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## H.I.V., Relationships and Gaol

### A Tough Environment for Wayne and Cheryl

by Wayne Jones

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... relationships are a reality within the New South Wales prison system and that these relationships need to be extremely strong to survive.

**M**y name is Wayne Jones and I am a thirty-six-year-old H.I.V. Positive inmate in the Long Bay Hilton. I have been in a relationship with a Transsexual for three and a half years

now who is also H.I.V. Positive. Our story while not totally unique is a very complicated one and certainly one that one day needs to be told in full. What we want to discuss in this article though is how very tough it is for people such as us to survive in this world of the Macho image and still be able to earn the respect and friendship that we have been so lucky with.

*... we are now in a legal de facto relationship in the eyes of the courts, it is not seen that way in the eyes of the Department of Corrective Services.*

My partner and best friend, a forty-six-year-old Transsexual has, like me, spent most of her adult life behind bars, While we would both love nothing more than to one day get out of gaol together, we both know that it will never happen. As I have already said, I am a H.I.V. positive person and as I still have fourteen

years gaol left to serve, I don't ever really expect to see the outside world again. My partner on the other hand was recently released from gaol but was back seven days later. Now some people would say that that is very irresponsible, however they do not know the circumstances as I know them. Cheryl came back because she wanted to and she didn't feel that she had any other choice if she wanted to live out her remaining years with any sort of real happiness and peace. Why Cheryl couldn't achieve that peace and happiness outside is another story altogether and one that cannot be told here, or by me. What I can tell you however is why Cheryl 'wanted' to come back to gaol. Basically it was because she wanted to be with me. Although I had spent nearly two years convincing Cheryl that she should accept parole and go home, I can now understand why she had put up so much opposition. I wanted Cheryl to have some quality time on the outside before the AIDS virus takes its full effect on her and there is nothing wrong with me wanting that for Cheryl other than the fact that it was not what Cheryl wanted. How can a person have quality time on the outside if they are hurting every day because they can't be with the person that they want to be with? That is the question that Cheryl put to me when she came back and it is a question that I can't answer because I know she is right. You can't have quality time of any real value if all you are doing all the time is pining to be with the person you love.

Anyway, regardless of whether people understand it or not, Cheryl did what she wanted to do and came back to gaol to be with the person she loves and wants to share her life with. Thankfully we were able to be placed back in the same gaol and cell as each other again, a fact that we are extremely grateful for as it was by no means a safe bet that we would get back together. It was in fact, highly probable that certain factions of the Department of Corrective Services (D.C.S.) would cause us to be placed in separate cells if not gaols. There is quite a few people with the D.C.S. who would dearly love to have myself and Cheryl put into separate gaols. Some feel that when a person comes to gaol they should lose ALL rights including the right to be with the person you love. Others feel that to leave Cheryl and I together is to condone what they see as homosexuality. There is also the few (a small few thankfully) that feel that because we both have AIDS we should be segregated and because Cheryl is a tranny she should be segregated or placed into protection.

Thankfully for us there are some people with the D.C.S. who are understanding of our situation and have therefore made arrangements for Cheryl and I to be left together for now at least. There is however always the constant fear of one day being told that we are to be parted and if this ever proves to be the case it would totally devastate the both of us to such an extent that I doubt very much that either of us would survive very long at all. Its one thing for a couple to be separated with one person in gaol and the other on the outside, but it's an entirely different situation when both people are in gaol and different gaols at that. At least the other way there is always the visits, but if Cheryl and I were to ever be placed into different gaols now, we would certainly not get any visits with each other as even though we are now in a legal de facto relationship in the eyes of the courts, it is not seen that way in the eyes of the Department of Corrective Services. The fact that Cheryl and I have now been sharing a cell together for just over three years does not really mean much to some people and the fact that in that time we have spent almost twenty-four hours a day with each other also means very little to some people. To us however it means a great deal more than most people could ever imagine for the things that we have had to go through and survive in that time are too numerous to mention here.

To be involved in a relationship in gaol is one story and to have the H.I.V. virus in gaol is another story but to be in a relationship in

gaol and to have the H.I.V. virus is an entirely different story again as both Cheryl and I can testify. It is hard enough to deal with either issue on its own but to deal with both issues at once is a task that would cripple most lesser relationships. The more adversity that we have encountered, the closer we have become and the harder people have tried to come between us, the stronger they make our relationship.

To be knowingly involved in a relationship in gaol means to leave yourself open for abuse, discrimination, torment and a great deal of hurt. To be knowingly H.I.V. positive in gaol means all that again and more. Put the two together and believe me it can make a persons life absolute misery if they are not ready to handle the repercussions that it causes.

Cheryl and I have been very lucky in so far as we are both more than prepared to battle the odds and fight to stay together as we both feel that to give in and not fight for the relationship would be to just quit on life in general. Having said that however, I must also say that we have had quite a lot of support from people who have been in a position to assist us with our constant fight to stay together. We have had professional staff and Prison Officers alike help us with our battle and I have to admit that we probably wouldn't still be together if it wasn't for that help and support.

As I have already stated earlier, Cheryl and I spend twenty-four hours a day in each others company and while that seems a bit much for some people, it is that way because we both like it and want it that way. We work together and live together and are very rarely apart for any longer than about half an hour. I guess it all comes down to the knowledge that either one of us could be placed on escort or worse yet, die from the H.I.V. virus, so we therefore want to spend as much time with each other now while we still can. It takes a very special kind of relationship to survive in gaol for any great length of time and our relationship certainly is a special one to say the very least.

While I could write much more about ours and other relationships in gaol, I will refrain from doing so partly because I would need to type another four or five pages and partly because I have drifted away slightly from what I originally intended to write about.

I guess the main point that I am trying to make is that relationships are a reality within the New South Wales prison system and that these relationships need to be extremely strong to survive. While we don't have to worry about such things as paying the rent or phone bill etc, we do have to constantly worry about being placed on escort for other gaols or being placed into different cells etc. Next time you and your partner are arguing or next time you see another couple arguing, just remind them how very lucky they are in being together and not have to worry about some prison officer not liking them and causing them to be placed in separate homes or suburbs.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.