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March 16, 2006

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Dangerous-to-Society Women

By MISSY COMLEY BEATTIE

The C
Again
MICHAEL

March 15, 2006

Abu Ghraib it wasn't. But it was dismal.

Jonathan Cook
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Lockup isn't supposed to be fun, but we are innocent until proven guilty. *Right?*

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I was arrested with Cindy Sheehan, Medea Benjamin, and Rev. Patti Ackerman last week as we attempted to deliver to the United States Mission a petition with 72,000 signatures of women who say no to war. Just a few hours before this, the Iraqi Women's Delegation

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Jason Kunin

had been received warmly at the UN. We were not received warmly at our publicly owned building, although our group had been told the petition could be delivered to a receptionist. In fact, as we approached, security guards locked the doors.

We moved from the building and were reading the petition when police arrived to arrest us. Cindy, Medea, and Patti locked arms and legs to avoid being hurt. I held tightly to a banner for peace. The police tried to pull it from my grasp but failed. They lifted me, pulled my arms behind my back, and carried me to the paddy wagon. I weigh 104 pounds. Might makes right, eh?

I yelled, "George Bush killed my nephew." I said this over and over.

We four "dangerous-to-society" women were driven to a police station where we were photographed and fingerprinted. The walls and floor of our cell were decorated with feces, blood, and urine. The bathroom was also filthy.

The police officers treated us with respect and allowed us to order a pizza. Some said they support our work.

About four hours later, we were cuffed, chained together, and placed in a van to be transported to a holding cell at the Criminal Courthouse, 100 Center Street, once known as the Tombs Prison. We were further processed and then taken to a holding cell. Cindy was in tremendous pain from being dragged and bounced across the pavement by policemen. She had to have icepacks and Tylenol.

The toilet in the cell didn't flush so we were led to another.

Let me tell you about the décor. Narrow benches line the walls with another bench in the center of the room. All of these are bolted to the floor and three twin-size pads are provided. A toilet is in the corner of the room. On the wall is a mealtime schedule. There is also a sign with: "Cover your mouth when you cough." There was plenty of coughing.

Breakfast is supposed to be served between four and five AM. At 1:30 AM, an officer yelled, "Wake up." She told us to come out into the hall where Frosted Flakes and milk were distributed. We ate this in the cell. At some point, we heard the same, "Wake up." This time we were told to put the pads on the benches so that the floor could be mopped. The mop was dirty and the disinfectant hardly masked the odor of the room. By morning, 20 women were in the cell. The roaches

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by Jef



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moved too fast to be counted. Four women were asleep on one "mattress."

No, I didn't expect the Ritz but to see the conditions of this place, to experience something that is demeaning to the women who await arraignment, is to understand despair. But those of us protesting the war already know despair. Cindy and I have lost a loved one. Medea and Patti have been to Iraq. We have all listened to the Iraqi women tell of the destruction of their culture, their country, and the human loss in Iraq. The inmates lodged with us are defined by their own dejection.

Most of the officers were kind. A couple, though, seemed to be getting off on the power thing.

The four of us are lucky. We knew we had lawyers working for our release. Most of our fellow "guests" are the marginalized. Some were young. Many looked much older than their ages. A few could barely lift their heads off the floor and struggled to go into the hallways when commanded. Rev. Patti offered words of encouragement and counseling to those who said they are addicts.

One young woman was arrested for "borrowing" money from her employer to pay her tuition. She has one more semester of college and has worked to make sure her sisters could also get an education. Her employer was sympathetic but wants her prosecuted.

Three Guatemalan women were brought in. Medea speaks Spanish and asked why they were arrested. One, the mother of the other two, said that they were selling food without a permit. Her two-year-old son was with them as they attempted to make a living. He was taken to foster care, and when his father went to claim him, the child couldn't be released. The father didn't have proper identification.

Another woman was arrested for shoplifting. She told us she's been a heroin addict since the age of 11. She said she learned to count as a young child when her mother, also an addict, had her fill bags with drugs to sell. This woman was articulate and funny, but her life was shaped by a mother who she said didn't care. After saying this, she corrected her words. "Maybe she cared, but she's a drug addict."

I didn't want to be arrested. Neither did Patti, Cindy or Medea. But the experience of sharing a cell with these activists may be a requirement of my commitment to peace. The experience of sharing a cell with the other women is also important. They are human beings who



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have made bad choices. But, often, life only serves bad choices. Being in their presence was a glimpse into their particular pain.

Our country under the Bush Doctrine is assuring that the poor and middle class are increasingly without good choices. Programs to help these people are being cut because a staggering amount of money is financing an illegal war and occupation.

Misery is everywhere. But there is hope. There has to be. Today, we must all work harder, though, to secure this hope. We must work for peace and justice, not just for our country but for our globe. All of us are members of a world community which mustn't be separated by levels of education, tax brackets, borders, and oceans. We are one, united by our humanity.

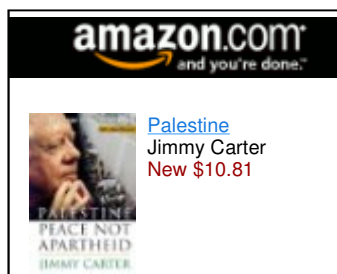
Missy Beattie lives in New York City. She's written for National Public Radio and *Nashville Life Magazine*. An outspoken critic of the Bush Administration and the war in Iraq, she's a member of Gold Star Families for Peace. She completed a novel last year, but since the death of her nephew, Marine Lance Cpl. Chase J. Comley, in Iraq on August 6, '05, she has been writing political articles. She can be reached at: Missybeat@aol.com



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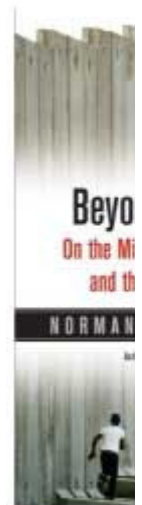
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