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Wayne and Cheryl

Maintaining their Relationship in Prison

by Wayne & Cheryl

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I'm very happy. I love [Wayne] very much.

Polare Magazine: How has prison changed since your time inside?

Wayne: I'm thirty-six years old and have been in gaol for seventeen years all up with ten years in child

welfare institutions before that. Prison was better back then because it was like a family. Crims were crims and they stood all together like they were brothers. If a crim had something that another crim didn't and he didn't need it he would give it. He wouldn't sell it or hire it he'd give it.

The attitude back then was one of solidarity that the inmates should stand united and rake their aggression out on the screws or the system instead of each other. And the officers were the same. It was us against them and them

against us. Now it's them against them and us against us.

Cheryl: I first came to prison in 1969 as a transsexual. I was very, very young and feminine looking. The difference in the system back then was that transsexuals were looked up to like goddesses. They were treated like the queen of England. Usually the so called heavies used to "sign on" with them - have a relationship with them and look after them.

And it wasn't usually stand over tactics. But that did happen sometimes. I was very lucky it only happened to me once. For the first twelve months he looked after me like there was no tomorrow. But in the end he was a "bad drunk" and got very, very violent. He physically assaulted me many times. I've still got the scars.

Finally after sixteen to seventeen months, I got myself dasso'd out of the gaol. For me to tell the authorities I would have been a dog and branded for life in gaol. That was really the only bad relationship I've had. I'd have the occasional slap in the mouth for being cheeky or being smart to guys but on the whole that was the only one that really hurt me. I've been really lucky.

Generally though, it was better back then. Transsexuals get a much harder time from the new breed of inmate who have come into the system. You'd get abuse - they'd scream when you'd walk past the yards. You'd never see that in the old days because someone would have punched and belted them all around the yard.

Polare Magazine: Why do you think the changes have taken place?

Wayne: Most obviously because of the drug users in prison. Now 75 to 80 percent of the guys in gaol are in for drug related offences. They are not real criminals and they should not be in gaol. They haven't committed any crime other than to support their drug habit.

But it's also about the oldest trick in the book - divide and conquer. Get us fighting amongst ourselves and we're leaving them alone. So an officer will approach one of the more well known inmates and say "be careful of that guy over there he's an informer or he's a child molester." There was also solidarity back then because it was all we had. You had a bible in your cell and that was it. If there was an issue that needed to be fought then nobody had anything to lose by fighting for it. We were all brothers - sure there were times when you fought and even times when you punched-on with one of your brothers but that happens outside too. I've punched-on with my real brothers outside many times.

Polare Magazine: On sexual assault, rock-spiders and psychiatrists ("trick-cyclists")

Wayne: I think that you'd find that the number of men in prison who've been sexually assaulted as children is a lot higher than you would ever imagine. Especially those that have come from boys' homes. It's a dark kept secret. I think it's why people hate rock-spiders so much, but it's not just that. I think the hatred that is caused by being molested in boys' homes is the hatred that makes people commit crimes against society. Especially when welfare took the kid that was being molested and put him in an institution where they were abused again.

The issue should definitely be talked about. I don't think it will be though. The first thing you'd need are people who really want to work with inmates who have that problem and they need to remain working with the inmate until the problem is resolved and the inmate no

longer needs to talk about it.

I've had psychiatric treatment since I was seven years old. Now I very rarely talk to a psychiatrist or psychologist because many, many times I've started to address issues only to get half way through before that person has gone for another job, gone to another gaol or I've gone to another gaol. I'm sick and tired of trying anymore. I think maybe groups could work though if they got support.

There's not nearly so much sexual assault in prison anymore although it still happens. AIDS has stopped all that and also gaol is different. There are more ways to let out your frustrations and more things to do.

Cheryl: I was raped prior to meeting Wayne. If I'd reported it I would have been a dog, the stigma sticks, and your name is no good in gaol. You've got to keep all the feelings locked inside and deal with them the best way you can. Rape isn't so common for transsexuals though. It's more common for boys. I don't know why that is. Maybe because they see boys as an easier mark. Most transsexuals have a bit of heart. They stand up for themselves and they would fight.

Polare Magazine: How did you meet?

Wayne: I first met Cheryl shortly after she had discovered that she was H.I.V. positive. She was very concerned about other people's reactions in the prison as she feared they would see a transsexual with H.I.V. and think that she must be spreading it around the gaol.

Cheryl: I caught the virus purposely. I was in a very depressed state of mind. I'm not the suicidal type but I'd lost hope. I thought "at least if I get infected it's a way out". The people I slept with were positive. They thought I was too. At the time I weighed 38 kilos - I was suffering from anorexia nervosa. I looked like someone out of a concentration camp. Everyone thought I had AIDS so it was easy to get someone to sleep with me.

Wayne: I then got the results of a blood test to show that I was also H.I.V. positive. That brought us closer together. Instead of me giving her the support she needed it was her giving me the support that I needed.

It wasn't long after that that we went two-out and we've been two-out ever since. We don't have a sexual relationship contrary to what most people think - they think that we must be in the cell having sex all the time. We don't. Not because we don't want to. It's mainly because of concern for each other's health. Just because we're both positive doesn't mean we can just go ahead and have unsafe sex, we can't otherwise we infect each other with each other's strain of the virus - we'd overdose ourselves with the virus for want of a better phrase!

Polare Magazine: The Relationship

Cheryl: If I had met Wayne before all this I would never have been in this situation. I'd still be negative. I'm not sad about it though I'm very happy. I love him very much.

Wayne: It's very hard trying to maintain a close relationship in prison. There's always the concern that you're going to be separated, that she'll be sent to one gaol and me another. We have been extremely lucky, in so far as we've had a lot of support from some of the professional staff and some of the executive staff to allow us to remain together at this stage.

A lot of people respect us for our honesty both about our relationship and about our H.I.V. status but some people resent us. Some people think that you lose your right to have a relationship when you come to prison. That's not right. To come to prison is the punishment. You're not meant to undergo further punishment inside.

Polare Magazine: What's it like being in a relationship with a transsexual?

Wayne: If someone had said to me four years ago that I was going to fall in love with a transsexual I would have punched them straight between the eyes! Now I have to sit here and say that it is without doubt the best thing that has ever happened to me in my life. Being with Cheryl has opened my eyes to so many things. All my life I've had it drummed into me that you've got to be a man, and do this to be a man and if you don't then you're a sissy or whatever. Some people would say that I'm gay because of this relationship. And I guess there was a time when the relationship first started when I was thinking "Shit am I gay? I must be gay". But I don't think I am. I regard Cheryl as a woman. Cheryl's been a transsexual all of her life. Other transsexuals that I know have only been women for the last three years of their life. I can't regard them as a woman in the same light that I regard Cheryl.

What makes a man? And what makes a woman? We think that if you're born with a penis that you're a man, a vagina and you're a woman. I guess being with Cheryl has taught me that that is a load of crap. What's inside a person is what makes them a woman or a man.

She was born a woman with a penis. There are people born with both a vagina and a penis - what do you call them? And my attitudes to homosexuality have changed as well. If they proved to me that I definitely was gay because of this relationship then I still don't care. I'm happy in this relationship. Why should I worry about whether it's a gay relationship or a heterosexual relationship?

All I know is that I was looking at fourteen years in prison with absolutely nothing to look forward to, with no desire to wake up the next day. Now, and over the last three years that we've been together I've been very, very happy. I do look forward to tomorrow and the next day.

Polare Magazine: Being a transsexual in a men's prison

Cheryl: Of course if I wasn't in a relationship with Wayne I'd want to be in a female prison - no hesitations at all. The only reason I haven't had the surgery is because I've been in prison. Now though, because I'm H.I.V. positive, even if I were outside they probably

wouldn't operate on me.

There's a lot of discrimination against transsexuals in here. If you've got bras or female clothes in your property it is very hard to get them out. They give you women's hormones so you act, feel, talk and get sexually aroused totally like a female and yet they want you to wear male attire and refuse to give you things like bras. You need bras to help the bust line grow. And to wear male underwear for a transsexual is a big thing. It takes away your identity. It's degrading.

Wayne: If people knew what transsexuals had to go through - discrimination from everyone including often their friends and families - then they'd have a hell of a lot of respect for them.

Polare Magazine: On death and dying

Cheryl: I know my time is very limited. I've been given eighteen months to two years to live but I'll outlive that, doctors are always wrong. I'm happy and that's all that's important. I don't think if a cure were found tomorrow that Wayne and I would take it.

Wayne: I am doing a fourteen year sentence with AIDS. I don't for one minute expect to live the fourteen years to one day get out. I have no desire to even try if I'm going to do it by myself. If Cheryl and I were to split, we'd both give up. Recently Cheryl was released. I was shattered and was sent to hospital. I gave up although I wanted her to go out and have some good quality time outside. She gave up too and came back after seven days.

The biggest fear I've had all my life is to not be useful in some way or another. And that fear hits home harder now than ever before. I really fear dementia, not being able to care for myself when I'm no longer of any use to anyone. Death? I welcome it. I've never been scared of it. I motivate myself to fight for Cheryl's benefit. While ever we're together we're getting some beautiful things out of life that I've never had before.

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