

Subj: re: doing time ...

by Ann Bogle

womyn in prison Date:1/16/06 8:01:05 AM Central Standard Time
From: AMBogle2 To:Poetics Listserv

When one of my California friends got involved in getting archaic anti-sex laws off the books, I doubt she was concerned with or thinking of women in prison. She might have gone to jail herself at one time -- for reasons other than sex -- but it didn't go that way, thank goodness for her. On Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday in 2003 (three years ago), I went to jail for having drunk 5.5 beers on election night Nov. 5, 2002. The legal finding was that there had been no driving misconduct; I had driven well enough (my childhood friend and I had gone out to watch returns at a local pub), but I was stopped about 10:30 because one of my high beams was out for a quarter mile. The other headlights worked fine. My b.a.l. (blood alcohol level) turned out after three weeks of urine testing to be .12 or .02 over the legal limit. Besides the alcohol, they tested for the anti-depressants I told them they would find -- two of them -- plus lithium and an anti-seizure drug. I was in treatment for major as well as manic depression. According to the doctor, three drinks with food is all right, but I had drunk 5.5 beers with just an appetizer. The charge against me was aggravated gross misdemeanor, which is likely to cause problems in finding employment, likely for good.

The jail, where I stayed for 48 hours, gave me enough information to write a 180-page book, something I resisted setting out upon due to the insult of it. The other women were staying longer than I was -- I had ankle bracelet to contend with at home; they were no longer in apartments and without a way to be on ankle bracelet. Martha Stewart said she preferred jail to ankle bracelet, but I preferred ankle bracelet. The ankle bracelet itself was like a plastic wrist watch that someone had cleverly clamped on above my foot, so my shoes could tell time. There was a box that looked like Darth Vader's

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helmet plugged in by my new phone line that would send out a red signal if I should try to leave. I could bathe and otherwise move about. I wore a sock under the bracelet to keep it from chafing. I never ended up leaving the house in eighteen days, so I was set free ten days early.

Those eighteen days gave me much less to think or worry about than the 48 hours in jail. I read two books while in jail, one was by Zora Neale Hurston about her visits to Haiti and Jamaica. She gives an amazing account of a wild boar hunt. If you get a chance to read hers next to Robert Stone's description of being in Mexico with Kesey and Kerouac and their wild boar, do. The food in jail was dreadful, so it was the next best thing to eating something really good to read of eating the boar with Zora. (The chicken a la king, however, was good, and so were the biscuits.)

It's sick that I could write a good long account of those 48 hours; I guess we'd agree to that. Two years later it was still bothering me that the women in the jail were not allowed lotion unless someone they knew brought it to them. There was an epidemic of dry skin, so dry that the women had visible sores. That would not help their chances in finding work and housing when they got out, and yet it was such a simple thing. I wanted to organize something, but I never go to bars -- it would be something for women who do go to bars to do -- sponsor a woman in jail by bringing a bottle of lotion to her.

A black woman in the TV room said: "The black women are here for crack and prostitution, the white women are here for drinking and driving. I'm here because I hit someone when I was pregnant." I took her to mean "punched," a cop, maybe. She had held an administrative post with a not-for-profit agency in Minnesota. A woman cop in North Minneapolis had hit a Jewish woman I knew in AA, looking for housing that could remind her of New York, for talking with the woman cop's boyfriend. I had a one-year sentence hanging over my head. Being locked in jail is worse than being

locked in your own house. I hope it never has to happen again. It's sad that I have become such a recluse. I prevent ever having to go to jail again by rarely leaving the house and by rarely drinking -- by living in fear of authorities and local busybodies. With money, I would move to a decent city and out of the suburbs.

My California friend who was agitating for anti-sex laws off the books for gay men in Houston didn't think of this: How do the police *know* that the women are trading sex for drugs before they are arrested? Why aren't they simply arrested for possessing drugs?

Had I had sex prior to my arrest? Had they thought I had? I was carrying expired condoms in my car (how embarrassing!) -- and they did rip through the car later and throw everything around. My Louise Hay notebook was on the backseat. My head was wrapped in a large black muffler with a Harley Davidson patch on one end; the woman cop must have thought I was a Muslim in the dark of night, in my pre-dented blue Volvo 240 DL 1989, the way she looked at the flipped-over patch. I had voted for Democrats.

