Captive Genders:
Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex, Expanded Second Edition
Edited by Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith

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FOREWORD

By CeCe McDonald

My political education began while I was incarcerated for defending myself against a racist and transphobic attack. During my time in prison, I began reading books about revolutionary politics, like the autobiographies of Assata Shakur and Huey P. Newton, Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, and the first edition of *Captive Genders*. It was here that I learned about Miss Major, who helped lead the Stonewall Uprising, and how strong trans women of color like her were kicked out of the official story by transphobia, capitalism, racism, sexism, and so many other things that dull the light of our intellectual past. Our schools are filled with clichéd textbooks and false histories, and once I'd read up, I realized I'd been hoodwinked for most of my life. These radical books helped move me in a direction where I can now continue this legacy that these profound leaders have left.

While inside, I started sharing this knowledge with the other prisoners who I talked to at lunch, dinner, and break time. In the beginning, I was scared—I was a trans woman surrounded by so many men, but they were really inviting and sincere. They wanted to know who I was as a person, as a trans woman, and they wanted to know my struggles as a trans woman. This surprised me because the media portrays people in prison as angry, evil, and deceiving. For me it was the opposite—those behaviors came from the staff more than they did from the other inmates. I figured, if I can connect with these people that society deems "criminals," then

why can't I do this with everybody who is oppressed? I would explain things like capitalism, sexism, transphobia, and the prison industrial complex using analogies from my life, because we all know it can get boring when people just get really intellectual about it. We have to make prison abolition inviting, so people can see it from their own perspective.

Building these relationships with other inmates was really deep for me, because it's easy to believe the lies the media says about people in prison. I always believed I would never be one of "those people" who ended up incarcerated, especially because growing up, I saw my father in prison. Most people in prison aren't the "criminals" that the media portrays us to be. A lot of people in prison are political warriors who stood up for our freedom, and we're here because of their work. Trans women of color are also targeted by the police state, and we have the highest rates of incarceration and violence. Millions of other people also get caught up in this system that evolved from the slave trade and is still maintained through racism, imperialism, patriarchy, and every other form of hierarchy.

Like slavery, there is no other way around the violence of the PIC, so we have to destroy it. We can't hold onto these powerful institutions that oppress people and expect that they will go away just because we reform them. Of course, change is good, but in instances of systematic oppression, like prisons, there is no way for it to be reformed. That's just like saying we can reform racism—there's no "better" form of racism—you have to abolish it. Racism lives within the prison industrial complex, and in order to end that, to end racism, we'd have to abolish all those powerful institutions that allow that energy to navigate through our lives.

When I was in prison I would sit in my cell and think about how, if I got struck by lightning, maybe I would gain superpowers so I could start kicking down all these walls. This was my form of imaginative abolition, but I also apply it to real life. For me kicking down the walls is educating people, and constantly educating myself. There are so many ways that we can work toward justice, but first we have to find out what justice actually is without just throwing people in prison and believing that's it. As alternatives to locking people up, we can put these people back in our communities and help them understand how they became part of this system that was created for our downfall. Right now I'm working on rebranding prison abolition in a way that connects to the people around me. You can still be cute, and wear talons, and be an abolitionist.

Along with talking about the PIC, we have to actually do things to end it. We easily use words like "activist" and "ally," but we often don't

live up to them. I'm so sick of people walking around saying they are an advocate, activist, or ally. No, boo, if you say you showed up to a meeting once and but just spend your day sitting online, that's not activism. There are people who put their lives on the line every day for us to just be able to walk outside.

If you know me, you know that my slogan is "The show ain't over because you can put a ring on it." The mainstream LGBTQIA community believes that because we now have gay marriage everything is better. We have to understand that there might be progress, but we also have to look at the way trans women are being slain. There is so much work left to do, so if you say you are an "activist," I'm going to hold you to that standard. And if you say you are an "ally," I'm going to hold you to that standard.

Currently I'm working on a curriculum that's built off of books like *Captive Genders*, for people who are in prison. I'm building an activist training program so that people in prison can use this information. It's going to be a school, basically, and I'm going to be one of the teachers. I'm also working on building an outside component of the program, so we can tell the Department of Corrections that once prisoners graduate from the program, we want these people to come work for us, which will hopefully help with people's parole. Our goal is to train people to come out of prison and to be ready to organize in the streets, and help end recidivism by making sure people have stable housing, a livable wage, and don't have to depend on the things that keep our people criminalized.

It's fucked up to hear about the murders of trans women every day, but I don't think prison is the solution. People that murder trans women almost never get charged, anyway. Ending violence against trans women of color without prisons is definitely achievable, it's just going to take more than one, or two, or three, or four people. Abolition can happen but we have to be willing to take initiative as a community—and I mean everybody—to want this, and to feel this, and to end mass incarceration. To get there, we need to end all oppression, and books like *Captive Genders* help us get there.

For me, in a post-prison world, we will have free cookies for everybody, unicorns, and really cute clothes—it will be a trans-topia. Outside of imagining prison abolition, we can hoot and holler and be mad all we want, but it's not going to mean shit unless we do the work, and we all in on this.

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MAKING IT HAPPEN, MAMA:

A Conversation with Miss Major

Jayden Donahue

We are at an important moment in the anti-prison industrial complex movement. The largest prison expansion bill (AB 900) in the history of the world is currently being implemented in California. We are experiencing increased policing of our communities through gang injunctions and the collaboration of local police agencies with the federal government through ICE and Secure Communities as continued fear-mongering bolstered by mainstream media urges us to become more dependent on state-sponsored solutions to social problems and less reliant on the skills, tools, and knowledge that we already have to create and support self-determined communities. History tells us that trans people and transwomen of color in particular have played and continue to play a foundational role in this fight. The Trans, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project is one of a

handful of organizations around the country that are providing leadership, eking out victories, and exploring strategies to help us reach our goals and the challenges presented in the struggle. As part of this conversation with Miss Major, we tried to tease out some of these points to serve as a tool for organizers and individuals in recognizing places of entry into the work as well as pitfalls or places where we get stuck. We also take some time to celebrate the triumphs, an important part of reflecting on our work.

The Trans, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project's (TGIJP) mission is to challenge and end the human rights abuses committed against transgender, gender-variant/genderqueer, and intersex people in California prisons and beyond. TGIJP was founded in 2003 by Alex Lee through a Soros Justice Advocacy fellowship and his work as part of the Trans in Prison Committee (TIP) at California Prison Focus. From the beginning, the organization has been volunteer-directed and currently has two staff positions: a legal director and a community organizing director. TGIJP has chosen to center trans women of color, particularly women who are currently inside and those who have been recently released, as an overall strategy to both build leadership among and empower people most affected by the PIC.

Miss Major is a black, formerly incarcerated, male-to-female transgender elder. A veteran activist born and raised on the south side of Chicago, she participated in the Stonewall rebellion in 1969 and was politicized in the wake of the Attica prison rebellion. She has worked at HIV/AIDS organizations throughout California, was an original member of the first all-transgender gospel choir, and is a father, mother, grandmother, and grandfather to her own children and to many in the transgender community. Currently, Miss Major is the executive director of TGIJP. I wanted to talk to Miss Major about some of the core elements of TGIJP and its structure, campaigns, and future work. I also wanted to take a look at some of the contradictions inherent in identity-based organizing and how TGIJP works to navigate in that space. We explore notions of political unity in a broad-based and diffuse movement as well as questions around what it means to be an ally and effectively take leadership from people most affected by the PIC.

Jayden Donahue: Can you introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about the Trans, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP) and its mission?

Miss Major Griffin-Gracy: OK, I am Miss Major, none of this Ms. shit. I am not a liberated woman. I'm a transgendered woman and I'm working on being liberated as we speak. So, as far as TGIJP—Transgender, Gender Variant, Intersex Justice Project—we're a nonprofit organization working under the guise of Justice Now as our fiscal sponsor, that is interested in promoting the well-being and mental health and stability of transgendered women of color that are housed in the prison industrial complex (PIC). We help those that are currently housed or recently released maintain their civil rights and help them fight—basically that's the start to finish kind of a thing. We have a lawyer to help legally represent them; should their cases get an opportunity or a chance to go to court, we help them work with that and help to find suitable legal representation through the lawyer we have working here. We also help with cases here in San Francisco and push for alternative sentencing, which may or may not work, but it's something we do push toward, making sure that the judges and the district attorneys have credible and viable information that pertains to the community itself and not this hyped up bullshit that's floating around about us, about who we are and how we exist.

So, a part of us used to be the Transgender in Prison Committee (TIP), which was a part of TGIJP. TIP was like their organizing fist of action, I guess you could call it. They worked together simultaneously with the same objectives and goals except that TIP was more of the grassroots kind of a thing with organizers and allies who believed in the same mission and helped us work toward establishing those things that we chose as part of our mission. In that vein, one of the things that I think is a *major* coup for us was when Alexis Giraldo got a chance to actually sue the fucking prison system and we assisted her in getting her documentation, her legal records at the time, and stuff like that. Alex Lee helped to coordinate and organize the information that she had and helped her find an attorney and work with them so that she could go to court. We did go to court on it. And then the organizing arm of us, that would be me (naturally I would be the fist), helped to pull together over a hundred people in a day to appear outside the courtroom at seven o'clock in the morning with signs protesting about what they're doing to transgendered people, how we are always getting abused and stepped over and mutilated and raped and walked on and ignored. And so we blocked the front of the court house, but we didn't stop people from going in. All four corners of that block—Polk and McAllister—had people on them with signs, so folks had to walk around us to cross the fucking street, so that was just

a little goose-bumpy, it just made you feel so good to look out there and see that. And it was allies and some of the girls came out and carried the signs. We made signs on the bumper of my car and taped and stapled and nailed them to wood, you know. It was an event; somebody ran and got bagels and donuts. So it was a good thing, it was a really good thing. She originally lost in court, but, the good thing is it went to the higher court, and they sent it back down to the lower court telling them that she can have another trial now, so that bullshit that they went through is null and void. So now we're working on helping her piece it together so that she can have another trial. So hopefully that will come to fruition.

JD: When did TGIJP start? Were you around then?

MM: I came here a little bit after it started. Alex (Alex Lee) started it, primarily by his little two-gun-shooting self. He had just gotten out of law school, he was working with TIP and he wanted to help to organize something to help defend and stand up for the rights of transgendered women that are in the prison system. So, through that he got TGIJP started and then they worked with TIP. TGIJP was doing prison visits and he was doing legal stuff to help the girls from the letters that were being sent in to Prison Focus. And from there it grew into this mammoth that we're working on building and taking to the next phase. It's an exciting thing.

JD: Could you talk a little bit about some of the challenges that TIP faced in the beginning, especially around membership and power dynamics?

MM: A sprinkle, I can talk about that a sprinkle. As usual, there were definitely a lot of transmen involved in this in the beginning, in TIP. For some reason a lot of the trans guys are really more politically aware and astute than my transwomen are. There doesn't seem to be this vanity floating through the fellas that simply butters itself up and down us transwomen. We're just bathed in it. Having to be beautiful and this and that. It will drive you crazy. You'll lose your hair trying to keep all of this shit together. So, our particular involvement as transgendered women is often minimal compared to the involvement of most trans guys. Usually they're white trans guys and they've been to college and they have an idea of how the system works and how to deal with it. With a lot of the white privilege and the education that they've got there's this tendency for them to step up and take charge and lead the way and say, "Follow me, I'll protect you,"

without educating people about what's going on. Of course, there are the little differences and petty things that get involved over personalities. Before I got heavily involved, there were a lot of little personality clashes and the testosterone egos bumping into each other here and there. It was a lot of the "pissing contests" the guys go through. It calmed down and the dust settled and TIP got to rise up and TGIJP was a calmer space.

JD: TGIJP has a few different committees. Can you talk about them and the work you are currently doing?

MM: Well the structure has changed from when I initially got involved and so a lot of the membership also changed. My getting on board made it a more comfortable and I think a more relaxed space in terms of meetings. The feel of everything changed and through that restructuring and getting everything to be more suitable to who we are as a different organization with the influx of more women of color and more transgendered female participants. It developed into teams. There's the legal team, which is run by our lawyer. There's the fundraising team, which is grassroots fundraising. We have a separate person who helps with the grants and that kind of annoying stuff that you have to do to survive. And then there's the Make It Happen Mamas (MIHM), which of course happens to be mine since I'm the mama. And the three of them function independently but under the same guise. We're a collective. And so, even though we function independently, there's this common rule that directs everything. The legal team of course works on getting the girls the information that they need and helping them fight in court, and writing letters to the judges and district attorneys about sentencing and stuff. And in writing to the parole officers and advocating for our clients, which are primarily transgender women of color housed in these kinds of situations. Not that we ignore white transgendered women, but our focus is primarily transgendered women of color since we're at the very bottom of the pile. We help everybody, but concentrate on transgendered women of color. The grassroots fundraising team, currently, is working on developing outside funds so that we can become self-sustaining and not need the grant money that we have to sustain us. So we're working on building up a database of funders. The team is working to get us to the point where we can be self-sustained and we can function on our own using the technology of today, which is the computer and Facebook shit and that kind of thing.

MIHM is driving itself and me crazy. We are working on revamping the organization and coming up with a new focus and direction for TGIJP since merging with TIP and becoming one organization. We've attempted to change the name and create a logo for us and ran into a brick wall, or impasse as they call it, and are sorting that out. So, we set that aside to concentrate on what the structure's going to be, where the direction is, and the aim that we're going to be taking.

One of the things that we're working on right now is developing a mentorship program so that we can help to establish and empower transgender women that have been in prison to realize that they have a voice and that their stories are important and they need to be told. We are also working with Sylvia Rivera Law Project and twelve other agencies across the United States through Transforming Justice, which was the conference that we had in 2007 in San Francisco to build a network, national network. It was attended by 250 from around the country. For our community, the male-to-female transgendered community, one of the things that works best with us in getting us to realize the things that are going on politically and socially and realize that we have to fight for social justice with folks who are not transgendered and deal with the Transgendered 101 that you have to give every time you go to pee because someone's going to ask you a question in the bathroom taking care of your business: Well, why are you in here, and how long have you been that way, and you know. A part of this mentorship program is helping the girls to understand how to deal with that, gracefully. And then getting them to take these things on and then to mentor to young girls, just one or two girls, so you don't drive yourself crazy. Help to set up boundaries and stuff like that. The mentorship program will help work on the newsletter that we send into the prison system to the girls, or work on our database and keep up on who is in there and who isn't, making things like that more current. And then working with them on establishing the pen-pal program, not just getting it up and running, but getting it functioning because it was running before but it lost wind—but like a sailboat, child, it's running along and then all of a sudden it stops. But now we have a motor on the damn boat so we won't get stuck, we can go forward.

In thinking about it and mapping it out as we are doing right now, it's an exciting thing. I mean, it's just really wonderful to think about how we can affect stuff. It feels good, and I think the comfortable thing about it for me is that I've been doing it all along and that I'm pretty good and also as an older person I don't run into a lot of walls. People give me

respect, getting to be 60 years old, it's like, "Well, we better listen to what this bitch has to say," and then once I get their ear, I got 'em. And so I think it's better for us, and better for the younger girls. And the reason why we're going through all of that restructuring of stuff and trying to sort out a different direction to take us—for me, a lot of times what I've noticed in reading about stuff is that TGIJP has built something and then lost momentum or became fractioned and whatever the goal was, it disappeared on us. In trying to refocus this and keep this going I think this is something that we can take small steps on, and then after it grows we'll be able to take bigger steps, get more involved, see what other things we have, and encompass more things. And then we can reach outside of ourselves to get involved with agencies that are not specifically transgendered-geared but that can help us say, sort out what the social justice movement is, how do we become a part of that, because, to me, none of these things are going to succeed if they don't involve everybody, which means, this community has to become involved. And it can't just be the transmen, we can't be you know, off to the side being all glamour-pinning on the fence, child, our size 12 feet in size 6 shoes, so we can't walk anywhere, we just have to stand and be pretty and leave this on your back; we can't do that. We *have* to become involved.

JD: You've talked a little bit about the newsletter that TGIJP sends to people inside and the pen-pal project. Can you talk a little bit about why it's important to stay connected to people who are inside?

MM: First of all, being in prison is filled with absolute, complete hell. Not a moment's peace. You have no sanity and no safety and no safe haven and no spots to think and sort out how you deal with shit that you have to go through, just from being in prison as a transgendered woman. The reason why the things that we do, like fighting to get bras inside, are important is that people are forgetting that these are women housed in a men's prison. They're not giving any recognition to the fact that a majority of these people have breasts and oddly enough, they need to be cupped in a bra, for their safety, for them to maintain who they are and for them to hold on to their sense of self. And it's not like it's a luxury in there but you know, if women have bras in the women's prison, then the women in the men's prison should have them. It's not that they want anything special; it's just something to keep their breasts safe; to keep them from having to suffer the indignity of making them run around without that particular

protection, because that's what it is for them. Every now and then we get some in and it's a major accomplishment. It's like, let's go out and throw a party. It becomes something that helps give the girls strength to sustain themselves while they are in there.

The reason we have the pen-pal program is when you're in there you're feeling so isolated and cut off and desolate and depressed and lonely. There's nowhere to turn for anything. So, if you happen to get a letter from somebody who's outside the damn wall to just say how are you doing, what can I do to help, this is what's going on here, I've seen your old friend so-and-so, it keeps you connected to your life and who you are and what you stand for. This can make a big difference in how you relate to stuff and how you get though your bid. You gotta do the time; you can't let the time do you. And without that connection to what's going on outside that wall, the time winds up doing you. When I was in there, not getting a letter from people I knew or friends, it got to the point where I'd take a postcard from a stranger saying "hey, girl," you know, just something to connect me to who I am. One of things that happens is that you lose yourself in there. All of a sudden you become Number 449632-C, and that's not who you are; that's just what you happen to be wearing at the time. Those things are awfully, awfully important.

JD: Can you talk about some of the challenges facing women coming home from prison?

MM: Talk about Mission Impossible II? I mean, it's unbelievable. It's bad enough for everybody else. It isn't just us suffering; everybody coming home is suffering. The reason why it's horrible for our community is you have a transgendered woman coming out of prison who hasn't had a moment to put her lotion on, keep herself feminine, stay in that mindset, portray the woman that she is inside. Then if they try to get a job, they're not going to hire *Barbara* because *Barbara* hasn't shaved in two days.

I've had girls who have gone up to work in the Castro area and are told, "Oh, you're so cute, it would be nice to have you working here," thinking that it's a lesbian they are talking to. And of course, she shows her ID and it says Fred Schwartz. "Ooh, well, you can't work here. I can't have people coming in here and questioning or looking at you like you're a, well, you know." Well, you want to hire me. They might come in here and like talking to me. You think I'm going to have my license pinned on my chest? "Hi, I'm Fred. Call me Gladys." And if you don't laugh at it, it

will kill you. You have to have a sense of humor about this and then, in that, work on getting at the change.

And then when you go to report to your parole officer, and you do manage to run into one of your old girlfriends, so you go and stay with her and you get a chance to bathe and put lotion on and get a bra that fits and throw together a little androgynous outfit because you can't go to parole in your shit and you can't go there looking like the woman that you are. And you go in there and you get hassled: "You're a sissy and you're this and you're that and you're not going to find no fucking work and I'm not going to help you get a job and the moment you do something, I'm going to throw your ass back in jail." So, you're on the merry-go-round and you're trying to figure out: Should I reach for that brass ring or not? Well, no because that brass ring is stuck and you're going back to jail, you know. So, how do you find a job? How do you find a place to live that they're going to approve of? How do you find a way to manipulate and use the things around you so that you can be OK and get off that merry-go-round of recidivism where you're back in jail within ten months? And it gets to the point where jail becomes like an old home. That's not exactly something that you're thinking about when you realize that you are a transgendered person and that you want to make this transition. It's not like you are thinking, *All my best friends are going to be behind bars and I'm going to visit them frequently from time to time, only on the inside, so I can hug them*. That's not what the hell I want, but that's the reality, as frightening as that is.

And it takes the work of agencies and people that want to help and commit to doing this despite the reaction that they're going to get when they offer to help. People forget that we've been abused and kicked in the stomach and stepped on for so fucking long. So you say, "Hi, my name is *Don*, I want to help," and you get, "Yeah, fuck you. You're not going to do shit for me, punk-ass motherfucker; you're not going to be there. Kiss my ass." And off you go. Well, *Don* needs to get his shit together and approach them again. You need to be consistent, you need to keep pushing. If this is what you really want to do, then you're going to have to climb up the mountain with roller skates on. Because the abuse has been so long, so tumultuous, that there isn't the room. Most of the girls don't have the time to believe in everyone that comes along wanting to help because prior to them coming into our lives, someone else came along saying that very same thing and then kicked us in the ass. Or we reached for their hand and they said, "Oh, you're too heavy, I can't hold you, girl,"

or "Oops, sorry, I missed you by just that much." Don't matter how much, bitch: You missed me. So, in order to deal with this you come up with this shell. The shell protects you; I love my shell, where would I be without you, hug me mama. Other people don't have to have a shell.

JD: This question came up for me in the last bit that you said different groups of people feeling like they are at the bottom. It occurred to me that that this says a lot about identity politics and competition for who is most oppressed. Can you talk a little bit about this and how it plays into your work?

MM: It's like going over to one of your friend's houses and they are in the middle of the biggest pity party that they've ever thrown. And instead of trying to help them feel better, you aren't invited to their party. So you're going to throw a party of your own. As an older person, when I go to one of the senior centers to get help, like for my taxes, and I'm in there and people are saying hi to me and greeting me then they'll ask you, "How do you feel?" Well, for older people, they really want to know how you feel, how your health is. "Oh, well, I had kidney surgery and I have this scar." "Girl, I fell and broke this leg and this hip over here." What is this, a competition? When you're younger it has more to do with what you're income is or how you have been denied an income and so it turns into being so devastated that you feel you don't even deserve to breathe. Well, how do you go forward if that's your attitude, if you are living to be worse off than somebody else? Complaining about it doesn't get anything done. So, in the social justice movement I have found that the things that some people are working on and pushing toward are not more important than what everybody else is working on. All of it is important. Because with the resources that are available to us we can make sure that nobody has to go through any of this. All we had to do, for a mere moment, is to step back and realize that the sun doesn't revolve around me; it revolves around a world that has other people in it. That's too hard for people to commit to. That's why all the wealth is in, what, 6 percent of the population, and the rest of us are struggling like hell.

JD: I consider TGIJP to be a radical organization. Can you talk a little bit about where your priorities differ from mainstream gay politics?

MM: I eventually do want to get married, to the right person, pet, tree. At

this point, I don't care, but I don't want to assimilate myself into a group of people who think that my very existence is abominable. Why do I want to do what they want to do? Why do I have to have a ring on my finger? Why do I have to pass? Why can't I just be recognized and acknowledged for who I am. *Well, he's pretty, the man's gorgeous*. This society is not at that level and so that makes it hard to maintain. It makes it hard to go forward. It makes it hard to sit and just accept your damn self. They say, "We're here to help." You don't know what help is. Try walking a mile in my shoes. Fuck walking a mile—why not wear my shoes, throw on my hair, wear this tight-ass dress, tuck my dick and balls into a gaff, child, and then run in front of police, jump over cars, and then snatch off your hair, put on different clothes, change your shoes and then walk down that same street past the motherfucker that was looking for you in the first place. Then you can give me some shit about who the fuck I am.

JD: Some of the things that you are talking about seem to be indirectly related to the prison industrial complex and maybe address some of the root causes of imprisonment for transgendered women of color.

MM: The thing is, it's hard to see that there is a connection, but there is a *definite* connection between that kind of stuff and the prison industrial complex. One of the things that happens for a girl getting involved in the PIC is we already, from the moment we decide to be a transgendered person, are living outside the law. The moment this dick-swinging motherfucker wants to put a dress on and head on down the street to go to the store or something like that, they have broken the law. Because it's not a legal thing that we're doing. We can be beaten, attacked, and killed, and it's OK "Oh, well, who gives a shit about that motherfucker, he's confused." You are already a convict for just how you express yourself and you might start to live a lifestyle of a person that is living outside of the law. Because you can't get a legitimate job, you can't get a chance in school, you can't get a chance to function and survive as a part of mainstream society. So, immediately, once you've done this, you're part of the PIC. Whether you get there right away or you slowly build toward it, but every step that you take, takes you another step closer to it. Now depending upon what star you were born under, you may or may not have it happen right away. But eventually, it happens most transgendered women have had some involvement with police. And this is directly related to the PIC, from my way of thinking. Because if you don't have a sense of self and you

don't have a way to learn how to protect and live your life, you're on your way to prison. So, for me, I'm working at it in the best way I feel I can to make sure that the girls don't get there. If they don't get there then society can't put a number on them; they can't be labeled, they can't be marketed or targeted by the PIC.

JD: Can you talk about where you see TGIJP going and its future work?

MM: Why would you do that to me? I don't have a crystal ball. I hate that question, but I can answer it. I see us growing and getting into a position to whereby we're not only helping the girls that are in the prison system but we're holding meetings and classes in there to talk to the girls, to let them know what their rights are while they are in there, helping them with the charges they get while they're in prison doing stuff, and alleviating sentences. Because you can go to jail, get arrested inside the jail for doing something else, and then go to jail in the jail as punishment for what you did. I can see us being in a position to help to alleviate that. We could train somebody to be one of those legal representatives within the prison to help the girls with charges and papers and that kind of stuff inside. And then outside to develop a system to work with the women who are coming out, job training, organizing, and doing what they need to do to survive. Get the girls involved in school, teach them trades so if they don't want to work a 9–5 job, they can sew, help girls make gowns, learn computers, do data-entry, paint, draw, artistic stuff. Get them to express themselves in ways that are appropriate to what they've gone through. There's art inside that so many of the girls never get the opportunity to present and have it appreciated. And help families, friends, and lovers adapt to situations because it's hard to explain to people what it means to be a transgendered woman, what we go through on hormones. We need to help families understand that this person that you happen to have raised is now 16 and wants to wear a dress and they still stand up to pee; it's their choice. We need to help negotiate that so that the animosity that usually occurs doesn't.

JD: Is TGIJP an abolitionist organization?

MM: I wonder how I knew that word was going to come up when talking to you. Yes, we are definitely an abolitionist organization. The thing about trying to get rid of the system, we can't just snap our fingers and the

bitches are gone. While we tear down the walls and let everybody go we have to figure out what we can do to make society accept this and figure out how to negotiate a co-existence. One of the questions that usually pops up is the idea that there are some evil, crazy, wild, stupid-ass motherfuckers who need to be behind bars. Well, it isn't that they need to be behind bars; it's that they need to be held accountable for what they do and we need to sort out a way to do that without putting them behind bars. Because when you put them behind bars, technically, you're putting all of us behind bars. It's like telling people they have to get off drugs; you have to give them some alternatives. We have to show society that their protection is still ensured by our other system. We are working on dismantling this system from the inside out, to show how it's not working, to show how it's hurting everybody and at the same time, building toward something else. My hope is that in the future, there won't be any prisons.