

ONE WOMAN'S STRUGGLE



BY MS. KEBBY WARNER



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Greetings! My name is Kebby Warner: I am a Woman prisoner held in Michigan. This is my story of the time I have done inside the Prison Industrial Complex. Society tends to forget that as human beings, we feel pain, anger, and cry tears. They forget that we are human; they forget that we have personalities and have placed labels against us, when most of us are genuinely good people, who have chosen the wrong roads in life's journey.

Many Women share my journey, some with the same circumstances, some not. Each of us has a unique story, but all of us share the same pain. So, as you read this, know that Women on the inside have gone through similar struggles.

First, a little about myself: I am 26 years old, having come to know myself as a Woman behind this razor wire and brick. I am a writer of poetry, an avid reader and seeker of knowledge. My political beliefs are of Anarchism, where the people may live in a Utopian society, without control, racism, sexism, classism, and all the other isms that plague today's world. I am open-minded and down to earth. I seek peace and love against this world of hatred and violence. This is who I have become on the inside of this separate society, a world within the world, called the Prison Industrial Complex. This has not always been, I have grown and matured behind these walls. I still have my days, but I am a Souljah in the struggle!

Here is my journey of pain and struggle, of joy and beginnings...

I came to prison on October 17, 1997 after being sentenced to 2 to 14 years for Uttering and Publishing, 1 to 4 years for Felonious Assault, and 1 to 2 years for attempted use of a Financial Transaction Device. I was 20 years old.

During the first month of prison you are kept in a separate unit under "quarantine status", so the administration and health care can test you for mental stability, educational level, diseases and overall health.

During my first month I was sick and throwing up, etc. I was told by the prison health care that my symptoms were caused by "stomach flu and stress". So, besides having to adapt to this world of control, different personalities, test after test, I had to deal with an illness that seemed to never end, which it didn't for quite a while☺.

After 30 days of quarantine, I was placed in general population. The next day, I was called to health care for what I thought was a routine appointment. The doctor called me into her office, told me to sit down, and stated, "you're pregnant". All I could think was, "They have the wrong inmate". I begin to cry and instead of comfort, all I heard was that I had 24 hours to make the choice of keeping my baby or having an abortion.

At that time, I was married to my co-defendant, who was doing 6 months county time under the work release program. The child was his, so I could not make this decision on my own. I went back to my cell in a state of unreality. I was dreaming, waiting to wake up.

I am pro-choice, but I could not see myself choosing abortion, this choice was up to my husband. I called him collect at work and gave him the news. He was ecstatic, promising to help with the child and be a "good Father". I still had a few months to go after my due date until I was eligible for parole, it would be his responsibility to care for our child, until I returned home. On top of my environment, I had this added stress. My husband had started smoking crack, but claimed to be free of his addiction after going to jail and both of us having to pay the consequences of his addiction. Those on the inside have to depend so much upon those on the outside. From giving us support and strength, to caring for our children and property that was left behind, to helping us manage financially. He was all I had; I was completely dependant upon the man I loved.

After this news, I got another surprise. I am an insulin dependant Diabetic, so my pregnancy was considered high risk. Most Women go through prenatal care through a midwife that comes to the prison. But those of us who are high risk, MDCC does not want to be responsible for our prenatal care, we are sent to an outside hospital that specializes in prenatal/child care.

To go to these appointments, I was strip searched, then placed in belly chains and handcuffs. This I had to endure once a week, then twice towards the end of my pregnancy. Society does not think highly of convicts, so to add to my humiliation, I had to go into a hospital full of people, chained, with two armed guards at my side. People stayed out of my way as if I had the plaque, they'd stare and make rude comments. It was a learning experience.

At my second appointment, I got the first look at my child through ultra sound. Before being able to see the screen, the technician walked out of the room and returned with the doctor. The doctor then looked at the screen and told me that I was carrying twins. WHAT!?! Through this ordeal Women have no one to physically lean on. We are not allowed to have family or friends at doctor's visits. As I heard this news the only person I had was an armed guard at my side.

On the inside we can lean on each other, but there is to be no physical contact. We are not allowed to hug or even shake hands for fear of a "Sexual Misconduct". I needed a hug; I needed my husband.

At 17 weeks, I was given another ultra sound. Again the technician left the room. I couldn't be pregnant with triplets, I knew. Again she came back with the doctor, who looked at the screen, then told me he was sorry, but one of the twin's hearts had stopped beating. One of my children was dead inside my womb. My pain shot to the center of my soul. I was taken back to prison, with the ultra sound picture of my dead twin in my hand. I hadn't made any friends here. I didn't know whom to trust as I found this to be a hard and cold environment. I had no one on the inside to share my pain.

I think that those on the outside forget that criminals still have feelings. We may not be part of society, but we still have issues. Prisons are not "Holiday Inns", as most have labeled them to be. I have heard some guards speak on the fact that they would love to be in a place where they didn't have to pay bills, received free food, and a free roof over their heads. I do not think for one moment that anyone would trade places with us on the inside. They also do not realize that we do pay for these things. On top of paying our debts to society, we pay with the seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years of our lives. We are away from the ones we love. While our world stops on the inside, the outside continues to move on. There are Women in here who have never seen a cellular phone or surfed the Net. They've seen their children grow up through pictures and sporadic visits, as money and distance are an issue. Some don't even know their children or where they are. They do not get to see them grow. They've heard of love ones dying, but could not be there. We have not faced death face to face, so at times it feels as if they're still alive, when the reality is we'll never see them again. The world has moved on without us, this is how we pay.

Anyway, I stayed strong; I held my head high and pressed forward. I had to; I could not give up on my other child. I informed my husband of all this, who was soon to be released and still promising to be here for me. To press forward I used the resources on the inside, by getting my G. E. D., taking prenatal and parenting classes offered to pregnant Women. I took my love for books and begin expanding my mind; getting in touch with my inner being; getting to know me. My husband was abusive; I lived in violence, but here on the inside, I found a peace in this dark, cold world. I found serenity. At the time I blamed myself for his abuse, so I never thought of it affecting my child as long as I was a good wife. He promised that things would be different once I got out. In distorted love, I believed this.

Most Women in prison come from abusive relationships that usually stemmed from abusive childhoods. They have turned to drugs or used their bodies to find and

feel love. They offer some groups on these issues, but in order to receive extensive therapy, which is needed for most of us, you have to be on psychotropic drugs. These drugs are not used for therapy on the inside, in most cases, but are used for replacement to their addiction on the outside. Unlike therapy, drugs are given freely to keep the Women in a state of calmness. This is the norm.

Upon my husband's release, he took care of his business. He was there for me. Then his letters stopped. Again he started writing and I knew at that time that he was using again. Again the letters stopped. After begging and pleading, there was still no response. All the letters I wrote began to be returned and till this day, I don't know his whereabouts. I was 8 months pregnant with child.

At that time, my family was nonexistent to me, they didn't even know I was in prison. Our relationship had been this way for a while now. I was a white Woman married to a black Man, this was not accepted. I knew their address and this being their first grandchild, they had to accept her. The color of her skin wouldn't matter, this was a child. She hadn't asked to be in this world. My other options were to give her up for adoption or she would be placed in a foster home until I was released. I need my family like I never needed them before. I couldn't give up my baby. She had kicked and moved inside of me, I spent night after night reading and talking to her on my cell bunk. This was my blood.

I wrote my parents and waited on a response. They finally wrote and told me they'd take my child until I was released. They came to visit and were there for me. They promised to care for her and bring her to visit after her birth. I had someone to lean on.

On June 25, 1998 after 72 hours of labor, I gave birth to a Beautiful Baby Girl, 7lbs. 11ozs. I gave birth to her under the watchful eyes of armed guards. I was able to watch the birth of my baby through a mirror and even though my family couldn't be there, I was blessed with supportive nurses and a humorous doctor, even though I screamed and cursed him out.

I was one of the lucky ones. I have heard horror stories of Women giving birth in other states in the U. S. They are forced to have their legs shackled to the bed while giving birth. During labor they are even chained to the bed and not allowed to get up and walk around. This does not happen in Michigan, which I am thankful for. I could not imagine this experience or what kind of mental stability Women have to have to endure this torture.

MDOC only allows 24 hours for a mother to spend with her child after giving birth. We are allowed to keep our newborns in the room with us and care for them, but in the end we must leave them there until someone can come pick them up. I wasn't leaving my child, how could I. How could they be so cruel? When the day came for me to leave, I refused to eat, which dropped my blood sugar levels. They put me on a glucose drip and I couldn't leave in this condition after giving birth, therefore spending more time with my baby.

This lasted three days. During this time nurses and staff would come in and try to get me to eat something, but I couldn't. All I thought about was my child. I couldn't leave my baby at that hospital; I was the sane one here, they were crazy. I had seen Women who returned after giving birth in a complete state of shock, depression, and dependency. At that time, I didn't understand, but now I did. On the third day, the guards told me that if I did not eat, they would have my daughter placed in the nursery until I returned to prison. After calling their bluff, the doctor came in and said the same thing. I was over; I had to leave.

Have you ever felt as if your heart and soul has been ripped out of your body? That your blood no longer flows. I actually felt my spirit lift out of my body and stay at that hospital as I was walking out. I was dead inside; walking in a shell of human skin. I cried until my soul dried up, until I could cry no longer. I was in a daze, lost. One of the

guards even made the statement that if I wanted my child, I should have stayed out of prison. I could have committed murder at that point.

The first thing I did was call my parents and was informed that they had left to pick her up. I stayed by the phone; calling over and over again, even though I knew it would take 4 to 5 hours for them to get to and from Detroit. I was in a dream that had turned into a nightmare. Finally, my child was home and I heard all the promises that they'd take care of my child until I got home.

My first visit was when she was two weeks old, and then I was shipped to the minimum-security camp for Women. I was depressed, angry, bitter, I didn't want to deal with the pain I was feeling, and didn't know how. My pain was turned into anger and I started fighting and getting into confrontations with guards. I was catching misconduct tickets and was placed in the hole. All I could think was that they didn't understand. I wanted my child. I wanted to be with her now. Again, I emphasize the fact that as prisoners we are not to express emotion. I was to be a stone and hold it all in, I couldn't.

After my release from the hole and being shipped to another prison, I tried to get myself together again. At that time college was offered and I began classes towards a Liberal Arts and Science Degree. My anger continued to boil. My visits were horrible, over and over again having to leave my child. Walking back to my unit in a state of despondency, I felt so empty.

Then when she was four months old, the doctors gave my Father 6 months to live; he died two weeks later. I lost the little control I had obtained and was put in the hole again. Two weeks later, I was called out by the Unit Supervisor for a phone call from an attorney. I had to be in court in three days from then...my mother had given my child to the state. Her reason? She would not raise a "half-black baby by herself". On top of everything else, she had betrayed me.

I went to court and was charged with neglect by the state because I was in prison and unable to care for my child.

By this time on the inside, I was labeled as "defiant" and a "management problem", because of the tickets I had accumulated. Once you are labeled your road is hard. You are defying the rules that govern this world. The guards begin looking for you to do something or provoking you until you do snap. They even go as far as putting others against you, lying on misconducts, and spreading rumors about you.

For two years I fought for my child. Going to court every three months to tell the Family Independence Agency and the judge of my "progress". Because of the misconducts, the first time I saw the parole board, I was given an 18-month continuance, which hurt my chances of getting my daughter.

Visitation was set up and I was able to see her once a month. The foster parents allowed me to call and correspond so I would know how she was doing. All this ended when the prison administration placed me in the maximum-security unit for management. The visits stopped and I was locked down 23 hours a day. My life had hit rock bottom on the inside and out.

By this time I went in front of the parole board again and was given a 12-month continuance. Max prisoners do not get paroles. The state was threatening to terminate my parental rights, but I knew per the law I still had time. In Michigan the law states that if a prisoner is in prison for two years, their right will be terminated. My time was almost up, but I hoped for a chance.

My chance was too late. On September 28, 2000 my parental rights were terminated and my daughter was placed up for adoption by FIA. I was able to take the stand at my proceedings, but it did no good. What hurt even more is that my own Mother testified against me. I didn't have a chance, but I didn't want to give up fighting and filed an appeal.

The foster parents wanted to adopt my daughter but wouldn't do so with the appeal pending. After my brief was done, my court appointed appellate attorney came

to see me. He gave me a copy of my brief and a piece of paper to sign off on the appeal. He told me that the FIA said that if I wanted to ever see my child again, I would sign off. If I didn't, they would place her with a family who would adopt her right away and I would not know her whereabouts. I was being threatened to give up my appeal. In the end I chose to know where my daughter was at and signed off.

I called the foster parents and told them of my decision. They promised to still allow me contact through phone calls and correspondence. This lasted for a while, but in June of last year, the prisons in Michigan started a contract through the phone company Sprint and some private company in Texas called Evercom. In order to place collect calls our family and friends had to pay a minimum of \$50 to this company in Texas. It's supposed to be pre-paid billing. If this money is not paid or less than \$20 is in the account our phone numbers are restricted. Most prisoners loved ones can barely afford the inflated price of calls for conversations once a month, much less \$50 up front. And now the calls are even more expensive by using this outside private company.

This is what happened to my phone calls; a restriction was placed on the number. I wrote letter after letter since that time and just received a response last week. They told me how she was doing, but did not know about phone calls right now. They would "try" to respond to my letters. I may never see my daughter until she is of age and we can find each other. I don't know what the future holds in my relationship with the adopted parents, but I do know I will not give up. I must keep pressing on. I am a stronger Woman now.

At this point in my time I am staying focused on getting out of here. I have been denied parole on 4 occasions by the parole board do to "past behavior". I've had two tickets in the past year and have not received one in the past 7 months.

I messed up my life, plain and simple. I wasn't strong enough to handle the circumstances I was forced to endure. My child is paying for this now. I was wrong, but so are these laws. I am not the only Woman who has lost their children to these laws, many has. If we don't have people on the outside to help in the care of our children, they are placed in the hands of the state, and 9 times out of 10 are lost in the system. Women on the inside must deal with this loss, pain, and blame, inside a cold society, who don't care about our children. The prison system doesn't care if we ever see them again. But there can be change...

A change with the help of the people on the outside who do care. Awareness has to be made known of what is happening on the inside to the Mothers who find themselves locked away. Alternative programs need to be set up for pregnant Women who must pay a debt to society; laws need to be changed. More programs need to be set up for abused Women, domestic violence and its association to prison needs to be placed in the spotlight. It is easier said then done to leave an abusive lover, take this from some one who knows.

At this time I am trying to start an organization called The P.A.C.K., The People Against Court Kidnapping. But this seems to be going nowhere with the few contacts I do have. My story has been sent out there, but the response has almost been non-existent. I can only do so much from the inside. I know nothing of starting an organization, but I do have a vision...

A vision of a mass of people who will support the Mothers and Fathers on the inside who find their children in the hands of the state. People who will help change the laws, who will protest against the kidnapping of our children, who will get the word out that we love our babies, that we are human, and deserve a chance to right the wrongs

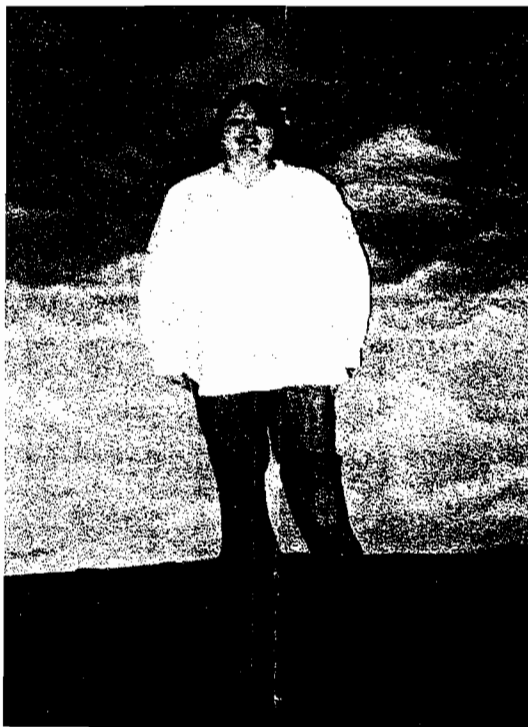
that we have caused. Our children shouldn't have to suffer. We need your help out there.

What has hit me the most about this whole situation is how many pregnant Women there are in prison. Some come in here 6 to 8 months along and I wonder about the coldheartedness of the judges who sent these Women to this hell. Was there an alternative? The prison population [in the US] is more than any other country in the world. Is prison the answer to crime or just a money-making organization for capitalism? I ask you to think about this.

I know this is long and I thank you for taking the time to read my story that comes from the soul of my pain. If you have any questions, again, please feel free to ask. I will answer them to the best of my ability.

I do look forward to hearing from you. We on the inside need you on the outside.

Until then, take care.



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