

# Herland

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## VOICE

February, 2001

### WHAT KIND OF BIRD CAN'T FLY?

By MOC

We stand around, perplexed, and Jesse Jackson asks again: "What kind of bird can't fly?". The light dawns, and in unison all of us milling around the booking room smile and call out "Jailbirds! Jailbirds can't fly". Jesse heads back into the men's holding cell, takes up position at the collect-call-only telephone, and resumes his pursuit of a moratorium on the death penalty. It was the only piece of whimsy we saw while he was here.

January 2001 has been a dreadful month for Oklahomans who feel that the death penalty is immoral, counterproductive and cruel. Yet, as in all terrible times, there have been moments fine and gratifying. Even when we can find little else good to say about this state, we have to acknowledge that Oklahoma offers abundant opportunities for activism.

And many very wonderful people. A peaceful and dedicated group of activists have been organized against the death penalty here for years. There have been protests and vigils at multiple locations on each execution day; there are letter writing campaigns to legislators, and newspapers and outreach to those on death row and their families. Meetings and mailing lists and organizational chores and prayers. They have done wonderful work, expanding their numbers and changing minds, eroding the bizarre Oklahoma belief in vengeance.... They have laid a bedrock of protest and conscience on which an eventual moratorium – and eventual ban – on the death penalty will be based.

Meanwhile, the State of Oklahoma, – the Governor, the Attorney General, the Pardon and Parole Board – who not *once*, since Oklahoma resumed executions in 1990, have granted clemency and reduced a death sentence - escalated the violence and scheduled an orgy of executions - twice a week for over four weeks.... And so the movement ratcheted up its protests as well.

Suddenly, the Reverend Jesse Jackson was coming to town to protest the upcoming bloodbath. He came on January 4th, and we were ready. Hundreds of us met and rallied at the church across Martin Luther King Boulevard from Mabel Bassett Women's Prison, and from there we marched a couple of miles down to Fairview Baptist Church on Seventh Street. We were pretty funny-looking at first, starting off as a ragtag bunch, needing only a few staves to look exactly as if we were marching on the Bastille – then Jesse rolled up, straight from the airport, pulled into line in front of us, got out and started walking with us. I have to think it was from his considerable expertise and on his advice that word went down the line that we should march in an orderly fashion, about seven abreast, and fifteen strides or so apart. Soon we looked like quite a serious,

determined, respectable bunch. At Fairview Baptist we had a spirited rally, with many good speeches. Jesse mentioned the possibility of Civil Disobedience, and promised to return. Many of us went home that evening with interesting and new ideas in our minds.

Monday January 8th, some of us met and shared our visions of CD - some were very much for it, some still reluctant, all open toward the possibility. *(continued inside)*

### SAY "I LOVE YOU" WITH FLOWERS



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#### February Events

Saturday, February 10th, 5:30 p.m.  
Herland Supper Club meets at Herland.

Sunday, February 18th, 4:00 p.m.  
Freefall Concert at Mayflower Church,  
just west of NW 63rd and Portland. No  
admission.

Saturday, February 24th, 6:30 p.m.  
Potluck Dinner at Herland. Afterwards,  
some will be going to Rocky Horror at  
Carpenter Square Theatre (call 232-  
6500 for tickets).

Sunday, February 25th, 1:00 p.m.  
Training for Library volunteers.

**What Kind of Bird Can't Fly** (continued from pg. 1)

Tuesday, January 9, Jesse returned. He protested and vigiled and sorrowed with us at the execution of Eddie Trice. Only vengeance was served by the execution of Eddie Trice, vengeance and the furtherance of violence.

The next scheduled election was for Thursday, January 11, 2001. Wanda Jean Allen: an African American lesbian with *no* impulse control who had killed two lovers. She was sentenced to die after chasing her lover to the police station and killing her there. Hardly an act of premeditation. A total of \$800 was spent on her defense, to a lawyer who told the judge he lacked the skills and experience to make a capable death-penalty defense, and asked to be replaced. (He was not). Wanda Jean's death by state-sanctioned homicide might have been less mourned had she been a cold-blooded calculating murderer, but it would have been protested no less.

And so, on Wednesday, January 10<sup>th</sup>, between the executions of Eddie Trice and Wanda Jean Allen, several hundred people gathered at Fairview Baptist Church—thank you, Reverend John Reed!—and heard from many leaders of the protest community. The final speaker was Jesse Jackson, who had indeed returned; and when he called for those willing to risk arrest by blocking the driveway at Mabel Bassett, to symbolically stop the transfer of Wanda Jean Allen to 'Death Row' at McAlester, more than a score of people stepped forward. All of them were well aware that they would certainly be arrested.

Arrangements were made for support people to take our cars home, feed our dogs, and so on, and then we lit out of there, another rag tag bunch, hightailing it by car for Mabel Bassett to let Wanda Jean Allen and the world know that we refused to be complicit in her slaying.

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*"Stop! Do not cross this line. If you cross this line you will be arrested."* We surged forward across the invisible line, eager to make our statement. This was a very civilized and well coordinated protest; we had informed them that we were coming, so there was a plentitude of police and paddy wagons (and television cameras) waiting for us, and civility all around. I tried to march up the little hill toward the prison, but the police officer-in-charge held me back to wait for "my" arresting officer, my guy ..... they kept passing me by and taking others, and I began to get impatient. *"Just wait, just wait"*, the officer in charge kept telling me. Finally a young officer heading our way took my elbow and led me off, and so help me Great Spirit, the chief cop leaned in to me as I left and murmured *"God bless you"*. I was immeasur-

ably touched by his kindness, even while images of Spencer Tracy and old movies crept in, and responded—how could I not?—*"God bless you!"*.

It was very cold and rainy, a steady drizzle. My fine support person had brought me an orange poncho, so if you ever see pictures of this night, you will recognize me as the *very dry and comfortable* - great pumpkin. We spent over an hour in the rain, though not from meanness—the police, most of them born well after the Viet Nam war, let alone the days of sit-ins, had no idea what was going on and how to process us. There were three stalwarts of the movement ahead of me, Bill and Bea and Tom, who were handcuffed from the get-go, while my hands were free—until we were finally put in the vans for the ride downtown—then their handcuffs

came off and mine went on. I understand that Reverend Reed and I were the only miscreants dangerous enough—all right, unlucky enough—to have to ride downtown with our hands in plastic restraints behind our backs. Two good things from my experience, however—it seems to have cured my left shoulder rotator-cuff problem, and I got quite a nice little hand-cuff bruise at the base of my thumb that I am thinking of memorializing in tattoo.

There were twenty-eight of us in lock-up that night, fourteen women, fourteen men—plus our support people standing by for our collect calls and the lawyers committed to springing us in time, if need be, to get to work the next morning. A very fine army. Someone I spoke to recently who is thinking about "crossing the line"

wanted to know if he could take a book in with him—Sure, I told him, but you won't read it, the joyous experience is in being with the wonderful people in with you. Bea and Bill. Two out-of-town women—yep, more outside agitators - Diane and Sala, who spent all night in lockup; Gerarda, Patty and Beth, Birdie and Mary and Margaret, Sherry and Larieta. Michelle and her husband with the broken leg; Ted, Roger, John, Tom from The Earth, Adam from college and Lydia from another life! Welcome home Lydia! Cleophus and Arthur, Sean, Stephen, Lorse, and Roger, and Jesse. A couple of ministers, a couple of Greek Orthodox brothers, an Episcopal Bishop's daughter, some Catholics, lots of Methodists, Bud Welch's sister, an acknowledged Atheist, several old married couples, a widow, some lesbians—what a great bunch we were.

*Do you value mercy over vengeance?*

*Do you believe that when we return evil for evil, we are all degraded?*

*Do you believe that it is wrong that some of our fellow citizens, in order to keep their jobs and put food on their tables, are required to tie fellow human beings to a gurney and kill them?*

*Do you believe that it might be obscene to put to death a person whose entire defense cost \$800, less probably than the inauguration dress of any First Lady or a big screen tv?*

*Do you think that "an eye for an eye" probably leaves the whole world blind? And that executions create an entirely new group of grieving families?*

*If you answer yes to these questions, you might want to call the Governor at 405/521-2342 and ask him not to kill anyone else in your name.*

**Individual, couples or family counseling.  
Accessible rates. Call for a Wednesday  
evening appointment. JoL. Soske, Phd, LPC,**

Not counting Jesse, Diane and Sala, all of whom spent all night inside, the last of us got out at about 3:30 a.m. Our faithful lawyers were waiting, thank you Rex, Doug and of course Opio, Oklahoma's new Little Giant. During that time we were fingerprinted three times, mug shot twice, asked about our medical needs and thoughts of suicide and/or harm toward others, taken and returned to our sex/segregated holding cells – on the outside of which was a hand-lettered sign, “protesters only”. They really treated us very well, if not particularly quickly; and the Sheriff was never long out of sight. In one memorable moment in the booking area an officer told me I was going to be patted down – which I was, hands against the wall, feet apart – up and down and places I'd've just as soon they didn't go – but only after they had told me to hand my voluminous winter coat to a friend – you guessed it, the coat was never searched.

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The next evening Wanda Jean Allen was strapped to a gurney and executed by the State. Since Wanda Jean's death we have lost many more. Each of them was unnecessary, useless, wrong, hurtful, painful, devastating to family members, devastating. There are over one hundred people on Oklahoma's death row – the death of each of them is cruel and unusual punishment inflicted on not only them but their families, friends and loved ones. How long? How long, in the pursuit of an elusive, illusive, fraudulent “closure” are we going to kill people in the name of God? □

## IN REVIEW

by Jill Garner

One of my favorite new CDs is Kasey Chambers, *The Captain*. While I don't love the entire CD, there are enough good songs, and a lot of potential, to keep me listening.

Chambers hails from Australia and has been embraced there by both pop and country fans. Her music in the U.S. has mainly been marketed as alternative country, which certainly isn't all bad. That label gets applied to a lot of people whose music does not fit into what's being played on the radio today, and Chambers fits that category somewhat. One of my favorite lines I read about her is “you begin to suspect she's Gillian Welch without the death trip.” And it's kind of true!

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As a teenager, Chambers fronted the Dead Ringer Band that also consisted of her father, mother Diane, and brother Nash. They won several awards and put out two albums. Her brother Nash played on and produced *The Captain*. Her father also played on the album and has been touring with her.

At 24 years old, and with her first solo album, Chambers already won the ARIA (Australia's Grammy's) award for Best Country Album, been nominated for Best Female artist, and won two Golden Guitar awards in 2000 for Album of the Year and Best Female Vocalist.

Both Buddy and Julie Miller join Chambers on separate tracks on this CD, and those are my two favorite songs ('These Pines' with Buddy Miller and 'The Captain' with Julie). Buddy's beautiful guitar playing and voice is featured on 'These Pines', a song about an emotional void couched in terms of a physical longing. “Well i don't talk 'cos I'm trying to listen, To the wind take me home through these leaves, But it's quiet and don't hear nothing, Cos the wind doesn't blow through these trees.” Julie adds a wonderful harmony to the title track, and makes an already good song that much better with her sweet voice.

'Southern Kind of Life' is also a standout on the CD. By southern she means the south of Australia, but the song is beautiful, and universal. “Yeah I was a south bound child, Yeah I had a small town life, But I turned out alright in the north, Livin' that southern kind of life.”

'The Hard Way' and 'Last Hard Bible' are probably the most country of the songs. 'The Hard Way' has the typical country timing and is something you could two-step to. But it's catchy without being too simple. 'Last Hard Bible' is the song that really got my attention the first time I heard Chambers on the post-country station on digital cable. She starts out the song acappella and takes you back to the old time country of groups like the Carter Family and it's just a great song.

There are a couple of songs that don't do her songwriting talent justice, most notably 'You Got the Car.' She could have done much better with lyrics like “You got the car and I got the break, I've had as much as I can take” and “All the kings horses and all the kings men, couldn't put me back together again.” But I can certainly forgive her for that because the really good songs on this CD make up for the weaker ones.

A *Special Bonus Edition of The Captain* has been released. It has 5 new songs including 2 newly recorded duets with Paul Kelly and Uncle Bill, a song by her favorite singer songwriters Fred Eaglesmith (who was just at The Blue Door) and Matthew Ryan, a version of Neil Finn's 'Better Be Home Soon' and Ben Harper's 'Another Lonely Day.’ I was already thinking of getting this new bonus release, but my decision has been clinched since I just cracked my copy of *The Captain* when I dropped it.

If you haven't already, listen to The Blue Door Music Show on Sunday nights from 7-9 on KRXO because they've been playing some of Kasey Chamber's music. Greg Johnson said last week on the show he had received a phone call about her possibly playing the Blue Door. And while it's a small place for her to play, he had a good point when he said, “Just because she's big everywhere else doesn't mean she is in Oklahoma.” □

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