bone? How to explain to the prisoner with the hospital appointment that because his escort arrived late, he can't be seen for another six weeks? She describes sometimes having to fight to get prisoners transferred to hospital at all.

It was at Wormwood Scrubs that Dr Brown started to feel disaffected from her social life in Buckinghamshire where her friends' first world problems seemed so remote from her daily experience. She found her values changing. As elsewhere, she credits her husband for his unfailing support. The impact of prison work upon family members often goes unrecognised and it is pleasing to see her crediting her family here. One senses that after her time at Scrubs, Dr Brown was simply becoming exhausted. She was given the opportunity of transferring to HMP Bronzfield, working a three-day week and her first experience of female prisoner patients. Amanda Brown's account of her work in the two previous establishments is permeated with pen pictures of many of the prisoners and staff she encountered. The Bronzfield section is almost entirely that. Again, for the general reader, this provides a vivid account of some of the tragic backstories and also those not so tragic. Drugs, childhood abuse, domestic abuse,

prostitution on the one hand and the glamorous lifestyle of being married to a Mafioso on the other. Often, as at Scrubs, she finds that it is not just the delivery of health care that is important to the prisoner but little things like not being judged and, whether strictly ethical or not, the occasional hug.

Her book's one shortcoming is nevertheless likely to appeal to the general reader. Much of the action is telescoped. Seven years at the Scrubs is condensed into 138 pages and thus drama appears to characterise of almost every minute. Likewise, she makes frequent reference to various notorious prisoners, perhaps for effect but not because they have been her patients. The book might also have benefited from rather more careful editing. Why an introduction with a graphic account of a woman giving birth to a child alone in a cell at Bronzfield? Dr Brown was called to the emergency and the child survived (unlike a similar case at the prison under investigation as I write<sup>3</sup>). Questions as to the adequacy of pre-natal medical care might have been addressed. We learn that, at Wormwood Scrubs, Dr Brown is 'no longer intimidated by prison officers, whatever their rank' but on the following page she says that she is. Further, Huntercombe is described as holding 15-18 year olds, 18-21 year olds and also an escapee from a maximum security prison. Unlikely.

The book will give the general reader a rare insight into the perhaps arcane world of prison medicine. When leaving her treatment room, one prisoner announced 'You've got a good heart, Dr Brown.' This is quite clear from her book.

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3. See BBC News (04 October 2019) *HMP Bronzfield: Newborn baby dies at women's prison* available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-49935191> accessed on 08 June 2020

## **Black Women Prison Employees: The Intersectionality of Gender and Race**

By Marcia Morgan

Publisher: Edwin Mellen Press (2018)

ISBN: 978-1495507083

Price: \$199.99

Criminal justice worker and academic Marcia Morgan, has produced a powerful book that illuminates the experiences of Black women working in the prison system in England and Wales. Much of the research on prison staff focusses on the experience of the predominant group — white men<sup>1</sup>. While some attention has been directed towards the experience of women<sup>2</sup> and staff from minority ethnic groups<sup>3</sup>, the novelty of Morgan's work is that it focusses on the intersection of race and gender. In total, seventeen Black women took part in the study, covering a range of roles and also encompassing public and privately-run prisons, and headquarters.

Morgan's book attempts to use the stories of Black and Asian women working in prison services and offers:

*...an invitation to those who do not know what it feels like to be a black woman located on the margins of their organisation because of gender and racial inequality. [it is] an opportunity to see through the lens of this group of employees and walk their footsteps through their challenges and experiences.*

The book uses the experience of these women as an guide to

exploring crucial aspects on their experiences including: the process in which Black women are acculturated into the world of prison employee; the participants' perception of themselves and their relationship dynamics with others within the organisation; the participants' negotiation of the organisational dynamics, and; the mobilisation and impact of psychosocial defenses on Black women. The analysis draws heavily upon both psychodynamic approaches to understanding organizational and individual behavior, and critical race theory.

The interviews with these women show that they often feel that they are an 'outsider within', not fully accepted by their peers and often experiencing discomfort with the organizational culture. Morgan describes a culture of suspicion and mistrust in prisons, which is often directed towards 'suspect' groups, including particular racial and ethnic groups. She describes that prisons are dominated by a white masculine culture in which the presence of Black women professionals is disruptive. Examples of how this played out included the mistrust directed towards one interviewee when she communicated in a different language with a prisoner. A further example was where one interviewee witnessed inappropriate use of force, which she considered to be racially motivated. The subsequent investigation not only concluded that the allegation was not proven but recommended that the complainant received further training. Such events caused some Black women to feel pressured into assimilating and remaining passive in the face of situations and actions that they felt uncomfortable about. Organisational attempts to transform

the institution, for example through the appointment of diversity managers, Morgan describes, are often ineffective as these posts are located on the margins of organisational power structures, with the post holders possessing neither race and gender privilege nor positional status.

One fascinating element of Morgan's study is to describe how some, including herself, masked their vulnerability and projected a façade of the 'Strong Black Woman' (SBW). The characteristics of this identity included self-reliance; independence; strength; assertiveness, and; perseverance. Morgan describes that this identity is deeply rooted in social and historic response to persecution, marginalisation and adversity. The SBW identity is interwoven through Black women's psychosocial experience, that is, the preoccupation of always being battle-ready to overcome personal challenges, as well as having the strength to support others through their battles. This highlights the complex inner world and external relationships Black women encounter within the workplace, a space that is sometimes experienced as a hostile environment.

Although Morgan's book is written in a gentle and empathic way, drawing upon the real experiences of people, the messages it carries are hard hitting. This book is an important contribution to the literature on occupational cultures in prisons. It is also a book that deserves careful consideration by practitioners who genuinely want to contribute towards tackling inequality in prison work.

*Dr Jamie Bennett is a Deputy Director HM Prison and Probation Service.*

1. For example Liebling, A., Price, D. and Shefer, G. (2011) *The Prison Officer* Second edition Abingdon: Willan; Crawley, E. (2004) *Doing Prison Work: The Public and Private Lives of Prison Officers* Cullompton: Willan
2. Crewe, B. (2006) *Male prisoners' perceptions of female officers in an English prison in Punishment and Society* Vol.8 No.4 p.395-421; Tait, S. (2008) *Prison officers and gender* in Bennett, J. Crewe, B. and Wahidin, A. (eds) *Understanding Prison Staff* Cullompton: Willan p. 65-91
3. Bhui, H. and Fossi, J. (2008) *The experiences of black and minority ethnic prison staff* in Bennett, J., Crewe, B. and Wahidin, A. (eds) *Understanding Prison Staff* Cullompton: Willan p. 49-64; Bennett, J. (2015) *The working lives of prison managers: Global change, local cultures and individual agency in the late modern prison* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

## Breakfast at Bronzefield

By Sophie Campbell

Publisher: Sophie Campbell Books

2020

ISBN: 978-1-9163506-0-1

Price: £8.27 (Paperback)

*Breakfast at Bronzefield*, is a lived experience narrative of one woman's time in HMP Bronzefield and HMP Downview, during 2017 and 2018. As explained in the Preface, the reason for writing the book is to 'expose the abuses that occur inside female prisons, but also to demonstrate that women can achieve great things despite having gone to prison' (Preface). Interestingly the author describes herself as being an atypical prisoner in the sense that she went to a public school, had a University education, was not a drug addict and prior to incarceration had somewhere to live and was employed. In contrast to how she would be treated on the 'outside' this difference meant that she felt she was looked down on by many prisoners and prison officers, largely because she didn't fit the unwarranted stereotype that female prisoners are uneducated and inarticulate. A key theme of this book is how such stereotypes shape the prison system, including the provision of education, mental health, drug use, race and family relationships.

The book is divided into three parts: the first recounts Sophie's (not her real name) time on remand, the second her sentence and the third her release. Part 1 is made up of 11 chapters with many focusing on important aspects/themes of life inside a women's jail. Chapter 4, for example, deals with the *Invisible War* on sexual assaults in prison, with the author suggesting how in many cases where a complaint of sexual assault had been made, the prison (Bronzefield) would not investigate or pass the matter to the police. The most that was done was that the suspect would be placed in

segregation and then following this punishment, either be placed on another wing or moved to another establishment. In a similar vein, chapter 5, deals with intimate relationships between female prisoners, with the 'sexually permissive atmosphere' (p. 57) in both Bronzefield and Downview, often allowing coercive abuse to be hidden and defined as a consenting relationship. The chapter also considered those women who were prepared to engage in sexual activity with a minority of corrupt officers (both male and female) so that they could have access to luxuries such as tobacco, alcohol, drugs or a mobile phone. Another interesting chapter, *Zombie Nation*, talks about mental health and the mental health unit at Bronzefield. While the author describes some of the women as 'really far gone' (p.86), she also describes others, including herself, who 'learnt how easy it was to play the mental health card when prison psychiatrists were conditioned to expect almost all females prisoners to be suffering from some sort of illness' (p. 86). Other useful chapters include those on segregation (Chp 6) and work in prisons (Chp 10).

Part two of the book recounts Sophie's time in prison as a sentenced offender and sees her move to HMP Downview, where, for a time, she worked in the prison library. Initially, she hoped that this establishment would be better than the last, but as her sentence progresses, this hope is not realised. While Downview had more job opportunities, there were less places available and on the occasion that she joined a debating workshop with students from Oxford, her title 'Cats are better than dogs?' (p. 198), was so simple because the students did not believe that the women could cope with anything harder. The fact that

the vast majority of education courses and opportunities are for those who had a poor education history is also mentioned, as too are the gendered bias for women to be trained in areas such as cleaning and beauty. One difference noted between the two prisons, however, was 'Downview really opened my eyes to the way a woman's race affected how she was treated. You couldn't just be yourself; you had to conform to racial stereotypes' (p.190). The stereotype here for a black women prisoner was 'overweight, aggressive, uncouth' with these women 'treated extremely well' (p. 191). Race and how the colour of your skin affected prison life is dealt with in chapter 19, although the author does point out that

*... bar a few incidences at Downview, I seriously doubt if I had been white — and I should say white middle class as opposed to white working class — whether my experiences would have been any different (p. 218).*

This is attributed to the fact that by not conforming to the black stereotype she was seen by many of the officers and other prisoners as a 'non-authentic black person' (p. 219). Racism, including some examples of how Sophie experienced it, is also dealt with in Chapter 20.

While the majority of the book is critical, Sophie is positive about Toastmasters International<sup>1</sup>, which ran public speaking workshops at Bronzefield. Despite her enthusiasm and positivity, she only participated for three weeks, however, due to being moved to segregation. This was not Sophie's first visit to the segregation unit, with there being several occasions reported in both

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1. For more information see: <https://www.toastmasters.org/>

Bronzefield and Downview, largely due to assaults and violence against both officers and the other women. On some occasions, Sophie would purposely act out in order to be moved, either to give herself a break from the wing or because 'the showers were exceptionally clean' (p. 245)!

The final part of the book deals with Sophie's release from prison, although the latter chapters of part two start to look at this as well. In particular it deals with the first seven months from June to December 2018. The account is critical, not just of the agencies involved, including resettlement (which did not find her housing) and probation (who were unable to offer her anything of practical use) but also of the lack of support her family (particularly her father) gave her. In fact, the six days that she had to live with her father are described as the time when she was most at risk of returning to prison. The success that Sophie finds is therefore down to her own efforts, although she does admit that she didn't tell the recruitment agency about her conviction, later lied to her probation officer about what one of her first jobs actually entailed and managed to get bumped up the housing list due to her supervision requirements. Once more financially secure, Sophie applied for and was accepted to do a degree at University and states in one of the later chapters that her plan is to follow this up with a Masters. While this 'story' has a happy ending, it is acknowledged that for most women prisoners their paths are very different, often due to a lack of educational qualifications, secure housing and the ability or confidence to move away from destructive relationships and/or family members.

As a lived experience narrative, this book is interesting and valuable. One thing that sets it apart from some other lived

narratives is the fact that the text is littered with prison statistics and references to research. This extra information provides added value to the book and makes it useful to students and those trying to learn about prison life.

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### **Solitary. Alone We Are Nothing**

By Gladys Ambort

Publisher: Waterside Press

ISBN: 978-1-909976-61-0

Price: £20.00 (Paperback)

In a change from the books that I normally review for the *Prison Service Journal*, *Solitary. Alone We Are Nothing*, is an account of prison conditions for political prisoners in Argentina during the late 1970's. The period in question 1975 — 1978 saw great political turmoil in Argentina with the President Isabel Martinez de Peron (third wife of President Juan Peron) deposed by a military right-wing coup (coup d'etat) on 24 March 1976. A military committee was put in place to replace the government, led by Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla, who in 1985 was prosecuted for large-scale human rights abuses and crimes against humanity, including kidnappings, forced disappearances, widespread torture and extrajudicial murder of activists and political opponents. Gladys Ambort was one of these political prisoners. In 1975, at the age of 17, she was imprisoned for being a left-wing political activist. The book is therefore an account of the three years that she spent in prisons in Argentina, before being exiled to France.

The book is divided into four parts, with a prologue (arrival in Paris) and an introduction preceding these. The introduction largely explains Gladys' life before arrest

and the political activism which she was involved in as a college student. While she was part of a left-wing political party called Vanguardia Comunista and did endeavour to spread its communist views, she was denounced by one of her college Professors and subsequently arrested and preventatively detained, without trial, for possessing communist literature. The main claim against her, as with other political activists at the time, was that she was a threat to the military right-wing rule.

Part One, which is by far the largest section of the book, then details the four prisons which Gladys spent the next three years of her life. This time of imprisonment began on 2 May 1975 when she was initially arrested and detained in a cell at the Police Headquarters at Rio Cuarto. The book describes the conditions of the cell and how she had to curl up and sleep on cold cement floors, although positively notes that, unlike others, she was not physically tortured. Despite the evidence against her being flimsy and her husband (who was also arrested with her) being released, Gladys' detention was continued and she was moved to the Convent of the Congregation of Bon Pasteur, in June 1975. The Convent, run by nuns was used as a women's prison and being the only political prisoner Gladys' time here was comparably stable. She got on with many of the nuns and while confined in the Convent was in contact with her family and had weekly visits to the prison in which her husband was incarcerated. While at the convent Gladys wanted to be among other political prisoners, although when this 'wish' was granted it was potentially the start of her mental destruction.

The move to her third prison in Cordoba took place on 13 December 1975. The wing in which she was placed was exclusively for

political prisoners and Gladys quickly discovered that she was the only person there from her own political party. This meant that she had to join 'The Fringe' a small group of prisoners who did not fit with the two main parties and thus she was housed on the first floor of the wing and deemed to be inferior. While this presented challenges this was nothing to the change of regime in the prison after March 1976 when the military took over the government and a reign of torture, killings and humiliations began. At this point, the prison is described as a 'theatre of atrocities' (p. 96). There was also a long period of isolation when all communication between prisoners and the outside world was ceased. A time which Gladys found incredibly difficult, because it was her family's love and support which she felt were keeping her sane while in prison. In December 1976, Gladys was moved to her fourth and final prison — Villa Devoto in Buenos Aires. At the time Devoto prison was heralded as a 'showpiece for foreign observers' (p. 91) and it does appear that physically the conditions were better than Cordoba prison, including being able to share cells rather than being locked up for considerable periods on her own. However, we are also told how there was a ban on watches, the women had arrived with bandaged eyes, there was no outside noise and very few windows, so it was very hard for them to obtain any reference to time and place. Despite all these challenges Gladys was still managing to survive.

This changed however on 21 February 1977 when she was accused of scratching a table in the visiting room and as a punishment spent 15 ½ days in solitary confinement. It is this experience (retold in part two of the book) which the title of the book refers

to and it is this period of her incarceration which took Gladys the longest to recover from. Her suffering can be seen in the quote below:

Apart from the four walls, the small window above, the door, and the metal plate nailed to the wall, which served as a bed, there was nothing in this cell. I never heard the sound of voices. I was forbidden to speak to the guard, or to look at her. When she opened the door for me to take the mattress in or out, to go to the toilet, or to pick up a meal, she forced me to do everything head bowed and very quickly. My senses were deprived of any stimulation. I had been left alone: alone, faced with myself, this person I could not even see. No face in front of me, not even an object to reflect mine. Nothing, nothing, nothing. There was nothing to do, nothing to listen to, nothing to look at. And since I did not know how long I would stay there, I could not even project myself forward in time towards the end of my torture (pp. 124-5).

Part three of the book then explains the consequent desolation felt by Gladys and explains how while in solitary confinement she was visited by delegates from the International Committee of the Red Cross. In 1978 Argentina hosted the football World Cup and as part of these preparations they had to demonstrate respect for human rights and the upholding of democracy. As part of this several political prisoners were either being released or allowed their freedom on the condition that they left the country. On 2 December 1977, Gladys found out through seeing her name in a newspaper that her (third) application to leave the country had been successful and that she would be exiled to France. This took place on 8 January 1978, and while part four details this release it also documents how the experience of

solitary confinement had broken her.

The book as I have tried to show is a very sobering account of one women's experience as a political prisoner in Argentina at a time of political turmoil. Under that though, it is yet another reminder to us how damaging solitary confinement can be and I believe another example of why such punishment tactics should not be used in modern society. The book should therefore be of interest to academics, students of law, criminology and political science, those working in prisons and perhaps more importantly those who decide what punishments should be given within our current prison estate.

*Karen Harrison is a Professor of Law and Penal Justice at the University of Lincoln.*

### **Your Honour, Can I Tell You My Story?**

By Andi Brierley

Publisher: Waterside Press 2019

ISBN: 978-1-909976-64-1

Price: £19.95

This book has been published at a time where Offender Management within the Prison Service has undergone the most modern transformation in the last decade. The national implementation of the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model across England and Wales has placed rehabilitative culture at the heart of offender management which has reshaped the paradigm of reducing re-offending. Best practice has been rolled into one framework, particularly drawing on advocating and operationalising a more trauma informed approach. With that, as a Prison Offender Manager (POM) (a role constructed within OMiC), working for Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution (HMYOI) Aylesbury, I



have learnt first-hand that in order to understand and reduce offender behaviour it is crucial to explore the criminal narrative. It is therefore welcomed that Andi Brierley, has created an introspective autobiographical account of his experience of care and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs), including him becoming a Specialist Professional for the Youth Offending Service (YOS). A key question posed by the author is, how can an individual understand their problematic offending behaviour if they are unaware of the link between that and their childhood?

I had to work out how I was going to go from being a prisoner to an achiever. I aspired to be something in life. Walking out of prison aged 23 the big question was could I turn things around. Was I, Andi Brierly, capable of such a thing? (p.197).

Today Andi Brierly is a Youth Justice Specialist, published author, father figure and husband. Andi has offered his own exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to professionally help others address Toxic Stress, Addiction and Child Criminal Exploitation, combined with 14 years expert knowledge working for Youth Justice.

This book is written in chronological order from what the author can remember as a child until the present day. The authenticity of the authors narrative carries through twenty-three chapters and allows trust to be developed in his readers. Respectively chapters explore early exposure to violence, abandonment, heroin addiction, group offending, prison survival, barriers between professionals and lastly, individual difference as an ex-prisoner working for the YOS. This developmental and reflective

approach seeks to directly engage the public and practitioners with life experience of care authorities and the criminal justice system, offering a sense of what it is like to become entangled in the wider issues of the environment and barriers to support and rehabilitation.

'One night before I dropped asleep I was so off my face I sat and talked to myself. 'What's your future going to look like you loser?'" (p 175). The most capturing and admiring feature of this book is the authors openness and readiness to show vulnerability. This is exhibited throughout this book although particularly in chapters A Life of Crime and The Drugs Chain. The author appears to advise that no matter how moral and decent your own values are, this will not always be enough to break away from the persuasion of negative peers and behaviour. This despite the fact of being consciously aware of it as a problem. An all too familiar scenario for prison and probation staff readers, argued by the author through life experience is that childhood and personal circumstances play a key role in the development of criminal behaviour. Without early recognition, this inevitably sets forth what appears to be a snowball effect of barriers to trust and support. The chapter *A Taste of Custody*, for example, demonstrates how Andi hid from his true self as a common method of survival, until time found him confused and stuck. Given the commonality of custody as a result of breaking the law, is it provoking to pause and wonder how many others use this as a coping mechanism.

Notable references are given throughout chapters to social services when it was felt additional intervention could have changed the circumstances that followed. This initially set out the context of

what seemed to be feelings of disillusionment; however it becomes clear in the closing chapters that the author is enlightened, strong and keen for the opportunity to coach others. The latter as a basis for moving onto the final chapter. The author argues that the criminal justice system is reactive rather than preventive, creating a 'justice hammer' that puts young offenders at a risk of re-traumatization rather than healing. Certainly, OMiC is a post-sentencing model. However, this book readily describes what may not be the answer, rather than what might be, prompting follow up research on what preventative strategies can be offered by the YOS.

In conclusion, this book has supported much research on the impact of early trauma on adult experience and tapped into the well-known nurture vs nature debate in psychological philosophy. Therefore, not only does this book provide instant practitioner usefulness but further consolidates empirical research in a field where such offerings of real-life experience are rare. It comes at a time where practitioner interest is formed on how OMiC arrangements in prison and the community will work and supports new incentives for reflective practice within Offender Management. Not only is this book familiar and comfortable for prison staff readers, it is also introductory and captivating for the public on a topic that is often discussed privately within establishments and offers due recognition to the achievements accomplished by a member of our civil service.

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