

One more Filipina in prison

My name is Maria Teresa, presently incarcerated at the Bedford Hills Correction Facility in New York. I have been in prison since 1985.

It has not been easy. Support from the Philippine community or the consulate was just not available until last year, when finally, I was given a chance to be heard. I even had an interview with a local Philippine newspaper. With that ended the long abuse and unfair treatment I have been receiving from this prison. There are still times that they attempt [to be abusive], but with more caution now, because they know that they are being watched. All these developments made me happy that I did not give up the fight to be heard.

In the past, the consulate mostly looked after the men, although the people now assigned to me are more sensitive to the needs of a Filipina in trouble. I got a bit of support from the Philippine community—from basically good, sensitive human beings, but also got the scorn of embarrassed and humiliated *kababayans* (compatriots) who, if it was left to them, would personally reinstate the death penalty just for me, people of your own kind who act like they know every detail of what had really happened, just too judgmental and very vicious. I am not proud of what happened, but neither can I say everything was my

fault. During my days in court, I was alone, no one was there to see what was being done to me... It was a horrible experience that I would not wish on anybody, much less a Filipina.

I am glad that now there is more support from others. There is this Pinay (*local slang for Filipina—Editor*) they are trying to railroad for killing her abusive boyfriend, and people from the consulate go and sit in the courtroom... But, as for as our Filipino community, well... especially here in New York, there are a number of very successful people that could really help—I've read about how much they spend on parties. Yet, they can't donate a decent amount for this poor girl's defense. We are talking about a clear self-defense case here... Lorena Bobbit cut off her husband's organ, yet received warm support from the Ecuadorian Community, besides getting psychiatric treatment instead of time in jail.

I thank God I received support from my adopted family, a Hispanic lady who, ironically, used to work in this jail. She lost her job because she showed compassion toward female inmates. This

lady has been a correction officer for 15 years but was all the time assigned to male facilities, until recently when she was promoted to sergeant rank. The treatment of female inmates here, whether by the family or administration, is so much more inferior to what the men receive, and all these just overwhelmed her. She came in at a time so painful for me that I was suicidal. We became good friends and I was able to have somebody I felt I could trust. To make a long story short, she lost her job, and to make things more painful, they accused her of being my lover and not performing her job. Her case is lingering at the Division of Human Rights, but she is a woman and a non-white—more than enough reason to make it okay for officials to take their time.

I wrote this letter because I wish to be given a chance to connect with Pinays, to be able to share my ideas, experiences, ideas of what I think I can do for the Philippines in the future. I am glad that Filipinas are more outspoken and active now in our men-dominated society.

I'm looking at the possibility of being deported back, and I'm excited that I will see my children face to face. I've been denied and turned away by my so-called family, and the painful thing is that

they can afford to. I took advantage a couple of years ago to tell my children where I really am over the phone. I was told that I have to play the wife when I get back. I really don't see that as right since he has been sleeping with everybody and anybody... I am not the same person he used to know; in fact, the whole family will be very surprised. I am not going to allow anyone to walk all over me and think that I am not going to do or say anything...


I appreciate the time you took away from your busy schedule to read this letter. I hope to hear from someone soon. Please keep in mind that there are more Pinays somewhere, sequestered in a cold, lonely cell, embarrassed and afraid. Maybe this letter could make a difference...

Thank you very much.

In sisterhood,
Maria Talag
17 February 1995

P.S. Please remember to write on the envelope my ID#86g 177 next to my name when corresponding.

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What can I call this time?

by Ma. Teresa Amberti Talag

What can I call this time...????
Away from the world of
freedom
Sequestered in a cell... a cold
box
human storage place
like unwanted furniture
unfit, different and awaiting
remodelling
awaiting a space that would
accept such altered beings

What can I call this time...????
is it time of penance
is it time to grow-up
or is it just time to kill the old
self and be reborn to a new
life...
is there an answer to my
question...?
I guess for now only time can
tell
thereafter I would know what
to call this time.