HEAR FROM HER:

ANGELICA RANGEL

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"I didn't know I was pregnant when I got arrested, and I was shocked when I found out. My first thought was, 'what is going to happen to my baby?'

You're a prisoner, a number, not a human, not a pregnant woman. What I was going through wasn't important to them."

"Being separated from my daughter like that sent me into a deep depression. I know I committed a crime and had to serve my time, but I did the wrong, not my child.

After delivery, I only got to hold her for fifteen minutes before they took her away.

For months I would wake up in my cell hearing a baby crying."

"There were a lot of women in prison like me. Every story seems the same, just a different person.

Drug convictions and prostitution, women with extensive trauma histories, women who don't value themselves or their bodies because of things that have happened to them and messed with their self-esteem."

"I had a hard pregnancy. I had gestational diabetes, and the doctors just want you in and out. I couldn't get my medical needs met like I could've if I had a regular doctor. When you go to medical appointments, you are shackled at your hands and your feet. What I was going through wasn't important to them. The guards think you're using your pregnancy as an excuse, there is no compassion. You don't get milk, and my teeth started decaying. Sleeping is so much harder on those thin mats. Pregnancy is hard on your body, and they don't take care of those needs. You only have what they give you."

What are you up to these days?

"I am a member of Girls Embracing Mothers (GEM) now. They were one of my great supporters. GEM helped me get the money to get my driver's license after I was released. They changed my life by believing in me.

They didn't see me as a criminal. They saw me as a mother, and a human, and someone who needed a little bit of help. Part of my problem was having too much pride and not asking for help, but since then I've worked on that and it just took somebody believing in me and supporting me."

Responses originally shared in 2018

For more information about women in Texas' criminal legal system, visit TexasCJE.org/texas-womens-justice-coalition

HEAR FROM HER:

ANNETTE PRICE

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"I was 20 years old, at the wrong place at the wrong time. Had I had interactions with police prior, it would've been different. I went to the police to tell them that I had been raped and attacked. They had already had it made up in their minds that they knew what had happened; that this was a pimp-prostitute altercation, which it wasn't."

"They treated me like I was a horrible person instead of someone who had just encountered being beaten and raped. I was 4 months pregnant when I went to jail. After I had my baby, I was really angry. Angry that I had gotten all that time [40 years] for defending myself and my unborn child."

"Women are the backbone to our families. Women are the glue that hold families together. When the mother is not there, it has a snowball effect on kids. The support is broken. The dynamics of the family are shattered. There is no more bonding, no more nurturing. It collapses the family."

"I just want my experiences to be helpful for women coming out. I've been through a whole lot, but I keep getting back up every time I'm knocked down. I've done my time; I've done everything the court system told me to do. I wish they would just let me live my life, but they won't. I was just denied my application to become a Licensed Chemical Dependency counselor because there is a lifetime ban on my conviction. I have two masters degrees, but can't use them because of my conviction."

How can we prevent women from entering the criminal legal system?

1. Stop incarcerating mothers.
2. Let's address the root causes of what's going on, because prison is not the right place for healing.
3. For women who are in prison, we need meaningful programs tailored toward women's needs.

Responses originally shared in 2017

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HEAR FROM HER:

CATHY MARSTON

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"Those of us who are survivors of battering and rape are extremely resilient. When I write a woman on the inside who is a survivor, I tell her that she is strong to have survived her batterer and what she had done to her was a criminal act."

"Unfortunately, one of the biggest barriers in stopping wrongful arrest of battered women and having clemency granted to battered women is that our society is still not fully behind the idea that when men beat or rape women, it is wrong. Nor are women recognized as equal human beings with rights."

"Those of us who are survivors do not have a disorder. And those of us who defended ourselves against our attackers do not have a syndrome. We were exercising our right to defend ourselves under the law."

"I had dreamed about testifying to the legislature when I was in prison. It was one of those things that kept me going."

Cathy's testimony to the House Corrections Committee in the Texas Legislature, April 4, 2019

Who is Cathy Marston?

"While I was incarcerated, I founded Free Battered Texas Women. FBTW empowers incarcerated survivors and their loved ones by telling them that their lives are worth something, validating their experience, and giving them the language of the law -- instead of handling them like a disease that needs to be treated. We need EVERYONE working to prevent battering and create restorative justice and a safe, supportive community that actually makes a difference for those of us who are re-entering!"

Responses originally shared in 2020

For more information about women in Texas' criminal legal system, visit TexasCJE.org/texas-womens-justice-coalition

HEAR FROM HER:

DESTINY HARRIS

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"My childhood was cut short because I had to become my own parent. I made myself go to school. I was working 3 jobs at one point. My mom wasn't there to take care of me, so I had to take care of myself."

"During one of my mom's incarcerations, I was molested. Had she been there, I wouldn't have been in that situation and she could've protected me. Locking her up, when she was no threat to public safety, put me and my siblings at risk."

"Women need extra protection, even while incarcerated. There is so much abuse in prison. Incarcerated women are vulnerable to re-victimization and re-traumatization. Trauma probably led them here in the first place. They shouldn't then be subjected to the same things they were having to fight against on the street."

Note: Destiny was around 5 years old the first time her mother was incarcerated. The youngest of 4 children, Destiny and her siblings would crash on a family members' couch. Sometimes the person they were staying with would also get arrested and locked up, and they'd have to go stay on someone else's couch.

What was the hardest part about your mom being incarcerated?

"Visitation was one of the hardest parts of my mom's incarceration. I always had to find someone to take me to see her. Even then, I could only see her on the screen. There was no face-to-face visitation.

I remember just looking at this fuzzy screen and crying. My mom was trying to console me, but she couldn't even wipe the tears from my eyes. The visits themselves were traumatizing."

Responses originally shared in 2017

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HEAR FROM HER:

EVELYN FULBRIGHT

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"Instead of offering some type of drug treatment, I was put on probation without services and then revoked. I cycled through the system because I had a drug problem and my root issues weren't being addressed."

"I had a fibroid on my uterus, so I had a lot of bleeding. The pads are so cheap, I would go through 3 a night and still bleed through my clothes and sheets. I would get in trouble for washing my clothes/sheets, but I couldn't just stay like that. It made me feel less than a human being, let alone a woman. Even though we are in prison, we are still women."

"They need to do more of an individual assessment of the women. We go through a processing in the beginning, but it needs to be more female based. If they did more of a detailed assessment involving female issues, maybe they could improve the quality of treatment of women in the system."

"I had a severe cocaine addiction for 15 years. Today, I am a nurse at a drug rehab center. God saved me out of that world, and then brought me back to help others."

Did you feel TDCJ prepared you for reentry?

"There was no preparation for reentry. They gave me a list of resources out the door, and many of the organizations and businesses didn't even exist anymore. I work at a resource center now, and when we get feedback that a place is closed or has restrictions, we update our resources. TDCJ should do that as well.

The trouble for me did not start until I came home. I had a felony, my nursing license had been taken, and I was facing so many obstacles that I was not prepared for.

The need is so much greater than what resources are available."

Responses originally shared in 2018
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HEAR FROM HER:

HANNAH OVERTON

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"On September 7, 2007, I was convicted of capital murder and sent to a maximum security prison for life without the possibility of parole for a crime I didn't commit.

This would leave my husband at home to care for our 5 children. After seven years in a maximum security prison, I was exonerated and all charges were dropped."

"Due to my charge I was not allowed to have contact visits at all with any of my children, for the 7 years of incarceration. We talked through Plexiglas.

Due to the distance (300 miles each way), my husband wasn't able to bring my 5 kids like we would have liked. Because my Church family paid for gas, he was able to bring them once a month."

"At first no phone calls were allowed. I could, however, request a 5 minute call every 90 days. This was more torture than help, because each child would cry, getting less than 1 minute to talk.

Once the phones were allowed and set up, the cost severely limited the amount of time we could talk. Communication through phone calls, and even letters, is still a huge issue for those without money."

"I think contact with children should be allowed, even in child cases, but the visit should be carefully monitored. I lived in a maximum security prison for 7 years. Most, if not all of the women I encountered, would never be a threat in a visiting room. When deciding which unit to place a woman in, I think the distance from her children should be considered. Phone calls should be affordable, so everyone has access, and I believe the phone system should be much easier to set up, since the current system is often difficult for the families to understand."

Was access to feminine hygiene products an issue in prison?

"Yes! The feminine pads we were provided (24 per month) were so cheaply made that they would last an hour or two. We were only given 6 tampons. Even if we could afford more at commissary, they were often out of stock.

I had to resort to begging those who no longer had a cycle for their products, which is technically against the rules and could result in a disciplinary case for trafficking and trading."

Responses originally shared in 2017
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HEAR FROM HER:

JENNIFER CHARLENE TOON

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"Often, women are returning to toxic relationships and inadequate housing out of necessity. We must find a way to divert them into better environments that will support them. We must treat the causes of why women become entangled in addiction and crime in the first place. What preventative measures have worked? Are we investing in those?"

"Women offer a unique perspective. We approach problems from many angles and look at an array of solutions that often focus on the more human impact of a decision than just hard facts. Without that perspective, communities and families suffer."

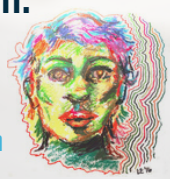
" I used my time for personal growth, but there were few opportunities provided through TDCJ in terms of preparation for release. Once I made parole and transferred to a therapeutic community for the last six months, then the preparation began. Seems like this should have started when I walked in, not six months before I walked out."

I have been advocating for women's justice in the criminal justice system for years. In prison I did what I could, whether it was as a peer educator, a columnist for The Echo, or as the expert on grievances. I found opportunities to speak up for our needs as women in the system. I continue that now as a freelance writer, a YouTube blogger, and a member of the Texas Women's Justice Coalition."

Did you feel there were a lot of women in prison similar to you?

"It appeared to many of the women at first glance that I didn't belong there but the more we shared and the more we got to know one another through our struggles, we knew that we were inherently the same.

Beautifully broken, incredible resilient, and desperate for redemption."



Responses originally shared in 2020

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HEAR FROM HER:

KAREN KEITH

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"My original sentence was 10 years probation, however I was revoked and sent to prison on a 7-year sentence for non-payment of restitution.

Revoking my probation for non-payment, then requiring me to still pay restitution as part of my parole, didn't make sense. Had I been employable at the time I was revoked, I could have paid the restitution, but instead I had to check a box."

"When I walked into prison for the first time, I was certain that place was filled with really bad people. I wasn't a bad person; I was a good person who made a bad decision. What I learned while incarcerated was that there were many good people in prison who made bad decisions or maybe they just made the best decision they could at that time."

"The first time students I had worked with graduated with their GEDs, I was so proud of each one of them. Before they began their test, I remember telling them I would take a sex case and hug each one of them if they graduated. I did hug each one and thankfully never caught a case for it! Watching these women bloom, find self-esteem & understand their true value was an awesome experience."

"When you walk out of prison with $100 and are expected to start life over, it's difficult. When you know what you are capable of and no one seems to care or give you a second chance, it's demeaning. 500+ job applications and not one call, it just about breaks you when part of your parole stipulations are you must be employed. Living in transitional housing because your choices have cost you everything brings new meaning to starting over."

What do you think could prevent women from entering the criminal legal system in the first place?

"Diversion, diversion, diversion – it is imperative to keeping women at home, allowing them to continue being parents to their children. Services outside the judicial system for addiction and mental health will divert many from ever entering the system.

My personal journey into prison cost me everything I value most – my 3 children and 3 grandchildren. The system does not just send a person to prison, it tears a family apart – sometimes permanently, and there are no services to reunite those families once a sentence is completed. For many of us, our families are lost to us."

Responses originally shared in 2018

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HEAR FROM HER:

KATIE FORD

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"If I could wave a magic wand and change the criminal justice system overnight, I would make it a system that more fully and meaningfully embraces the principles of restorative justice, meaning that the objective of putting people in jail or prison would be to immerse them in programs and services that empower them to stop harming themselves and others in society."

"If the focus of the correctional system is to punish, we are only traumatizing an already traumatized individual. This is exacerbating the issue, not correcting it."

"So many of the women I meet in prison are struggling with addictive behavior and being in abusive relationships. These two things keep women caught up in an imprisoning cycle of violence and criminal behavior. At the root of this cycle is unresolved trauma that needs to be healed. This is why I believe healing needs to be the focus of any correctional effort in women's prisons."

Note: Katie is the Executive Director of Truth Be Told, a nonprofit that offers gender-responsive programs and safe community to women during and after incarceration. Through courses that offer healing through storytelling, expressive arts, life skills and self-care tools, Truth Be Told speaks directly to the unique risk factors that lead women into the system: elevated rates of trauma, addiction, and histories of childhood abuse.

Why are organizations like Truth Be Told so critical for incarcerated women?

"By and large, our correctional system in this state remains focused on punishment and security. Rehabilitation feels like an afterthought. I believe this to be true when I observe the majority of rehabilitative services offered in prison being provided by volunteer organizations, not by a financial investment from the system.

We are not a religious program or ministry, which makes us very unique among prison volunteer groups. We offer safe space that is open to women regardless of personal belief systems. We welcome women from all walks of faith, even those who've lost faith or have no faith. When you remove the dividing barrier of religion— when a woman feels unconditionally accepted for who she is— that's when the opportunity for real rehabilitation and healing presents itself."

Responses originally shared in 2017

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HEAR FROM HER:

KRISTIE MAYHUGH

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

In your opinion, what are the predominate issues facing women who are incarcerated in Texas?

"Their children left behind, skills learned that can be useful to get a job when released back to society, and not enough toilet paper and feminine items issued."

How do you think we can better help women while they are incarcerated?

"I think we could help incarcerated women by teaching them useful skills to get them a job when released, and by providing a way for mothers to see and interact with their children regularly."

"If I could change anything about the Texas criminal justice system, I would change the rehabilitation process for those who are incarcerated by providing better and more education programs. I would improve the process for reentry back into society by making sure people had job skills, support to find jobs, a place to stay, and transportation."

Note: Kristie is one of the "San Antonio Four," the name given to four women from San Antonio, Texas who were wrongfully convicted of sexually assaulting two children in the 1990s and spent nearly 15 years in prison until their exoneration in 2016.

Get to know Kristie!

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE FOOD?

Mexican food!

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST?

Just living and enjoying life the best that I can and moving forward from this bad experience I had to go through and taking the good from it.

WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

To bring awareness with my case to help others in whatever way possible.

Responses originally shared in 2017

For more information about women in Texas' criminal legal system, visit TexasCJE.org/texas-womens-justice-coalition

HEAR FROM HER:

LAUREN JOHNSON

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"I've been free from the system for nearly 7 years. I'm not quite an abolitionist, but I do wonder if we didn't have such an expansive prison system, we might learn how to deal with our problems as a society. I see the deeply rooted connections between crime and poverty and am baffled by the way we choose to punish people instead of working to fix the actual problems that drive crime and poverty. "

"I've been incarcerated as a person with no children and as a mother. The latter was definitely the hardest. I missed a lot in a very short time frame. Knowing the impact your absence has on your children and the people who step in to care for them in your absence is hard. "

"Prison did nothing for me to prepare me for reentry. They gave me an individualized treatment plan because they were mandated to do so, but I never got into any of the programs they suggested on that plan because the wait list to get into anything is very long, and I didn't qualify for most of what is available."

"My darkest day wasn't in prison, it was in jail. The day I had to leave the hospital after having my baby to go back to jail and leave him with my aunt is probably the day I would characterize as one of the most difficult in my life. I can't recall ever hurting that much in any other situation. I was placed in a medical holding cell alone and couldn't stop crying."

Who is Lauren Johnson?

"Who am I? The existential question that sometimes or often alludes us. I am a fallible human in charge of three little humans that are growing up so fast my head spins. I am someone who wants to fight injustice and am often torn about the way to approach the fight.

I am someone who has reaped rewards because others have invested and supported me to be able to do some pretty awesome things, someone who stands on the shoulders of giants, someone who sees the humanity in not just people who have been imprisoned, but also in the people I disagree with which is interestingly more of a challenge."

Responses originally shared in 2017

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HEAR FROM HER:

LAURIE PHERIGO

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"I would estimate that well over 90% of the women I knew in TDCJ had experienced some form of trauma, whether it was domestic violence, sexual assault as a child or adult – or both. For these women the very environment and culture in prison is traumatic, daily. The guards scream at you. The dorms are deafeningly loud. There are ways you can respond to this trauma, but it never really goes away."

"The lack of approved physical contact in prison is very damaging to women, specifically. I understand the blanket prohibition and that the prisons are – at least ostensibly – trying to reduce cases of sexual assault. I support them in that goal. But I also believe that women need physical contact for our emotional health. Being able to hold hands as you pray, or giving a hug at the end of a class, is so important. "

"The incarceration of women makes virtual orphans of thousands upon thousands of children. Like it or not, a vast majority of women who are incarcerated are mothers, and it is all too common for their children to have nowhere to go. Wherever those children live, they are much more likely to have emotional or behavioral problems, and all too often they are part of the school-to-prison pipeline."

"I volunteer with a local organization, Truth Be Told, and in that capacity I have written a curriculum for a class that helps prepare the women for reentry. I have facilitated this class at the Lockhart Correctional Facility since 2017. This work is some of the most satisfying I have ever done. I was also a part of the Dignity campaign in the 2019 legislative session, which successfully passed eight women's justice bills."

What are you looking forward to most in the future?

"Watching my grandchildren grow into the amazing adults they're on their way to becoming, and experiencing with them the magic of life. Growing old with my wife. Simple things, mostly. In many ways the future has become a scary place. I worry about what kind of world my grandchildren will inherit. So I will do everything I possibly can to make sure that we make it the right world. "

Responses originally shared in 2020

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HEAR FROM HER:

MARGIE O'NEAL

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"The most predominant issue for women in prison is the lack of job training or education available to them. The women are incarcerated in a one-size-fits-all prison system, designed for men. Women need gender-appropriate programs that will help them succeed when they are released."

"The greatest barriers women face post-release are the ability to find employment and housing. It was hard for me to get a job with a felony conviction even though I was qualified for the position. I was fortunate enough to know people who were willing to rent me a place to live."

"If I could change anything about the Texas criminal justice system, I would change the idea that going to prison is not punishment, but a time out for self-improvement. From the moment women arrive they should be screened for their educational abilities and offered training they can use once they are released."

Note: Margie volunteers for the Texas Department of Corrections, Meals on Wheels, and Truth Be Told. Margie advocates for changes in the justice system as a member of the Statewide Leadership Council, which brings together community advocates to collaborate on policy changes that will lead to the end of mass incarceration.

What impact on communities and families do you think incarcerating women has had?

"The impact on society when a woman is incarcerated is multifaceted. The biggest issue is the children. Children of incarcerated mothers struggle with developing a sense of security.

I feel there were a lot of women in prison similar to me. The only difference was the sentence or length of time served. We all have children and families and made poor choices."

Responses originally shared in 2020
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HEAR FROM HER:

MEME STYLES

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"Yes, we need to march in the streets, we need our voices heard, but we also need the data. We need a great platform to be able to critique what's happening, but first we need the numbers. All that qualitative data that we collect on our community data gatherings matters, and it feeds into these different solutions."

"For 450 years, Black girls have had their innocence stolen or disregarded. This may be the first time that a community is taking the first steps towards addressing adultification bias and healing this part of our history."

"MEASURE's mission is to use data and education to empower communities to eliminate social disparities. We address justice in education, health, economic, and criminal systems, and we do this through community, advocacy, resilience, and evidence. We exist so Black people can reclaim their narrative."

Jameila "Meme" Styles founded MEASURE in 2015, when she challenged the Austin Police Department to "show me the numbers" they were using to report the results of agency performance measures. Today the organization has grown to not only address community policing but health, education, and economic disparities.

What is adultification bias, and how are you working to address it?

"The Innocence Initiative responds to the 'Girlhood Interrupted' study, which showed that adults view Black girls as more adult-like, less innocent, and in less need of protection and nurturing than white girls. This is called adultification bias.

Adultification bias is linked to harsher treatment and unfair standards for Black girls. Black girls are suspended five times more often than white girls and are nearly three times more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system. And it doesn't stop there. Educators and other authorities often treat Black girls in developmentally inappropriate ways."

Responses originally shared in 2020

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HEAR FROM HER:

MURPHY ANNE CARTER

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"One of the first problems that I would change would be the parole system. How many women I see come back, even after a few months of having left, is shocking. You can read about recidivism rates until the cows come home, and not really comprehend it until you see the look on someone's face when you see them back inside."

"Moments of inspiration occur daily, and I say this a lot, because it touches me but, in every class, at least one person cries, and in every class, we all laugh. That's one of things that keeps me going back—that real connection and candor that transforms a group of people into a community."

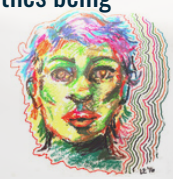
"People in the community, talking about changes and motivated to incur them, have no backing, no support, and if they did, so much of this work could begin. We have the perfect recidivist machine, and we have tools to retrofit it, to change it, and people who know how and are willing to do so. The two just need to come together."

Note: Murphy is the co-director of the Freehand Arts Project, a non-profit dedicated to bringing creative arts classes to those incarcerated in Texas jails and prisons. The program strives to address the deep wounds found in the incarceration system by providing a safe avenue for self-reflection, the opportunity to develop emotional awareness, and a supportive community. The classes give inmates the experience of control and introspection through art, allowing them to engage in the world more confidently and authentically.

Can you talk about the women you serve?

"The women I serve range in age. I've taught individuals who are still teenagers, and women who are grandmothers. While everyone's story is different, and the details of their past and backgrounds vary, a few commonalities appear again and again. First, that many of the women are mothers, and second, that many of the charges against these individuals deal with drugs. However, this is all empirical observation. We do not explicitly ask background questions, personal history, or facts about their case.

The stories I learn about emerge largely from the writing the women produce, about life on the inside and the outside, both the dreams and nightmares that have led to their current circumstances. I have read poetry written by a mother afraid her daughter will forget her face, a daughter worried about the meals and housekeeping, the dishes piling up in the sink or the clothes being ironed in the morning, and essays about the demons of drugs, voices coming to get you with a spoon."



Responses originally shared in 2017
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HEAR FROM HER:

NATALIE BAKER

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"In prison, it's a different way of life, and you have to adapt in order to survive. When I got out, I found I'd forgotten how to function like a normal person in society – how to eat, how to sleep, how to make decisions on my own. If I hadn't found a good therapist specializing in post-traumatic stress, I don't think I'd be the person I am today."

"The system doesn't prepare you for freedom. For the first few years after release, the most difficult aspect was living with the felon label. As a convicted felon, you are forever a second-class citizen, and the social stigma against you is a very real thing."

"Basic civil liberties, housing and certain career paths are suddenly off-limits. Even with my law degree and MBA, it took me a year and a half to get a full-time job, a hardship I was entirely unprepared for."

"Soon after I was released, I served as the Executive Relations Manager of the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), a nonprofit dedicated to rehabilitating prisoners and reducing Texas' recidivism rate. I then moved to San Diego to live with my now-husband, where I currently do business development/legal affairs for a litigation support firm, as well as freelance for several companies on the side. We also recently welcomed our first child – a little girl!"

Do people compare your experience to Piper Kerman's (of Orange is the New Black)?

"Of all the questions I receive about my prison experience, I probably get asked about Orange is the New Black the most. I read her book my first year in and can relate to the whole being-thrown-into-a-foreign-world thing, especially after having come from a relatively privileged life. I can also identify with the amazing people she befriended, because the bonds you make in there truly keep you going.

But, for as much as we had in common, our prison experiences weren't identical by any means. State prison (where I was) is a whole different animal compared to the federal system (where she was)."

Responses originally shared in 2017
For more information about women in Texas' criminal legal system, visit TexasCJE.org/texas-womens-justice-coalition

HEAR FROM HER:

TANYA HALE

Interviews with system-impacted women brought to you by the Texas Women's Justice Coalition and the Texas Center for Justice and Equity

"In November of 2015 I was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer and I spent the next 3 1/2 years undergoing treatment while in prison.

From the beginning of my battle with cancer, I was not given access to appropriate facilities or medical care. The sites of my initial biopsies became infected when guards would not allow me to keep my wounds clean."

"The medical unit I was placed in during chemotherapy was filthy and I was handcuffed and shackled without water while waiting for treatment at the hospital.

I was over-radiated and denied medication for the open wounds on my neck. Once those wounds healed, I had a mastectomy in April of 2016. In June I learned that my cancer had returned and in August I was granted medical reprieve."

"Before my release, I had been denied parole twice. I believe that TDCJ knew I was being treated inhumanely and wanted to keep me locked up in order to avoid a lawsuit or public awareness about how I was treated.

I worked in the law library and lived in a faith-based dorm. I was sentenced because I could not pay expensive parole fees, but they said I was not rehabilitated enough to release."

"I want my story shared.
I hope that sharing what has happened to me can stop it from happening to anyone else."

What changes would you like to see for women in prison?

"We were told not to hug or touch - any physical contact was treated as a sexual offense. That needs to change, because people need that contact. Everyone needs support and simple human contact, especially while going through treatment.

Anyone fighting cancer should be given access to clean living conditions, regular showers, appropriate medical care, and contact with their loved ones. Incarceration should never strip a person of these basic necessities, especially while undergoing treatment. Incarceration should not strip a person of their dignity. That is not rehabilitative and it is not humane."

Responses originally shared in 2018
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