



MARIE MASON

A Letter from Marie

Hello and Happy New Year!

It's been a little more than a year and a half since I was transferred to the Admin Unit at Carswell. Many folks have written wondering if I was in the hospital here, and no, I am not. The Admin Unit is just part of a larger compound that has a major medical center for the Bureau of Prisons. This unit is completely separate from both the compound and the medical center. It's actually more difficult to see most medical staff from here because of the security detail that must accompany any of us if we leave the unit for any reason.

It is a very small world here; only some 20 women are housed here in complete segregation from general population. It is a mixed unit and serves as both death row and as a kind of control unit. We are fortunately not locked down as often as the men's units are, as policy in the BoP is different for male and female prisoners.

I have been able to maintain my vegan diet, mostly at my own expense until recently, and will continue to do that. It has been easier to get a more healthy and varied diet here than before. The Carswell kitchen has consistent vegan options for meals with a few exceptions, as beans and rice and vegetables are mostly available.

Carswell is far enough from everyone I know that it makes it hard for people to visit. It's expensive to travel, it's intimidating to come here I'm sure...But my family and my friend Julie have all made the trip to get here, things went well and it was good to see my loved ones. Mostly I have been struggling to keep up with folks through mail and email. I have had some trouble these past few years with lost letters and such, but have resolved to track and increase my communication this year. If you have written a letter, or signed one of the wonderful message cards (after

an animal rights convention, at the Heartwood gathering, from a prisoner support letter writing night)- thank you so very much and please know how much I appreciated your kind words and encouragement! I've been so happy to hear about walks in the woods (how much I miss being in the forests!), amazing bike rides, photos of animal friends and beautiful natural places and descriptions of all the great campaigns to save forests and animals, to stop nuclear pollution and to halt the Keystone Pipeline project!!!! You all rock with a vengeance!

Tomorrow I will turn 50. It's a mile marker and a time to reflect on my life. Like all humans, I've made mistakes and have some small regrets. But I am still an anarchist, a feminist, an internationalist, a Wobbly and community organizer, a passionate Earth First!er, and am still proud to have played my part in the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front's work to defend the wild and our non-human brothers and sisters.

My life has been spent in many movements, and all seem to be part of the process of necessary change. That experiment in social change is still ongoing and we must all keep trying, keep contributing what we can. My body is trapped here, but my heart is with you still fighting out there. Never give up, never give in, keep your minds open to inventing better compassionate ways to make change happen. And write when you can. I'm a mom, I worry about all of you out there...

As Woody Guthrie used to say, take it easy... but take it.

Marie

January 25th 2012

Marie

Marie Mason has been involved in both environmental and labor struggles, has edited many radical publications, and has been involved in water rights, anti-infrastructure, anti-logging and anti-development projects in the Midwest, organizing above ground and clandestinely for the past 30 years. She is a mother of two and companion to many wonderful animals, a militant anarchist, and continues to be an involved member of each community she's lived in over the years.

She had already been subjected to years of harassment from local and federal law enforcement when, in 2008, she was indicted for a string of Earth Liberation Front (E.L.F.) actions that had occurred in 1999 and 2000. The targets included a University of Michigan lab involved in GMO crop development (funded by Monsanto), as well as logging equipment. During her court proceedings, she also admitted involvement with (but was not charged with) 12 other acts of sabotage, including tree spiking in Indiana and the attempted arson of an Ice Mountain water pumping facility near her hometown of Stanwood, Michigan. In the cases of all of these attacks, Marie had been heavily involved for years in above-ground campaigns against these projects of environmental devastation.

Her indictment was only possible because of her ex-husband Frank Ambrose's collaboration with the FBI. Throughout 2007, Ambrose travelled around the country on the FBI's dime, wearing a wire and implicating many old friends, including Marie, by recording conversations in which they reminisced about or discussed their past actions. Even though Frank sold Marie and others out for a lesser sentence (he is currently serving 9 years in low security), Marie remained strong throughout her lengthy, arduous legal battle, implicating no one except herself and Frank, who had

already admitted to his own involvement. Two others indicted for involvement in the New Years' arsons, Stephanie Fultz and Aaron Burthwick, also flipped and testified against Mason during this time. Because of continuing pressure and threats of a life sentence in prison, Mason eventually accepted a non-cooperating plea deal with the court that recommended her for 15-20 years imprisonment. Citing her actions and her complete unwillingness to collaborate, the court went back on its promises and, on February 5th, 2009, sentenced Marie to nearly 22 years in a federal facility.

Since her incarceration, Marie has suffered health problems, partly from to lack of adequate nutrition (she has been a committed vegan for over 20 years and was constantly refused vegan food in Waseca Prison, even with the intervention of a nutritionist and her insistence that her diet is part of her religious practice.) She has been harassed and threatened regularly and was recently been re-located to FMC Carswell near Ft. Worth, Texas (nearly 1,200 miles away from her family in Michigan.) In the unit she resides in, her communication with the outside world is extremely restricted; she can only write to a pre-approved list of people and her phone and visitation time are limited.

While Carswell Prison is not officially a Communications Management Unit (CMU),¹ Marie's conditions resemble those of other political prisoners who are kept in CMUs. She is not allowed to interact with general population, and is confined to her cell block of 20 women. While she is technically allowed to have visitors, all requests except for those of her immediate family and one close friend have been consistently denied. Her incarceration is a very literal wall of separation between her and her family, friends, and the wilderness she ceaselessly fought for.

The Green Scare

Marie's arrest is just a single facet of a broader plan of repression by the U.S. government known by anarchists as the "Green Scare," an allusion to the Red Scare of the 1950s in which communists in the United States were harassed, blacklisted and even deported. Environmentalist anarchists and animal rights activists in the U.S. have faced a similar brand of harassment since 2001, being named the #1 domestic terrorism threat in the United States, even though their actions (through their careful planning and caution) have never harmed a single human or animal.

In 2005, the government's "Operation Backfire" plan ripped open the underground E.L.F. movement in the northwest United State. Subsequently, many more anarchists and environmentalists, including Marie, have been targeted because of two apparent purposes: to completely wipe out the E.L.F. in the United States, and to terrify broadening circles of people into compliance and inaction. The state's tactic has been fairly successful: the culture of fear around anarchist and radical circles has indeed been intensified, thanks to tactics such as extensive surveillance, infiltration, wiretapping, and clever prosecution, aided by laws such as the A.E.T.A.², anti-mafia laws, conspiracy charges, and terrorism enhancements.

In the years leading up to and since her arrest and imprisonment, Marie and those close to her have experienced this increased repression firsthand. Even before her indictment, Marie's daughter found Feds attempting to place a GPS tracking device on Marie's car. Since then, all attempts to humanize her conditions have been sluggish or impossible, continuing to leave her vulnerable to continued FBI harassment and intense control on her communications and her connections with the outside.

Marie has been behind bars for three years now, but the government will not be satisfied with the 22-year sentence that has been handed down to her. She continues to face harassment and isolation, and is clearly being singled out as an example. The government has a message: do not go about things too intensely, do not live your lives as if something is at stake, the way that Marie did. Prison is not the worst they can do.



Practically speaking, Marie's last legal appeal attempts have failed. Since she accepted a plea bargain, she cannot appeal her conviction, only her sentence, and her last sentencing appeal has been denied. The only remaining legal option seems to be to seek a presidential pardon, an endeavor both costly and extremely unlikely to succeed, as no politician wants to be labeled "soft on terrorism." Of course, every effort made towards Marie's freedom or improved conditions is necessary and important. Given these circumstances, however, we feel that it's time to start imagining solidarity that doesn't rely on the legal system we hold no trust in, to think beyond strategies that center around constant fundraising to pay lawyers (although money is always needed to help Marie meet her basic needs for survival in prison, to help her get vegan food and maintain her minimal lifelines to the outside world.)

June 11: A Proposal

In beginning to talk about new strategies, we might draw inspiration from the case of Jeff “Free” Luers, another anarchist who was imprisoned for an E.L.F. arson against an SUV dealership in the late 90s. While initially sentenced to 22 years in prison, Jeff was released after 10 years in part because of an ongoing campaign of support and solidarity; early release of this sort is very rare in the U.S., especially for prisoners labeled as “terrorists.” While Jeff was imprisoned, June 11th, the day he was sentenced, became a yearly day of solidarity events and actions, to ensure that he was not forgotten in prison. Since Jeff was released in December 2009, there has been momentum towards June 11th becoming an international day of solidarity with both Marie and Eric McDavid³, as well as other longterm anarchist prisoners.

Many of us with experience in supporting comrades who’ve been imprisoned are familiar with the challenges of shorter-term imprisonment, but feel that new considerations have to be discussed now that our comrades are regularly receiving 20-year sentences rather than 5- or 10-year terms. Marie’s 22 year and Eric’s 20 year sentences are clearly outrageous, but we can’t forget that sentences exceeding this length are fairly common in the U.S. prisons system, and are currently being served by many black and indigenous liberation prisoners, as well as countless others.

The government imprisons our comrades and others as a way to erase them, and it is crucial that they do not succeed in this sinister task. If we take one day a year to shout our comrades’ names from the rooftops, to write them on the walls and share their stories with each other, then not one year will pass when we will not take action for our friends in prison at least once. This is at most, a minimum for those of us who daily remember and feel the pain

of our comrades who sit behind bars, but we hope it will serve as a starting point for others, and as a helpful point of focus. As a first attempt (for these people, in this form,) June 11th, 2011 was a huge success, with actions and events happening in dozens of cities all over the U.S. and the world. Funds were raised, information was distributed and mischief was managed, as arsons and attacks took place along with benefit movie screenings, community dinners, and info-nights.

June 11th can and should be an opportunity for conversations around the conditions of long-term imprisonment. As longer sentences for us become increasingly common in the U.S. and other countries, the importance of talking about these conditions as anarchists becomes apparent. By calling an international day that focuses on long-term anarchist prisoners, connecting lines can be drawn between our experiences in the U.S. and those of anarchists in other places, regardless of the separation that borders and languages impose upon us. We cannot and will not sit back passively as these measures are imposed upon us.

Certainly we don't want June 11th to be monolithic or official; we recognize our strategy proposal as one aspect of a struggle that necessitates many approaches. There are a number of ways in which people are supporting Marie through her imprisonment, including her family's and close friends' constant and unwavering commitment to helping her meet her practical needs in prison. If we are truly committed to our comrades' freedom, we must be open to the necessity of a multiplicity of approaches.

So plan something for June 11th, whether it's raising money or awareness for Marie and Eric McDavid, reaching out to them personally, helping their friends and family maintain her legal and day-to-day needs, or continuing their projects of defending the wild and waging war on the existent. The best solidarity we can offer Marie and Eric is to continue in their struggles and in our own.

A Few Practical Ideas for Supporting Marie

Avoid the trap of renunciation. Honor her publicly: in the context of universal condemnation of Marie's actions from the state and media, public statements denouncing her actions play into the police strategy of isolating and cutting Marie off from her friends and supporters. Against this moral and legal condemnation, we can openly demonstrate the pride we feel for her actions and principled stand.

Communicate: write to Marie, especially if you are an old friend. Send pictures and poetry, drawings and dreams. She may not be able to write back because of her communication restrictions, but letters are her window to the outside world, and she thrives on them.

Push harder: develop new methods of spreading information about her case and raising money for her legal and life expenses. Organize an event or action or happening on June 11th to keep her name on everyone's mind.

Suggestions and Starting Points:

- Info nights
- Microphone demos⁴
- Other solidarity actions (Have fun and be safe)
- Hanging banners and putting up posters to spread an understanding of her case.
- Take seriously the radical transformations this world will need to experience before Marie could be freed. Work towards ending society that spreads prisons and ruins wilderness. *This is the project that Marie has contributed to for decades, and it's fulfillment is now the best guarantor of her future freedom.*

Endnotes

1. Communications Management Units (CMU) are special prison units used to house prisoners with political or extremist connections, including many Muslim prisoners. As the name implies, communication in these units is incredibly restricted within these “prisons within prisons.” Daniel McGowan, an anarchist who was charged with E.L.F. actions during Operation Backfire in 2005, is currently housed in a CMU in Terre Haute, IN and has been working to create a great deal of publicity around these sketchy and secretive units. For an extensive archive of investigations into CMUs, visit <http://www.supportdaniel.org/cm/>.

2. The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act is a federal law that prohibits any person from engaging in certain conduct “for the purpose of damaging or interfering with the operations of an animal enterprise.” Passed in 2006, the law is an extension of the Animal Enterprise Protection Act, and has been used to target primarily above ground animal rights activists and classify them as terrorists. For more info see shac7.com and aeta4.org.

3. Eric McDavid is an anarchist who was arrested in 2006 on charges of planning attacks against environmentally devastating projects. He was entrapped by a young informant called ‘Anna’ who encouraged him, even providing recipes and materials on the government’s dime. Even though he carried out no actions, he was sentenced to nearly 20 years in prison, forced to serve as an example for those who dream of a better world. We connect his case to Marie’s because of their long sentences and our affection for them. For more information, visit supportrric.org.

4. see <http://anarchistnews.org/content/3912-demo-fourth-anniversary-maries-arrest>

Writing to Marie

Letters for Marie can be sent to:

Marie Mason #04672-061
FMC Carswell
Federal Medical Center
P.O. Box 27137
Fort Worth, TX 76127

This address is current as of 4/1/12. Marie can be moved at any time, so please check supportmariemason.org for her most recent address.

Marie's mail is heavily scrutinized, so please refrain from mentioning illegal acts as this endangers both you and her. However, do not let this stop you from writing to her- she loves to hear about walks in the woods, daily activities and projects, and many other things. All letters must be in English to get in, and we highly recommend writing her full name, number, and address on each page of the letter, as authorities have a tendency to "lose" envelopes and forget where letters are going.

Funds raised for Marie should be sent directly to her mother. Please don't deposit money into her commissary account yourself; a percentage of her commissary account will be deducted toward her massive restitution if the amount of money in the account gets too high. All money (checks made out to Karin Mason) can be mailed to:

Karin Mason
P.O. Box 352
Stanwood, MI 49346

Further Resources

Interwebz

supportmariemason.org - *Marie's support website*

june11.org - *Info about June 11th, international day of solidarity with longterm anarchist prisoners.*

greenisthenewred.com - *Reporting and analysis about the Green Scare.*

supporteric.org - *Eric McDavid's support website.*

ecoprisoners.org - *Eco prisoner support information.*

Articles and Zines

Reed, Henry: *Between Orwell and McCarthy :The Crucifixion of Marie Mason.* Fifth Estate #380, Spring 2009

McGowan, Daniel: *Exposing Little Guantanamo: Inside the CMU.* NY Anarchist Black Cross. Spring 2009

Solidarity with Eric McDavid (pamphlet) as well as many other printable materials by and about Eric, available on his support website as well as <http://zinelibrary.info>

