

At Grand Valley Institute for Women, a federal prison in Kitchener, Ontario, there has been a recent crackdown against LGBTQ2+ prisoners and/or prisoners in relationships amongst themselves. Intimate relationships between prisoners were being attacked by a clique of guards who took it upon themselves to physically intimidate queer prisoners, throw them in solitary, threaten transfers to remote institutions, lay bogus institutional charges and increase prisoners' security levels. In response, prisoners at GVI started a call-in campaign to pressure staff to stop the ongoing harrassment ([gviwatch.wordpress.com](http://gviwatch.wordpress.com)). This campaign is currently on hold as prisoners have secured approval to form an LGBTQ2+ support group and are fighting to ensure it becomes a reality.

Love and rage to Nyki and all other LGBTQ2+ prisoners in Grand Valley and everywhere. Up the queers, fuck the screws!

For a detailed and personal account of the criminalization of LGBTQ2+ prisoners at GVI, check out Nyki Kish's blog at [changeandprison.wordpress.com](http://changeandprison.wordpress.com) Here's an excerpt:

*"It was May of 2015 when my relationship was publicized. We were moved into separate units and things have only worsened since. By the enforcement of one rule, everything that had been private and positive for me became public and criminalized. This event began my formal introduction into experiencing the worst of a prison. We submitted requests to every department that we could, explaining the nature and routine of our relationship, offering to meet any institutional boundary or requirement to live together again. Asking management to acknowledge that women are routinely moved into units to accommodate healthy friendships. We said that it was not fair, if we were complying with all the rules, that we were excluded from this practice and treated differently than other women. But all our requests were denied.*

*We tried, initially, to make the best of being separated. But we had no idea what being forced to interact in only the public spaces within this prison, within the limited time frame of work breaks and movement hours, would entail. We had no idea that being in a public relationship in this prison would open the door for us to experience so much harm. We became subject to harsh comments and bizarre treatment from guards. Outside of the security and quiet of our cells, where we used to spend all our time, there was a corrupt and aggressive climate within this prison. It is a climate that we dove deep within to continue seeing one another.*

*At first, they were small events. One day a guard yelled at us for passing apples, another day they charged my partner for carrying water for me.*

*Over the next 6 months, things progressively got worse; exposing us to the side of this prison that we did not know existed. Until today, where my partner was re-classified as a maximum security prisoner after having spent twenty days in segregation, while the acting warden decided whether or not to approve the re-classification. Once negative encounters began, we called out for help, calls which repeatedly fell on deaf ears. We tried and tried to express to senior management the issues that exist in the medium compound. Yet as events got worse and worse in nature, the responses to our requests became shorter and shorter. No one wanted to listen to us. Our complaints involved CSC employees and policies. In the last few weeks before they segregated my partner, the climate at the Grand Valley Institution for Women had gotten so bad, not just with us but in the general way, that I decided I needed to blog again.*

*It was only hours after I sent my first blog out that several guards stood throughout the compound and in front of my unit. They went into my partners unit, handcuffed her and took her to segregation. They took her three days after they had threatened to take her. Threatened to change her security classification to maximum for "being arrogant and wanting to make a difference". She had argued with them, telling them she had not done anything to warrant being moved to maximum security. They responded, "we will lie we will make you max".*

*Twenty days in segregation later, they did just that. She is now the first person here to be reclassified from medium to maximum, without having been released in over a year, aside from a woman who attempted to jump over at the fence, who had been previously pleading to be taken out from the general population."*

## Authoritarianism, Autonomy and an Art Show

### Jarrood Shook, Collins Bay Institution

In January 2014 while serving time at Collins Bay Medium Institution I began thinking about creative ways we prisoners could continue to resist Conservative government's petty punishment agenda. One night the idea came to me to organize an art exhibit to show in the community. It seemed like a soft, tactful, and potentially effective approach to both vent some of our frustrations about the realities of prison life, and encourage a conversation outside that would hopefully challenge some of the narratives advanced by the Harper government which demonize and further vilify prisoners.

The original idea was to focus on how the 30% pay cuts and related measures had affected our daily lives. I contacted some known artists at the institution and wrote in my journal: "I saw genuine excitement to contribute and through the conversations I have had, it seems that some real thought has been put into what these men would like to create..."

I had been in contact with my friend, comrade and fellow organizer Eric along with the EPIC group. They suggested a local co-operative cafe as a promising location to exhibit the art-work and offered to help set it up. 7 men in the institution showed solid interest in participating, but we didn't have any art supplies. According to CSC's ridiculous policy, to get even paper and pencil crayons, each artist would have to obtain specialized hobby-craft permits. The John Howards Society donated us \$200 towards supplies, but we would require clearance from the social programs department, the manager of programs, the assistant warden of interventions, and the security intelligence officer. I then made my first big mistake. I decided to put in a proposal to ask 'permission' to organize this project, naively thinking that this would legitimate the art show and CSC would appreciate our approach and maybe even make exceptions to some of their especially petty rules to help get us going.

One progressive staff member at the institution was enthusiastic and offered to help get us supplies and send out artwork into the community. A short while later, she indicated that her boss had instructed that she could not be an art show contact or deliver artwork for us. In fact, we would not be allowed to send art into the community

at all. This was demoralizing and frustrating, and we reluctantly scaled the project back to a show inside the institution with the idea of inviting people in to see it.

After waiting about three months to hear back, the manager of programs advised me that the art show had been approved, but all art would be censored by the Security Intelligence Officer and the Warden. They also insisted on managing the distribution of art supplies and issuing hobby craft permits. So much for getting our ideas over the wall, not to mention this naive idea about free expression and meaningful dialogue. It took another month just to get the supplies – you would think we were distributing blow torches and cans of spray paint, but it was sketch pads, drawing pencils, erasers, and one set of water colours!

CSC scheduled the show for the pre-release fair in June, so our audience would essentially be halfway houses and social services, people who have pretty well made up their minds about prison and prisoners. We had hoped to include an artists statement with each piece, but given the level of censorship we decided against it. This way the art wouldn't be banned and the artists less likely to face negative reprisals.

The week before the pre-release fair, there were nine drug overdoses in the institution. I mention this not only because these events settle themselves into the collective psyche of the prison and reflect several problems with the institution itself, but when you measure this against the immense struggle we went through in trying to create a healthy and constructive outlet for prisoners to communicate theirfrustration, it shows the absurdity of the system. The resulting lockdown ended the day before the exhibit. At this point my hope were pretty well dashed, I felt fatigued from the lockdown and somewhat cynical about the whole project. The staff in the programs department ended up setting up the exhibit and taking control over its presentation. I was extremely frustrated and felt defeated. The entire process had been conquered by an oppressive bureaucracy. There was nothing to feel proud about, except the men who were patient and enthusiastic enough to boldly share their artwork despite all the obstacles we faced.

(Continued...)

**In Memory of Peter Collins**  
*Giselle Dias, on behalf of the Peter Collins Support Committee*

On August 13th, 2015 at 2am Peter Collins passed away. Peter was a writer, artist, cartoonist, activist, scholar, organizer and advocate. Peter was in his 32nd year of a life sentence for shooting a police officer in a botched bank robbery attempt. He was 10 years past his parole eligibility date.

Peter was well loved and respected by so many people in prison and in the community. It was no surprise that his family and people in the community rallied around his death and planned memorial services in Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto and Montreal. Combined there was well over 200 people in attendance and so many others who sent kind words of love and appreciation for the ways in which he had touched their lives. We created a memorial booklet that had over 40 contributions from people who had been affected by Peter and his work.

When someone dies in prison there are very few opportunities for people to collectively grieve the loss. These memorial services brought us together and allowed us an opportunity to share our grief about the loss of a ‘giant’ in the anti- PIC movement. It was an opportunity to share our love, our loss and many funny stories about Peter. It was also an opportunity for us to connect and think about the effects of prisons in our lives and the tragic conditions in which people live and die inside.

We had the first memorial service in Ottawa with his family and friends on September 12th, 2015. Many of his family members, friends and the community members gathered to remember and celebrate Peter’s life. Peter was a beloved brother to Lucy, Rob, Chris and he was deeply loved by his extended family in England. For the service we had a collection of Peter’s favorite songs, his artwork lining the walls, a slide show of photos from his childhood and time in prison. We had a wall of writings where people shared their love, respect and appreciation for all of Peter’s contributions to the anti-PIC movement and we watched Peter’s short film called “A Fly in the Ointment” which is about his time in Solitary Confinement. His close family and friends spoke about Peter, the person he was, how he influenced us and the contributions he made to the world.

On September 13th a group of family and friends met in Kingston to celebrate Peter’s life once again. There was a small group of us who sat together in a circle and shared stories about how we knew Peter and what he meant to each of us. Many in the room had never met Peter but knew his work and were deeply influenced by his writing, art, cartoons

**Authoritarianism, Autonomy and an Art Show**

*By Jarrod Shook (Continued from Front...)*

Looking back I can see some critical errors we made, the first of which was the decision to seek permission. Which is why this year we did things differently, and launched our show at the Sleepless Goat for Prisoners Justice Day in the spirit of free artistic expression. We did it as fully autonomous individuals with the capacity to work outside the system and get things done! It’s now clear to me that what happened last year when trying to work within the system was inevitable. What could we have expected from an authoritarian system except authoritarianism?

In Chris Dixon’s recent book Another Politics, he defines anti-authoritarian organizing as “building the capacity of a group of people directly impacted by injustice so that they can struggle to transform their situation.” In the words of abolitionist Marika Warner, this means “you’re (a) challenging power structures, (b) working to build power structures, and (c) dealing with a problem that you share collectively with the people you’re organizing with.” Lesson learned. I’m happy to say that this year by working with folks who share our values, folks like EPIC, CFRC Prison Radio, the Sleepless Goat Cafe, and prisoners across the country who contributed to this project, we did much more than just “pull it off.” We pulled it off and then some, and we did it with integrity. We built capacity and challenged the system in solidarity together. It’s a beautiful thing.  
*(Excerpt. Read full art show booklet at [epic.noblogs.org](http://epic.noblogs.org))*

**OVER THE WALL**  
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and contributions to ‘Calls From Home’ radio. There were a group of people in Kingston who regularly supported Peter through letters, organizing art shows and airing him on the radio. There were also a couple of people who had done time with Peter for many years and knew him well. Each person in the room shared how Peter had influenced our understanding of the PIC and how his love and support made us better people.

On September 25th, a large group of us gathered in Montreal to celebrate his life and grieve his passing. We were so grateful that a group of prisoners were able to join us for the evening on ETA’s. Many of them had known Peter throughout his years in prison and it was so meaningful to have them present. Many of them mentioned that they didn’t know that there was such a big community of prisoners’ rights activists in the community who cared about the lives and deaths of prisoners. Montreal activists have always been very supportive of Peter’s work. They have organized art shows, ensured his contributions to CKUT radio and included his art in the Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners Calendar.

On October 10th we had our final memorial service in Toronto. Peter was an active member of many community organizations and grassroots organizations in Toronto. A large group of us gathered in a circle and only asked one question: ‘what brought you here today?’ This question resulted in a 3 hour session of people sharing about their relationship with Peter. We talked about how each person met him, how he influenced their politics, how funny Peter was and how he gave each of us a ‘hard time’ if we didn’t live up to his standards of a ‘good ally’. He was such an integral part of the anti-prison movement in Toronto through his work with PASAN, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, PJD organizing committee, Prisoners’ Justice Action Committee, Rittenhouse: A New Vision and the Prisoners’ Justice Film Festival.

At each service we talked about the failures of CSC in the treatment of Peter before he died. We talked about the lack of accommodations, the poor healthcare, and the inadequate amount of pain management which resulted in a very slow and painful death.

Peter’s on-going hope was that his work would continue to be used to fight systems of oppression and systemic violence. We are in the midst of creating a book of Peter’s writing, artwork and cartoons for Ad Astra Comix which will be launched on Prisoners Justice Day (August 10th) 2016.

**Revolutionary Ex-Prisoner Launches New Autobiography**

EPIC recently hosted a launch for the autobiography of revolutionary ex-prisoner Ed Mead. Ed spoke at the event via Skype and the book’s publisher was there to sell books. Ed has some amazing stories to share and the event provided us with an exciting sneak peak of an insightful and thought-provoking autobiography.

*“More than a memoir, **Lumpen: The Autobiography of Ed Mead** takes the reader on a tour of America’s underbelly. From Iowa to Compton to Venice Beach to Fairbanks, Alaska, Mead introduces you to poor America just trying to get by—and barely making it. When a thirteen-year-old Mead ends up in the Utah State Industrial School, a prison for boys, it is the first step in a story of oppression and revolt that will ultimately lead to the foundation of the George Jackson Brigade, a Seattle-based urban guerrilla group, and to Mead’s re-incarceration as a fully engaged revolutionary, well-placed and prepared to take on both his captors and the predators amongst his fellow prisoners.”*

The book is a great read for anybody who is interested in prison politics, poverty, working-class politics, or revolutionary movements. People on the outside who would like to get their hands on a copy can order it directly through Kersplebedeb ([www.leftwingbooks.net](http://www.leftwingbooks.net)). EPIC is also working on distributing the book to our local prison libraries and book carts – if you can help with this or would like to suggest a location or institution that should get a copy, please write to us.

A message from our friends at William Head Institution:

**Out of Bounds Magazine** is a quarterly publication produced and distributed by prisoners at William Head Institution. It is an avenue for contributors to express their views, opinions and experiences about prison, and to give prisoners a creative outlet to express their art.

It is our hope that although our contributors may be physically confined, their ideas will transcend both time and space.

**For more information, please write to:**  
Out of Bounds Magazine, PO Box 6000, Victoria, BC, V9C 0B5

**OVER THE WALL** is a twice-annual newsletter about strikes, actions, and struggles going on inside or around prisons in Ontario. It is published by End the Prison Industrial Complex (EPIC).

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