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<http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid=714279>

## Letters From the Women of SAFPF

In early 2008, Jodi Stodder-Caldwell, an inmate at the Ellen Halbert SAFPF unit in Burnet County, contacted Austin attorney Derek Howard to explore the prospect of filing a civil rights lawsuit. For several months, she and other inmates, from Halbert and other units, sent graphic narratives chronicling alleged physical and psychological abuses occurring in state SAFPF units. Upon request by the Office of Inspector General, Howard provided 10 narratives for the benefit of a SAFPF investigation but was asked for none of the others. The OIG concluded its investigation and reported finding no violations of civil rights or policy, according to Inspector General John Moriarty. The OIG has submitted a request to withhold all or part of the report to the state Attorney General's Office. The request was pending at press time.

Below is just a small sample of the letters received by Howard; they have been transcribed and minimally edited. Protected by attorney-client privilege, the narratives could not be legally confiscated as could other mail. Nonetheless, inmates have reported that they've suffered retribution for writing to Howard and others about the abuses they've endured. – *Patricia J. Ruland*

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### Kerry Wolf

**Unit: Hackberry**

**Date of narrative: July 21, 2008**

*"Women were required to take drugs causing extreme sedation. ... If they became drowsy during group or closed their eyes, they were written up for 'refusal to comply with treatment.' If they did not take the meds in order to be able to stay awake, they were also written up for the same thing."*

My name is Kerry Wolf, and I just read of your work on the SAFPF charges brought by Jodi Stodder-Caldwell in *The Austin Chronicle*. I was overjoyed to read about this. I, too, am a victim of this brutal, inhumane torture factory.

I was at SAFPF on the Hackberry Unit in Gatesville (female special needs) from April of 2001 through February 2002. I was sent to special needs SAFF originally because I was pregnant, although I lost my baby at the Williamson County jail prior to being transported to SAFF due to being denied necessary medication by the jail. I was placed on anti-depressants after the stillbirth, so they decided that I should still go to the special needs unit for this reason. However, when I arrived at SAFF, they discontinued my medication, saying that they did not have any SSRI [selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor] anti-

depressants on the prison formulary and instead prescribed Trazodone, an older drug that causes pronounced sedation.

Many of the women at this SAFP had serious medical or psychiatric conditions, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, severe depression, HIV, Hep C, epilepsy, and diabetes. Many were on medications that were very sedating, yet the "bedtime" pill call came at 4pm. Therefore, the women were required to take drugs causing extreme sedation at 4pm and continue with groups and sessions up until 8pm. If they became drowsy during group or closed their eyes, they were written up for "refusal to comply with treatment." If they did not take the meds in order to be able to stay awake, they were also written up for the same thing. I was able to get the doctor to D/C [discontinue] my meds soon after arriving there, as my depression was not severe – but many others struggled with this the whole time.

Everything Jodi Stodder-Caldwell alleges is true. I do not know her in any way, but her allegations ring true and clear to me. SAFP was the worst, most frightening and humiliating experience I have ever had, and I emerged from it deeply scarred.

We, too, experienced the "tighthouse" – although on our unit it was referred to as "shutdown." We were threatened with it for months. A horde of guards burst into our dorm screaming and yelling, cursing and telling us to throw all our precious few belongings into a net bag immediately. Anything we could not carry in one trip would be thrown away. Any food supplies purchased from commissary would be ruined as they were to be stored on the upper floor of the gym in the blazing heat and with rats everywhere for the next month. We were quickly marched to the gym and strip-searched by brutal guards who made fun of a young 18-year-old girl who had no front teeth, saying that she was "probably a whore like the rest of them" and asking her if her customers enjoyed her "services" without her front teeth, as she stood naked in front of them.

When we returned to the dorm, the hard plastic chairs had been set up in rows in the day room. We were told to sit "in props," meaning no crossing legs or ankles, feet flat, hands on legs, eyes straight ahead. The clock was removed so we could not see the time. We were told that we were horrible mothers, that our families were much happier without us there, that we were nothing but "con-VICTS," and deserved whatever we got. We were told that for the duration of the shutdown, we were not to speak to anyone unless questioned by a staff member. We could not even ask for help in an emergency. The 9/11 World Trade Center attacks had occurred just a couple of days prior, but we were allowed no newspapers, no accounts of what was going on, and had no idea if we were at war, if loved ones were in danger, if we were in danger of an attack, etc. We were told that we needed to "focus on treatment."

During the first week or so of the shutdown, we sat in the chairs from 4:30am until 8pm, with brief bathroom breaks and meals. Whenever we walked anywhere, we had to walk "in props" with our hands behind our backs, even to the restroom. Further, every time we left the dorm to eat or shower, we had to "walk the perimeter" – walking all around the unit (a 20-minute walk) back to the dorm, only then being able to walk to our destination. At one point, a yearly mattress exchange was announced, in which we were to pick up the *extremely* heavy sawdust-filled mattresses and take them to the gym to exchange for another one. Even then, we had to "walk the perimeter" with the very very heavy mattresses. Many of the women were heavily pregnant, elderly, crippled, etc., but no one was allowed to help anyone else.

While we were in the chairs, it was extremely hot. We were supposed to have AC on our unit, as it was a medical unit, but it did not work. The buildings were brick with tin roofs. Our fans had been confiscated for the shutdown. We were not allowed to use cool towels, wear shorts and T-shirts, etc. like the regular units but had to dress in full uniform and steel-toed boots every day, to sit in the chairs. Many women could not tolerate it either physically or mentally. Almost every day, someone would begin screaming and crying, begging for the torture to stop. They were usually hauled off to the Skyview psych unit for a

few days (another horror story). Other women would faint or have seizures. However, even as they lay jerking and frothing on the floor beside us, we were admonished to ignore them – not to break their fall or help in any way, as that would be breaking the SAFP cardinal rule of *no physical contact*, ever. We were told that "group is up here" and to keep our eyes front at all times. Sometimes, they called medical, but it often took an hour or more for help to arrive as the nurses had to be brought over from another unit and then hike a good distance from the gate to the dorm. When they did arrive, they usually just laughed at the inmates, prodded them with a shoe, and did nothing to help them. One of the nurses, speaking to a counselor, said that the inmates would likely try and "play sick" during shutdown to get a lay-in but that she would not be giving *any* lay-ins "unless they are literally dying" (an example of the crossover between TDCJ [Texas Department of Criminal Justice] medical and the Gateway staff).

During the shutdown, the counselors would occasionally enter the silent dorms to scream at us, call us names, and encourage everyone to write each other up. What we could write each other up for was a mystery since we were not allowed to move or talk. However, they said that if the box remained empty we were "letting our sisters drown" by not reporting them and that we would never get off shutdown like this. So, the desperate women frantically wrote each other up for things like closing their eyes or whispering, etc. Then, the counselors screamed at and berated them for having too many write-ups, saying that this meant that they were not ready to come off shutdown. There was no way to win. Many of us realized this at the outset, but others were trying so pitifully hard to please the counselors, only to fail no matter what they did – which was the point. The idea was supposedly to see how they would react under severe stress and mixed messages, but it in no way resembled real life.

The constant pressure to "tell" on each other was brutal and led to a junior high type atmosphere of people writing up anyone they did not like and vice versa, and fear and terror were constantly with us. And the "Encounters" group, where inmates sat in a circle and ripped into each other with curses, wild accusations, insults, and character assassinations, was conducted daily, and all the inmates were encouraged to jump in and hurl their own invectives at the victim while they sat in silence. This often resulted in an eruption of violence, with mentally and emotionally fragile inmates exploding into rage, throwing chairs, and others breaking down into hysterics, having flashbacks of abuse, etc.

In the second week of "shutdown," we were often required to "circle up" the chairs and were given a tablet and pencil and told to write a 1,000-word essay on a topic like: "Why complaining will only keep me here longer," etc. We were not allowed to cross our legs to prop up the tablets, and there was no desk or table, so we had to crouch over the tablets on our laps as we wrote with feet flat on the floor. These essays were never read by the staff but simply tossed into our file. (As the counselor's clerk, I knew this.)

In the afternoons, we would have "cop outs," where we were pressured to not only admit publicly to everything we had done wrong at SAFP but also to call out everyone who had done wrong that we were aware of – the pressure to do this was incredible – we were told we would get an extension on our time if we did not. However, doing so might cause you to become someone's sworn enemy – someone who could pose a real threat to you both there and on the outside. The pressure was awful – to snitch and go home earlier but be the target of the rage of some mentally unstable gang member or to not snitch and spend two more long, torturous months away from your family and get an unfavorable report to your judge.

Two women were discovered to have written love notes to another woman in the program. One was punished by having the note pinned to the wall in the dining hall so that every passing inmate could read it as they stood in line. The other was called up in front of the whole unit in the gymnasium and had her note read to the unit by the lieutenant and a counselor, interspersed with their derisive comments and laughter.

Suicide attempts were common. Women cut themselves, slit wrists, attempted to choke themselves, etc. Many of the inmates were so mentally challenged that they were unable to complete the coursework (essays, etc.), and so they were assigned a "big sister" who had to do it for them, as well as her own. Many were not capable of comprehending why they were being treated the way they were.

During the shutdown, they brought the "hoe squad" over from the regular units. With them, they brought a cage – like a zoo animal cage, with bars on all sides and the floor itself was just iron bars (so you could not sit down in it). The cage had a silhouette on the side depicting a girl hoeing and a man on horseback with a gun pointed at her. This was supposedly to show us what the future held if we didn't shape up. We were made to stand toe-to-toe in a long line, given a heavy iron "aggie," and told to lift it to the sky and bring it down to the ground as someone chanted a four-step call. On each fourth call we were to step forward one step. It was dangerous in the extreme, all these untrained, pregnant, and ill and delusional women swinging heavy, sharp hoes above their heads over and over. This was done for the entire day, three days running. For water breaks, we had to "short leg it" (run) hand-in-hand to a tanker truck filled with hot water and drink from a spigot in the side and run back. Anyone who fell, fainted, or became too exhausted to continue was put into the cage. The cage was in direct sunlight with no water or bathroom breaks and no way to sit down. You also received a major case. During these three days, the counselors brought lawn chairs out to watch us. They sat in the shade, laughing and pointing at us while eating pizza and drinking lemonade, with their feet propped up.

Some of the counselors left during this time, sickened and appalled by what they had to do. Two of these were men named Mr. Daniels and Mr. Brock. Mr. Brock, a kindly man, left shortly after being forced to bellow at a young teen who had inadvertently forgotten to remove the braid from her hair on the second shutdown day, which was forbidden (no styling of hair, ponytails, etc), reducing her to helpless tears. One of the guards was reduced to tears watching us sit hour after hour after hour in the day room.

As the shutdown drew to a close, we were called into the gym for a "family meeting." We were told that they would be announcing who was getting off shutdown and who was not. Some, they said, would receive red badges and be forced to stay on shutdown even longer. Ironically, many of those who were given the red badges were those who had behaved in an exemplary fashion the entire time, striving as hard as possible to please the counselors and be a "good example." Again, this was to "test them" to see how they would react.

Everyone feared retribution from the staff and guards if they complained about anything in any way. I once filed a grievance, and that very evening the guard who had accepted the paper from me (and who was not a part of the grievance at all) came to my cubicle and tore it to shreds, stomping on my papers, ripping my photos, dumping out my food, etc., leaving it like a tornado had gone through it, saying, "That will teach you to file a grievance!"

Also, I wanted to mention the "family" groups they had each night. As Ms. Stodder-Caldwell stated, we were forced to sing children's nursery rhymes over and over. Songs had to be submitted to the counselors for approval – no love songs, etc. Pretty much the only things approved were kids songs and religious songs. We were forced to sing these songs even if it violated our religious beliefs (they were all Christian). Inmates patrolled the aisles during the singing, writing up anyone who was not clapping and singing as "refusing to comply with treatment." Often it took on the tone of a religious revival meeting, with songs about Jesus, crying, hands lifted into the air, etc. We often had religious groups (all Christian) come to the unit for "revivals." The counselors knew they could not force inmates to attend – however, we were told that if we refused, we would have to stay behind in the dorms scrubbing the floors with a toothbrush until it was over. In fact, scrubbing the floors with a toothbrush and water was a common "activity" during the later days of shutdown. After slaving for hours dusting and scrubbing, the counselors would come in, rub their fingers along something we *knew* was completely sparkling clean,

and say, "This dorm is *filthy*! Do it *again*!" Some of the women would pretend to be cleaning under their bunks so they could shut their eyes for a few blessed seconds.

Well, sir, this has gotten way too long, and I apologize, but there is so much more than this that I could tell. So much brutality and evil and so much lying and covering up by TDCJ. I feared coming forward before now, as I was on probation until last April (2008). I was an RN who was addicted to Rx opiates, and my crime was calling in my own prescription for cough syrup. But now that I can speak up, I am so glad there is someone actually investigating this! Please let me know if I can help in any way, and feel free to use this information. Also, I give my consent to *The Austin Chronicle* reporter to contact me if she wishes, and please give my contact information to Ms. Stodder-Caldwell – I would love to talk to her if she would like.

*Reporter's note: Wolf said that the lyrics inmates were forced to sing went like this:*

*Mama, Mama, look at me*

*I'm in a program called SAFP*

*I used to drive a little Ford*

*Now I'm cruisin' with the Lord*

*Another went like this:*

*I said recovery is cool*

*It'll blow your mind*

*If you work the 12 steps*

*You won't do no time*

*So, if it's not real for you*

*Like it is for me*

*And you want to stay out of the penitentiary*

*Go to SAFP!*

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## **Regan Center**

**Unit: Ellen Halbert**

**Date of Narrative: May 27, 2008**

*"At the end of that 28 days, my scalp was raw and bleeding. Medical brushed me off."*

My name is Regan Center. I am a 27-year-old female and have been in SAFP (Halbert Unit) now two times. The first time I was sentenced to SAFP was in 2005. I arrived at the Halbert Unit on Feb. 16, 2006. It was pretty much a nightmare from day one. Gateway's whole idea of the "therapeutic community" is, in my opinion, a joke. I believe it was in late June or early July the unit went on tighthouse. TDC came in our dorm yelling at us to get in our chairs and set them up "seminar style." That's where we set the chairs up in rows, straight rows of seven, all the way from one end of the day room to the other. I knew what was happening. It was the very thing we all had been dreading. We were threatened with "chairs" all of the time by staff. So, a TDC officer named Lt. Turner came in our dorm, made us set up our chairs, and told us not to move or talk for any reason. Just stare at the wall. ... The whole unit had been put in the chairs because we needed to refocus on recovery. That's what we were told. So we sat from 4am until 8pm every single day for 28 days. We could not have anything off commissary. They locked all our lockboxes with zip ties. All we could have was a comb, toothbrush, tooth powder, and blue lye soap. I have always had problems with my scalp. I have been seeing a dermatologist since I was 4 because of it, and I was having to wash my hair with blue state soap, and at the end of that 28 days, my scalp was raw and bleeding. Medical brushed me off – staff would come in every day saying ugly things about how our kids were better off – just a lot of low blows to a bunch of people who were very on edge, like they were really trying to push us to a breaking point so our punishment would be furthered.

The counselors would come in and insist on us participating in "gunsling," where one client stands up, points another client out, and starts telling every wrong thing that person has done since they have been at SAFP. Then the person that gets "told on" calls out a peer and does the same, and within 30 minutes, everyone is down each other's throats, and the tension is very thick. All the while, staff stands back and smiles. We were treated like 5-year-olds rather than human beings with legitimate problems seeking help to save our lives. I even remember one client having to stand in the corner for six hours with her nose to the wall for refusing to tell on someone else. There are countless stories about my experiences at SAFP that are very strange. I know some of the things sound "out there," but it is all the truth. And I think it's time people know the truth.

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## **Name withheld**

**Unit: Ellen Halbert**

**Date of narrative: June 28, 2008**

*"I look like I have leprosy."*

I am incarcerated here at Ellen Halbert SAFP Unit. I am writing you because I have been unable to receive proper medical attention. I have skin irritations on my face. When I went to medical here, they told me that if I had not come to prison I would have access to proper hygiene products, and I would not have this problem.

My skin itches, burns, stings, pusses, and has open wounds that will not heal. This started one month after I got here. Approximately Feb. 15, 2008. They refuse to give me a simple antibiotic. This is emotional and physical abuse. When I do look in the mirror, I cry for hours, then can't sleep that night for the shock of seeing myself. I look like I have leprosy. My own family doesn't recognize me at visitation.

I am constantly trying not to itch my face. I wake up at night clawing. It is very hard to concentrate on my treatment when I am so worried about catching staph, having scars, or trying to hide my face so no one sees. This is degrading and humiliating, not to mention it is abusive that I have to live this way.

I realize that I am incarcerated and that I have done society (as a whole) an injustice by my incarceration. I do not want to seem ungrateful for this second chance at life. I want this treatment and my recovery for my alcoholism issues. Although, I feel I cannot get what I need out of this program because I am constantly in a state of turmoil physically and emotionally.

I was in a physically abusive marriage, and the feelings are exactly the same as the feelings I feel regarding my skin issues. I feel like this is my fault and I deserve this. That "this is the hand that I was dealt," so to speak.

My question to you is, as an offender, do I have a right to proper medical attention? Do I have to suffer here in this "safe environment" like I did in an abusive marriage? I want my life back, and I want my recovery. I am so distraught over this that I have a hard time concentrating. I need to know my rights. I appreciate your time and effort and hope to be able to hear from you soon. Your work is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

### **Second letter: August 1, 2008**

I am writing you to give you an update about things here at Halbert Unit SAFP. ... We are still being required to sit with our feet on the floor, back against the chair, and hands in our lap. It is no longer called "sitting in props." It is now called "sitting appropriately." We do this in 50 minute intervals five times a day. From 12:30pm until 4:30pm, we sit this way. They say we get a 10-minute break every 50 minutes, but it doesn't always work out that way. Then, from 7:30pm-9:20pm, we are "sitting appropriately." On the weekends it is 8am-10am we sit this way, then 12:30-3:30pm we sit this way.

I really feel like this is punishment. Children don't have to sit this way in school. When you are coming down and detoxifying from drugs and alcohol, you become nervous, fidgety, and anxious. One last thing. When we sit with 136 women in one dorm day room, we sit blocking the fire exits. If a fire were to break out, we would be trampled. "I wish that you could see it." Thanks.

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### **Name and unit withheld**

**Date July 7, 2008**

*"Their cure was to drink a pitcher of water for 10 days ..."*

Hello, how are you? I truly hope this letter finds you in the best of health and spirits. Well, I feel I should fill you in on the things that I have been put through during my stay here at Saf-P. Well, where should I start? There is so much mental abuse day by day by officers, counselors, and medical. My first experience of abuse was from medical a few days after I got here. They told me when I was sick to my stomach that there was nothing they could do for me and it's my problem and that maybe I should think about that before I decide to get incarcerated next time. I have had several incidents since with medical, and I have paid (3.00) to be seen just for them to tell me to drink water each time. One time about a week ago I was having and still am having sharp stomach pains, and one night I couldn't sleep, so I finally hurt so bad I went to the door crying bent over in pain. I had to wait for the next day to see



medical, and they wouldn't even give me Tylenol for the pain. Their cure was to drink a pitcher of water for 10 days, and still I have the pains. Okay, wow, you are going to have a lot to read because there is a lot of unnecessary things that go on here. Okay, and then when I was working in the kitchen, I was laughing at a peer about her falling. Well, we were both laughing, and I guess the officer perceived us to be laughing at him. Anyways, he verbally threatened me by saying, "Oh, you think something is funny? Well, we'll see who has the last laugh." He said, "Your time is gonna come and I'll get you and when I do, I'll get you good." I even had witnesses to this incident, wrote a grievance, and they sent it back saying there's nothing they can do. We constantly have doors slammed in our faces, are talked to like trash, and get belittled. The guards here are horrible. Oh, Lord, the counselors, my counselor, is always talking down on my family, constantly calling my husband a loser, my mom a drunk, and making me feel less than. At one point she made me feel so low that I wanted to give up. She tells me that she will recommend I stay longer if I plan to go home to my husband. This is someone I'm married to and have a child with. I don't know what gives her the right to think she can choose who I be with. It is so spirit-breaking to where I literally cry every day. I am depressed, have nightmares about hanging myself. Before, I have had nightmares about being beaten by the guards. It is terrible. I have been to prison once prior to this, and my time there wasn't half this bad. I haven't felt this ridiculed and depressed in the 25 years I have been alive. I am in a real deep depression. Okay. On to the work. I am no longer working in the kitchen, but when I was, I had to start my day at 2:30am and go work, got off at 6:00am, came back to the dorm, took a shower, went and got clothes and got ready for school at 8:00am, came back, ate, then started groups from 12:00pm. 4:20pm, went ate, had some time, took another shower, then had our last group from 6:30-7:30. After head count, if I wanted any time to write my family, I had to cut into my sleep time, which means I went to bed about 9:30pm, sleep for about an hour, then get woke up and have to sit up for count at 10:30, which takes usually 45 minutes to an hour. So, every day I was forced to run on four, maybe five, hours sleep. In a week's time, I slept about 25 hours maximum when I should've had about 40 to 50 hours. And the punishment here is crazy. I am being punished for arguing with someone, just a verbal altercation, threats, no fights. Now I am living with 68 other women and expected not to argue. Anyways, my punishment is three days in the box, a 1,500-word essay on "Do I like negative attention?" and I have to say in front of everyone and be humiliated: "I'm real tough. I'm real tough, watch me roar, watch me roar. If you don't do what I say, I'll scream until I get my way then turn away." Also with this I have to clean sinks and toilets for three hours and lose all privileges for two weeks, which includes I cannot have hot water, have to be awake, not allowed to lay down from 4:00am-8:00pm. No TV, and the other person received one day in the box, one week LOP [loss of privileges], and one hour extra duty. I received twice the punishment for the same thing. Then, I had fallen asleep, and they took my food and told me I can't do nothing but stay on my bed, no TV, no day room, no sleep, no food until the 18th of July. There is so much more to this place than meets the eye. And I know that one right we have is freedom of speech and we even get consequences behind talking. I have been here for six months now and have been through straight up hell and torture. I am to the breaking point. I am literally starting to go crazy in here, no lie, and I still don't have a date to go home yet. I am cutting into my sleep time by writing this. I have so much more to tell you about how this place is but really need to get some sleep, 4:00am comes really early. I thank you for taking the time out to listen to my, well, some of my, story. I will write more details when I receive a response. Thank you, and God bless you.

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**Julia Hyden-Price**

**Unit: Hackberry**

**Date of narrative (sent to *The Austin Chronicle*): July 10, 2008**



I recently came across your article on the SAFPF conditions described by Jodi Stodder-Caldwell. Everything she said is true. I felt like someone was finally putting into words what I had gone through during my experience there.

In 2000, I was confined to the Hackberry Unit in Gatesville, a unit that is geared towards "clients" who have special medical conditions, anything from bipolar and depression to anemia and multiple sclerosis. I often wondered how carrying chairs around from dorm to dorm to gym and then sitting in those same chairs for up to 16 hours a day was supposed to "cure" me from my alcoholism. In all honesty, I didn't have a problem with drugs or alcohol. That's not denial; it was the deal my lawyer worked out so that I wouldn't have to spend time in a state jail. Completing the program at SAFPF would enable me to successfully meet the terms of my deferred adjudication for theft. I thought it would be a piece of cake, but it was nothing like the time I spent in residential treatments for typical teenage angst.

Occasionally you would get the guard who didn't think you were a piece of trash; one in particular often called us "honey" and "sweetheart" and made it clear that the decisions we made to get us in there were not indicative of the people we were. More often than not, however, you would get the guard who called you by your number and told you that you deserved every second of your jail time. Mothers were often subjected to the worst degradation about the neglect of their kids. "Highly personal and intentionally wounding" doesn't begin to describe the insults they would fling at us. As a teenager who found herself on the wrong side of law enforcement, I was more than willing to accept responsibility for my actions. I was not prepared to exit the program with an eating disorder and a distorted reality of how the world works. Something as simple as letting another inmate borrow a piece of paper would be grounds for "trafficking and trading." "Would you let your neighbor borrow crack?!" the counselors and officers would bellow at us. No, but I would sure let my neighbor borrow a cup of sugar.

Try as I might, I will never forget the absolute disregard for human life. A girl in the dorm across the pipe chase from mine ... had taken ill. She came into the program as a healthy young woman. Very bright and happy, even through these circumstances, and she worked in the beauty parlor. We had all seen her worsening, walking to the chow hall with a red face, nose sniffing, coughing. She went to the infirmary a few times, but she just couldn't shake whatever she had. Though I knew her, she was in the opposite dorm, so I didn't always see her. One Sunday morning, most of the girls were filing in from church services when we heard a loud commotion coming from the other side. It was very chaotic, but you could hear the girls screaming at the guard on duty to call the ambulance. Over and over they would scream, and over and over the guard would scream at the girls to get back to their cubicles. It must have been torturous to watch someone, a girl you had gotten to know, a girl you could call your friend, die in front of your eyes while the people you are supposed to trust sit by and do nothing. Every dorm was dismissed to the gym while her body was carried out. As far as we know, there was not much medically wrong with her when she got to SAFPF. Like most of us, her conditions were more psychological. And yet, she died. After I left, I remember getting a call from a lawyer who wanted to pursue more about the case, but I couldn't offer much more than what I have written now.

I apologize for such a long letter. I am happy to inform you that the one guard was right about not letting the decisions I made define who I was. I believe I am a success story, though I don't attribute it to the excellent, top-rate treatment and care I received. I attribute it to a wonderful support system and the fear of returning to hell on Earth. I could not understand how so many women could return to that place on relapse track. Again and again, a woman would come in and tell us this was her second time in this place. One girl was even on her fourth period of confinement there. Obviously, the program was not working.

Thank you so much for writing about such an important issue. Like Jodi, I was also somewhat afraid to speak up. Unlike Jodi, I never did. I kept my mouth shut and did my time. I know that for me, I had to

go through something like that to get my life back together. While grateful to have had a turnaround in my life, I would never again wish to go through an experience like that. Thank you, thank you, thank you for speaking out about the atrocities of the Gateway Foundation in the Texas Criminal Justice System. Please tell Jodi thank you, too. Perhaps if more women spoke up, there could be positive procedure changes so that there could be positive life changes. Confinement for criminal actions shouldn't be a walk in the park, but it shouldn't lead to death, either.

Thank you so much for your time.

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