

DEATH ON THE YARD

The Untold Killings at Soledad & San Quentin

The guts of Soledad Prison is the "main line," a long corridor which Warden Cletus Fitzharris describes as "a quarter mile of madness." Branching off from it, like steel from a telephone pole, are the prison's various housing wings, dining halls, classrooms, its gymnasium and hospital. The prison's maximum security block, O-wing, also extrudes from the main line. Like the other wings, O-wing—called the Adjustment Center or A/C—is three tiers high. Each floor is a double row of small one-man cells, back to back.

While Soledad's 2500 main-liners shuffle back and forth in a daily routine of reveille, showers, mess hall, vocational training, industry shops and classrooms, O-wing inmates are locked in their six-by-nine-foot cells, surrounded by three sides of solid wall and a row of floor-to-ceiling bars covered with heavy steel mesh. Thirty minutes a day, on some days, inmates are let out onto a tier corridor to exercise. There had been daily recreational periods for basketball, handball and punching bags in a small, narrow exercise yard adjacent to the wing itself. The outdoor yard was closed and integrated exercise periods ended, however, with the fatal stabbing of a black inmate named Clarence Causey in April 1968. . . .

Because of the Causey death and the subsequent killing of another black inmate by guards, racial antagonism in O-wing was intense. Vengeance for violence and death to snitches are the two cornerstones of the convict code. The blacks in O-wing swore revenge. Aware of this, the guards stopped integrated exercises. The outdoor exercise yard, which had been used for basketball and handball, was closed. It was a time to tighten security. Henceforth, only one inmate at a time would be allowed out to exercise. . . .

By the summer of 1969, mutual fears and racial animosities between blacks and whites had increased to such intensity that five O-wing black prisoners tried to take their complaints



W. L. Nolen

and fears to court. Led by W. L. Nolen, a prison boxing champion who was quickly becoming politicized, the group filed civil suits against Warden Fitzharris, the Department of Corrections and several guards. . . . The Nolen suits charged that the guards were aware of "existing social and racial conflicts"; that the guards helped foment more racial strife by helping their white inmate "confederates" through "direct harassment

in ways not actionable in court." Nolen meant that his charges would be hard to prove, like leaving a cell door open "to endanger the lives of the plaintiffs." Also hard to prove was the fact that the guards made "false disciplinary reports" to keep blacks on max row in the "hole" for longer periods of time. . . .

In addition, Nolen swore that Soledad officials were "willfully creating and maintaining situations that creates and poses dangers to plaintiff [Nolen himself] and other members of his race." Nolen said he "feared for his life." The case never came to trial; four months after he wrote the petition Nolen was shot to death by an O-wing guard. Two other black inmates, one of whom signed Nolen's petition, were also shot to death.

The murder of W. L. Nolen, on January 13, 1970, began an incredible chain of tragedies that led the California prison system to disaster. The initial consequence was the first killing of a guard in Soledad history, a revenge murder, and from there the poison spread. In the 19 months following the January 13 incident, at least 40 persons were murdered as a result of events and circumstances in the California prison system. Of the 40 murders, 19 are directly linked to the series of tragedies which began with the shooting of W. L. Nolen. For the killing of seven guards, two CDC staff members and a Marin County judge, twenty-one blacks and two whites, all inmates, have been charged. No CDC guards or staff have been charged with the shooting deaths of seven black inmates.

These men died:

W. L. Nolen, black inmate, shot by white guard, O. G. Miller.
Cleveland Edwards, black inmate, shot by white guard, O. G. Miller.
Alvin Miller, black inmate, shot by white guard, O. G. Miller.

John V. Mills, white guard, beaten and shoved to his death; George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette, three black inmates, charged, acquitted.

William Shull, white guard, stabbed to death; seven blacks charged, three went to trial, all acquitted.

Robert J. McCarthy, white guard, stabbed to death; Hugo Pinell, brown inmate, charged.

Kenneth Conant, white prison administrator, stabbed to death; two whites charged.

William Christmas, black inmate, shot to death at the Marin Civic Center.

James McClain, black inmate, shot to death at Marin.

Jonathan Jackson, black youth, shot to death at Marin.

Harold J. Haley, white judge, shot to death at Marin; Ruchell Magee and Angela Davis charged; Davis acquitted, Magee now on trial.

Richard L. McComas, guard lieutenant, gun suicide, after about a hundred Soledad inmates were transferred to Deuel prison; reportedly committed suicide because he feared for the life of his men.

Leo Davis, white guard, stabbed to death while guarding a "snitch" who testified in the murder of guard Shull.

Paul Krasenes, white guard, stabbed and strangled to death.

Frank DeLeon, white guard, stabbed and shot.

Jere Graham, white guard, stabbed and shot; five blacks—George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, John Larry Spain, David Johnson and Willie Tate, one brown—Hugo Pinell, and two whites—an inmate named Luis Talamantes and an attorney, named Stephen Bingham—charged with the three guards' deaths and the two stabbing deaths of:

John Lynn,

Ronald Kane.

George Jackson, shot to death by two white guards.

James Carr, considered George Jackson's closest friend on the outside, shot to death on lawn of his home; two whites charged.

Stephen Bingham, Berkeley attorney, charged with smuggling gun to Jackson and conspiracy in guards' murders, presumed by both law enforcement and movement persons to be dead.

Four other people were critically wounded in two of the above incidents but they survived.

Gary Thomas, assistant district attorney, Marin County, paralyzed from the waist down by gunshot wound to spinal column.

Kenneth McCray, white guard, throat slashed from ear to ear.

Charles Breckenridge, white guard,

throat slashed badly.

Urbano Rubiaco, white guard, minor throat slashes, deep stab wounds to throat. . . .

How did all this happen? How did it begin? What were the conditions and circumstances under which a militant black leader like Nolen was shot and killed in the first place? Why was most of the evidence suppressed? Why is it that even now state investigators, district attorneys and prison officials quickly gloss over and cover up the shooting deaths of other black inmates but bring the full power of penal, investigatory, judicial and media forces to bear in the deaths of prison guards? Why is it that the circumstances surrounding the death of an inmate, black or white, can be suppressed and forgotten while the killing of a guard cannot be hushed up or forgotten? And finally, what beatings, what killings, what fecal-infested food, what dark filthy isolation, what parole refusal, what lies, what other indignities and what insight led or compelled the blacks to lash out and kill seven white guards? . . . And then what forces rushed to a cataclysm on January 13, 1970, when a corpulent white guard named Opie G. Miller squeezed off a shot that struck the breastbone of W. L. Nolen, a politicized black inmate who, for years, had been a close friend and comrade of a black convict named George Jackson. . . .

JANUARY 13, 1970:

THE DEATH OF W.L. NOLEN

Sergeant R. A. Maddix, a stocky Southerner who carried his belly a few inches in front of his wide leather belt, was the program sergeant responsible for reopening the exercise yard. Although Maddix said he was aware of the "racial vendetta war" in O-wing, he stood by his decision that once the yard opened both blacks and whites would be placed in the yard to exercise together. The only way the staff was going to stop the racial war, he told a white trusty clerk named John Martin, was to put everyone on the yard, "and if there was trouble, kill a couple of those black bastards over there." As the opening of the yard approached, Maddix began talking about the officer who would man

the gun tower. The gun guard selected was Opie G. Miller, who, like other guards assigned to gun towers, had trouble getting along with almost any inmate, white or black. O. G. Miller, Maddix confided to someone, was one guard who "didn't care and would shoot those black bastards and end all that trouble."

On December 29, 1969, Maddix handed out mimeographed sheets to O-wing prisoners informing them about yard release procedures. The men would be allowed to exercise in groups of up to 25. Each inmate would be allowed to carry a towel, since all the showering would be done in the newly installed yard showers. "When maximum yard is announced," Maddix had written, "each inmate who desires to go to the yard will remove his clothing and stand by with his clothes in his arms for release. *Failure to prepare for yard release*," the directive continued in underlined type, "*will be considered refusal to exercise, and will result in the inmate's exercise for that period being cancelled.*" Maddix's handout then directed the inmates to the O-wing sally port, a five-by-five-foot caged area, where the men would be given an unclothed body search. "So please cooperate," Maddix concluded, and signed his name.

When the prisoners considered the underlined sentence, mulling it over together with the almost constant exchanges of racial taunts and insults and the sly digs from Maddix and other guards, they concluded that "failure to prepare for yard release" was somehow equivalent to a lack of courage or simple fear. "It was like an insult," a black con told me. . . .

The O-wing exercise yard, a 40-by-150-foot concrete rectangle, was flanked on the west by O-wing's drab beige brick wall and on the east by the prison's hospital wing. . . . Along the O-wing wall, prison officials had placed a heavy punching bag, a speed bag, a pull-up bar, a water fountain and an open-air shower platform. A basketball hoop and backstop stood at the center of the yard near the south end, while the north-end wall served as a backstop for handball. Twenty feet over the yard, atop the dental wing on the south end, Soledad workmen had erected a wooden booth, the new gun tower for the yard. In the booth that

January morning was Opie G. Miller, a retired Army man and a reputed expert with the .30 caliber semi-automatic which he held in his hands.

Miller, 51, had joined the Soledad guard staff in August 1962, a year after he retired from the Army as a non-com with 20 years service. A short, stocky man with an oval face and slightly receding cropped hair, Miller was a product of Woden, Texas, a small agricultural town that is excluded from most atlases. As a guard, Miller had a reputation among prisoners and staff of being sullen and severe. That was probably the reason he was often assigned to standing watches in gun towers, where he would have little, if any, direct contact with inmates. Two days before the opening of the yard, Miller was "checked out" in the use of the .30 caliber rifle. As in the past, he performed well.

The release for yard exercise began at 8:45 A.M., when W. L. Nolen's cell door was opened by a switch in the officers' area. "Prepare for yard release," a guard yelled down the max row corridor. Nolen stepped out of his cell and walked down the corridor to the cage-like sally port. As directed by the mimeographed sheet handed out by Sergeant Maddix two weeks earlier, Nolen carried his clothing and a towel under his arms. Inside the sally port, he handed a guard the towel and his clothes, which consisted of coveralls, foam rubber shower shoes, a T-shirt, shorts and socks. While the clothes were being examined for shanks and razor blades by one guard, a second officer conducted a skin search, looking for concealed weapons in the prisoner's mouth, under his tongue, in his hair, in and behind his ears, under his armpits, between his toes, under his feet and in and around his rectum and genitals. The skin search is routine for all prisoners entering and leaving the maximum security cell area. "Spread 'em," a guard ordered. Nolen grabbed his buttocks and leaned forward. The other officer handed Nolen his clothing and the inmate dressed to enter the yard.

Nolen was the first prisoner released into the yard. As he stepped onto the concrete pavement in the quiet gray moments of that Monterey winter's morning, he could look back

over his right shoulder and see the armed guard, Opie Miller, above and behind him some 30 feet away. Nolen walked away from the gun, stepping across puddles of rain water toward the handball area at the north end.

Two white inmates—a lanky, lean-faced Chicano named Joseph ("Colorado") Ariaz and Howard ("Smiley") Hoyle—entered the yard after Nolen. The make-sheet on Ariaz described him as "assaultive" and noted that the Chicano "boasts about disliking niggers and considers them less than human." Hoyle was a racist himself. Just months earlier, he had stabbed a black prisoner in another wing of the prison.

Minutes later, Richard ("Cactus") Ferguson, "Hawaiian John" Fanene and Billie ("Buzzard") Harris joined these two near the hospital fence. Ferguson, 22, was doing three to life. Fanene, 24, was of Samoan ancestry. Soledad officials said he was "not necessarily a racist, but identified with whites." Harris was a white supremacist, a member of the so-called Aryan Brotherhood.

By the time the white trio joined their comrades at the hospital fence, three other black inmates—Earl Satcher, Ed Whiteside and John

while but the ball sailed over the fence and they stopped. When someone threw the ball back over the high fence, Whiteside took Nolen's place. Satcher, both hands hanging onto the ends of a white towel around his neck, laughed and joked and acted as a sort of greeter to other black prisoners as they entered the yard.

Raymond Guerrero, 29, a white inmate doing six months to ten years for narcotics possession, was another veteran of racial brawls. Soledad officials said Guerrero had, just two months before this date, been in a fight in which a black was badly beaten. Guerrero was the eleventh man into the yard. While he was joining the whites at the south end, Hawaiian John Fanene left the group, walked to the heavy punching bag along the O-wing wall and began pounding it. Between jabbing combinations, Fanene looked toward the gun tower. He said Miller, the gun guard, held the rifle "poised," as if ready to fire. This worried Fanene because he had been wounded in the yard at San Quentin and still carried the scars. Fanene stopped working on the heavy bag and moved over to the speed-punching bag, where he kept watching the tower as he punched. He was watching when Miller aimed and fired the first shot.

When Thomas Meneweather entered the yard, he "automatically" glanced up toward the gun tower and found himself "looking into the muzzle of O. G.'s carbine." Meneweather, Soledad officials said, had a "serious disciplinary record." He made zip guns and bombs and furnished them to other blacks on max row. When he entered the yard, Miller motioned him to the north end with a wave of the gun barrel. Meneweather challenged Randolph to a game of handball.

While Fanene punched the speed bag and glanced nervously at the gun tower, another white racist was cleared for yard exercise. Ronnie Dean ("Harpo") Harper was a close friend of the whites responsible for Clarence Causey's death, thus having earned a special hatred from the blacks, who wanted to "tattoo some knuckles onto the man's face." Harpo Harper joined the whites near the hospital fence.

The last two blacks to enter the yard were Cleveland Edwards and Alvin ("Jug") Miller. Edwards, twenty,



Earl Satcher

Randolph—were in the yard and had joined Nolen at the far north end. . . . The four blacks took a few steps to the center of the handball court and began warming up, slapping the handball against the cinderblock backstop. Nolen and Randolph played for a

was doing a relatively lengthy six months to ten years for struggling with a police officer. Soledad officials didn't like Edwards because he had a "negative attitude towards authority. . . ." Twenty-three-year-old Jug Miller, who would die within minutes, was serving five to life for robbery.

The last inmate to enter the yard before the shooting began was Robert ("Chuko") Wendekier, 21, a white con who was doing six months to five years for possession of a weapon. According to prison records, Wendekier was noted for "riotous behavior" and had "assaulted a number of inmates." Prison officials said that Wendekier, a Hawaiian, "goes with whites when trouble starts."

By now, 15 men had entered the yard. Each had been skin-searched for weapons. Almost all were considered "racist" by prison officials. Almost all had a prison record of racial fighting. All were aware of the racial score to be settled for the Causey killing. Since they were unarmed, no one expected to get killed, but a free-swinging, knee-jabbing, foot-stomping melee was anticipated as guards, inmates and prison staff awaited the beginning spark. It was like placing scorpions and black widow spiders in a shoebox. . . . As O-wing administrator Eugene Peterson admitted in a confidential memo to Warden Fitzharris, "Most of the men [in the yard] have been to the other lock-ups [prisons] at one time or another and know most of the inmates in the other lock-ups. The hate or alliances go deep and many are of long years standing, i.e., a friend of mine was stabbed by a friend of yours, so I'm going to have to stab you."

The carnage began shortly after Chuko Wendekier entered the yard. Wendekier walked under the basketball hoop in the center of the yard and ambled over to the fence, where he began talking with Harper, Harris and Fanene, who had just stopped punching the speed bag. The four men laughed and joked about the "niggers" playing handball, about getting out on the yard for the first time in more than a year, about the anticipated fistfight and about the gun guard pointing the rifle around.

When Fanene left the speed bag, W. L. Nolen began punching it. Nolen

called to Meneweather, who had been helping Nolen with his court petitions against the prison, and suggested that they punch the heavy bag. Nolen worked with the heavy bag while Meneweather held it and watched. Meneweather had also been anxious about the gun tower. He noticed that the gun guard had his aim on them as they approached the bag and kept the rifle leveled at them while Nolen punched it.

Nolen, who had won most of the boxing matches he fought in prison tournaments, had just given the heavy bag a few combinations when Wendekier approached the drinking fountain along the O-wing wall. As Chuko passed near him, Nolen yelled at him and threw a quick right, slamming his knuckles into the white con's forehead. Wendekier returned three punches, then decided that Nolen, with his boxing experience, was too big and too fast to square off against. Chuko dove for Nolen's legs, grabbing his blue denim trouser legs, trying to pull Nolen down. Meanwhile, Fanene, who had walked up with Wendekier, was standing slightly behind Chuko. Fanene threw a few punches at Nolen, punches that whizzed past Wendekier's ear, but he missed. Fanene, his mind flashing quickly on the scar he still bore from the San Quentin yard, turned once more to look at the gun guard. He watched as Opie G. Miller aimed and fired.



Soledad, California

The first bullet tore into Nolen's chest, piercing his body just to the right of the breastbone. A white wit-

ness saw Nolen sag to his knees, clap his hands behind his head, elbows shaking, and fall forward, his forehead slamming into the concrete. Wendekier said he kicked Nolen a few times, unaware that Nolen was bleeding to death. Meneweather, who had let go of the bag he was holding for Nolen, started for Chuko to stop him from kicking his black friend. He didn't reach Wendekier because Billie Harris and Harpo Harper jumped him first.

"Watch out," Cleveland Edwards yelled at Meneweather.

Meneweather, a powerfully built man and a judo expert, turned to meet Harris and Harper. He caught Harris in midair, letting the white con's momentum carry him, and threw Harris to the pavement. Edwards called that he would look after Nolen but as he ran toward the fallen black leader the gun guard squeezed off another shot. Edwards grabbed his stomach and fell on his face. The shot went through Edwards and smashed into Meneweather's left hand.

John Randolph and Ed Whiteside were playing handball when they heard the rifle shots. They spun around and saw Edwards fall to the concrete, holding his stomach. Randolph started running, zig-zagging toward the fence near the hospital, then back toward the shower stalls. He heard another shot. The bullet hit Jug Miller in the gut as Miller was running along the O-wing wall toward the fight scene. Randolph, who was just a few steps away, tried to grab Jug Miller to stop him from falling but he couldn't. Miller was dead weight. He fell near the pull-up bar and speed bag as Randolph let go and turned to face Billie Harris, who had got up from Meneweather's judo throw. Randolph and Harris glared briefly at each other. Then, glancing at the carnage around him, Harris decided to stop fighting. He walked a few steps, paused, and felt a burning sensation in his groin. He had been shot in the testicles.

Satcher, who had been pacing back and forth in the northwest corner of the yard, also had headed for the fight. By the time he got to the middle of the yard, at least three shots had been fired. Satcher squared off against Cactus Ferguson, each feinting with left jabs and threatening rights, but neither landed a punch. When the fourth bul-

let was fired and both men noticed that inmates had actually been shot, they put their hands down. Two of the wounded blacks moaned. Harris, a testicle shot off, sat on the concrete pavement, loudly cursing the blacks and the gun guard. Satcher cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled, "It's all over with."

"Well, it better be all over with," Opie Miller, the gun guard, yelled back.

The four surviving black prisoners first tried to figure out who was the most seriously wounded. Satcher and Randolph, kneeling over Nolen asked how badly he was hit. "I'm probably hit in the leg," said Nolen, but his shirt showed bleeding in the chest and back. The men decided to move Jug Miller.

"Everyone was now waiting for the doctor," said a witness, "but after about ten minutes nothing happened. We then began hollering to the gunman in the tower to open up the emergency gate to the hospital, but he refused and just stood there with his rifle aimed at us." After 15 minutes passed, Meneweather decided to try to take Jug Miller off the yard. He kneeled down so two other black cons could place Miller across his back and shoulders. "I started to walk toward the door through which we had entered the yard," said Meneweather, "but the tower guard pointed the gun at me and shook his head. Then I started forward with tears in my eyes, expecting to be shot down every second, but the tower guard told me, 'That's far enough.'"

"If you take another step, it'll be your last," Opie Miller shouted from the tower. "Nobody leaves the yard until I get an official O.K."

"If they don't get back, shoot another one," Sergeant Maddix yelled from the open O-wing door.

John Randolph and Ed Whiteside carried W. L. Nolen up the hospital ramp but they were stopped by a guard who pointed a tear gas gun in their faces. "I started cussing and inching forward," said Randolph, "until the gunman in the tower told me to stop and pointed his rifle at us. So we stopped."

By this time, Nolen had drifted into shock and was trying to swallow his

tongue. Randolph slapped Nolen's face and the wounded man calmed down. But a minute later Nolen's eyes rolled up to the top of his head and he started biting his tongue. "I began slapping his face again," said Randolph, "but to no avail."

While the blacks were arguing with the guards about taking the wounded off the yard, two white prisoners—Ariaz and Guerrero—moved to the north end of the yard and played handball. They played for about ten minutes.

Finally, three guards and two MTAs (civilian medical technical assistants) appeared at the O-wing sally port and walked onto the yard. The guards were carrying tear gas guns. An MTA stopped by each of the wounded black prisoners and mutely shook his head three times. The guards said the wounded could be brought in off the yard but that the men would enter through O-wing instead of directly up the hospital ramp to the emergency rooms. This meant a long circuitous route to the hospital, through the series of O-wing doors, down part of the prison's main-line corridor and through the hospital security doors. Both the blacks and the whites protested, arguing that the hospital gate, whose ramp jutted out into the yard barely twenty feet from the wounded men, should be opened. They knew that prison laundry was taken in through there almost every day. The guards refused. . . .

The bullets that ripped into Nolen, Edwards and Miller did not kill the men outright. According to witnesses, all three men lay bleeding in the yard for 15 to 20 minutes before officials would unlock any gates to take them off the yard. The guards never did unlock the two doors which led directly to the prison hospital. The three blacks bled to death.

A "corrected copy" of the highly confidential report of the chief medical officer at Soledad, Dr. Daniel W. Boone, stated that Nolen "was brought to the hospital in a moribund condition . . . from a circular 4 mm. wound in the right 4th interspace just to the right of the sternum." The bullet was about as close to the middle of a man's chest as a shot can be placed.

Jug Miller, the doctor said, was brought to surgery in a "near mori-

bund state." Miller had a four-millimeter circular wound in the "epigastrium just below the xyphoid process," just below the middle chest, slightly above dead center on the stomach.

Cleveland Edwards was carried into the prison hospital "bleeding profusely from the left femoral area," a large artery in the groin. Boone reported that he tried to expose the severed vessels to control the hemorrhaging but by then the "subject had already succumbed."

Billie ("Buzzard") Harris lost a testicle. . . .

Word of the triple killings flashed quickly throughout the Soledad "main line." Within hours various groups of black inmates were demanding the arrest of the gun guard and a grand jury investigation. Investigators and attorneys from the Monterey County district attorney's office poked and probed, but after a passage of three days, there was no word on the progress of the "investigation." The prison continued tense, "like a fire-cracker fixing to explode," as one white inmate described it.

During the evening of the third day, the Monterey County district attorney told reporters in an interview that Opie G. Miller's killing of the three black prisoners was, in his personal opinion, "probable justifiable homicide by a public officer in the performance of his duty." When the black inmates heard this report on television, they were incensed. Within an hour a white guard named John V. Mills lay dying on the concrete pavement of Y-wing. He died in the prison hospital without regaining consciousness.

Mills probably never knew any of the truth about the killings on January 13. His death was revenge, cold detached revenge. Opie Miller—the man who shot Nolen, Edwards, Miller and Harris—took an extended vacation in Germany. The Mills death, the first killing of a guard in Soledad history, resulted in the arrest of three black inmates: George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette. Due to the incredibly heavy-handed and racist treatment of these three men during pre-trial hearings in Salinas, defense attorneys won a transfer of venue to San Francisco, and the case of the three

rapidly became a cause celebre in California. Movement forces called them the "Soledad Brothers" and their



"The Soledad Brothers"

case—which focused on racial injustice and inhuman prison conditions—began receiving wider attention and press coverage. It was not until August 1970, however, that the press really closed in. For it was then that George Jackson's younger brother, Jonathan, armed himself and entered the Marin County Courthouse. The younger Jackson emerged with five white hostages, including an assistant D.A. and a Superior Court judge, hostages they wanted to exchange for the freedom of the Soledad Brothers. In a murderous barrage of gunfire, Jonathan Jackson was killed. So were two other black inmates, James McClain and William Christmas, and the white judge, Harold Haley. Ruchell Magee, one of the survivors in the van, is on trial for murder as this is being written.

Within days of the Marin Courthouse shooting, law enforcement officials reported that Angela Davis had purchased the guns involved in the kidnapping. Warrants were issued for her arrest and she was captured in a downtown New York motel nearly three months after the event. Federal authorities delivered Ms. Davis to California, where she was imprisoned at the Marin County jail. Meanwhile,

George Jackson had been transferred to San Quentin.

AUGUST 21, 1971: THE DEATH OF GEORGE JACKSON

San Quentin Prison is California's oldest. Because it has the only gas chamber in the state, it also became the most famous. It was here in the late spring of 1960 that Caryl Chessman lost his ninth stay of execution and was strapped into a steel chair to inhale the bitter almond stench of two cyanide capsules. It is here that Robert Kennedy's assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, and the Tate murderers Charles Manson and Charles Watson sit and sleep their life away. It was here that Ruchell Magee awaited trial for his involvement in the Marin County Courthouse tragedy. And it was here, on a plaza of flower beds and walkways, that George Jackson met his death on a late August Saturday in 1971.

Except for a gusty wind that funneled in through the Golden Gate, the day George Jackson died was sunny and warm. He had expected at least one visitor that August 21 and inside the Adjustment Center he kept asking the guards whether his visitor had arrived. The guards said no, even though they knew otherwise. Two people were waiting to see Jackson but the visiting room officer had told the guards on the telephone that they had not been "cleared."

The two visitors, a young, white radical attorney named Stephen Bingham and a black female activist named Vanita Anderson, had signed in at the prison's East Gate at 10:15 A.M.

Inside the East Gate, the two walked about 200 yards to the prison's security fence, where all visitors are required to pass through a metal detector. Purses, bags, tape recorders, briefcases and similar large objects, while not passing through the "inspectoscope" detector, are examined routinely by the guard at that gate.

That Saturday, Correctional Officer Bernard C. Betts processed more than 225 visitors through his metal detector. It was not his normal duty station but he had manned the machine before. It was another routine day for Betts. A man wearing a leg brace set the metal detector off. So did a woman wearing a naugahyde coat with

three-inch metallic buttons.

Steve Bingham passed through the inspectoscope at about 10:20 A.M. Betts remembered that the young attorney was wearing a mod necktie and a corduroy jacket, his long hair combed neatly. Betts could not recall that the Berkeley attorney carried anything.

Vanita Anderson walked up to the inspectoscope carrying what looked to Betts like a portable typewriter case. Light-complexioned, with a mild Afro and wearing a pair of finely handcrafted copper earrings, Ms. Anderson was dressed in a three-piece checkerboard suit.

"What's your title?" Betts asked.

"I'm a legal investigator," she answered.

"Who are you going to visit?" Betts inquired.

"George Jackson," Ms. Anderson replied.

Betts instructed her to pass him the bluish-gray metallic case, holding it away from the metal detector so the case would not set the machine off. She thrust the case toward him "in a contemptuous manner" and Betts began examining the contents. The case was about 20 inches long, 16 inches wide and some four or five inches deep. Inside, Betts found several inches of yellow legal-sized paper and a tape recorder. The recorder was nine to ten inches long, five or six inches wide and almost four inches thick. The guard carefully removed the back of the recorder and saw four C-size batteries, various diodes and transistorized parts and a speaker. Betts did not try to turn the recorder on to see if it worked. He said later that there were about three inches of the recorder which he could not see. He also said that the tape recorder and the attaché case belonging to Ms. Anderson were the only ones which passed through his gate that day.

"You're clear," Betts said to the woman, returning the case. He picked up his phone and called the visiting room to inform guards there that the black female visitor was carrying a tape recorder inside her attaché case. . . .

The visiting room guard was Daniel P. Scarborough, a quiet, gangly officer who was well-liked by most of the

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CONFESSIONS OF A SINGLE MOTHER

Woman with a broken foot and with a two-and-a-half-year-old child needs a woman to help three hours a day to make meal, get child ready for bed." When I read that ad in our local women's newsletter, I felt that I had been there before. I remembered the last time I had had a serious illness, sitting in bed and leafing through the pages of my red telephone book for someone who might help take care of my daughter. I shudder at the memory.

I am writing about women who are divorced or were never married: women who are raising children alone. The illusion persists that the nuclear family is "normal" even though just 35 percent of the nation's population live in nuclear families. In fact, the number of families headed by women is rising more rapidly than the number of all families. But we are still pariahs. Our economics are marginal. Our needs are not met nor even acknowledged.

What exactly does a mother do when she has a broken foot? What does a mother do when she has to go to work and her child is sick? I remember the day my daughter woke up with a stomach ache and I took her to the doctor for a urine sample. I had cancelled a morning hour of teaching, thus forgoing my salary. (Like many single mothers, I work part time and haven't the luxury of sick leave.) When we got to the doctor's office, however, my daughter could produce no urine. We agonized for an hour and a half. "You'll have to come back later in the day," the receptionist told me. But, by this time, my daughter's stomach ache had vanished, and I had hoped to take her to day care so that I could return to work. "Can't I get the sample at

home?" I asked, "I can't come back today, I have to work." The receptionist picked up a buzzing phone before she darted righteously at me, "Your daughter's health should come first." "She has to eat, too," I mumbled as we hurried out the door.

If we go to work, there are always guardians of the public morality to make us feel guilty for not being at home with our children. If we live on welfare we are the object of political pogroms, of the unending curiosity of social workers, of the Kafkaesque bureaucracy. In any case we are likely to be poor; likely to be tired; and, despite all our efforts, likely to be witnesses to the sufferings of our children.

Statistics yield up some part of the truth. There are 5.6 million families in the U.S. headed by women, more than one family in ten. According to Department of Labor yardsticks, about one third of these families live in poverty whether the mother is working or not. We make up 35 percent of all families living in poverty. Of families earning under \$2,000 a year, 63 percent are headed by women, while of families earning \$10,000 or more, the figure is only two percent.

But these figures show nothing of the struggle to survive, the battle a woman goes through, with the divorce courts, the county welfare office, the job market, to find day care, to somehow get through each day, each year, and feed herself and her children.

According to popular myth, divorced men are hounded into poverty by avaricious, lazy and luxury-seeking females. The facts argue differently. According to a report written by the Citizens Advisory Council on the Status of Women, "The rights to support of women and children are much more limited than is generally known and enforcement is

very inadequate . . . fathers by and large are contributing less than half the support of children in divided families; and . . . alimony and child support awards are very difficult to collect."

The logic of the divorce court is in fact based on the false assumption that the earning powers and leisure to use those earning powers are equal for both the mother and the father.* In the lives of real people, these assumptions make for poverty for the mother and her children, but not necessarily for the children's father. Take the hypothetical couple Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Mr. Smith earns about \$640 a month, the national average for a full-time male worker in 1968. He is ordered by the court to pay \$125 for the support of his child. If one deducts that amount from his salary, Mr. Smith is left with \$515 a month for himself.

Mrs. Smith and her child are not quite so well off. Of course she cannot live on \$125 a month, so she invests this child support payment in full-time day care (which usually costs from \$100 to \$150 a month) and goes out looking for work. The unemployment rate is a third higher for women than for men, but let's forget that and assume Mrs. Smith is lucky enough to find a job. She begins to earn the median national salary for a full time working woman in 1968—that is, about \$370 a month. (In fact, the average salary for a woman with children is somewhat lower: \$333 a month.) Thus both Mrs. Smith and her child live on less than three quarters of what Mr. Smith alone has—assuming, of course, that Mr. Smith *does* make his child support payments; in real life, he often neglects to do that.

I had my own experience with the California divorce courts. As I sat in

* The idea that a mother might be paid for her child rearing and housekeeping activities is totally foreign to the court.

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by Susan Griffin