No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

FAY STENDER
(1932—1980)

Fay Abraham Stender

Monarch Towers
Hong Kong

May 1980

Beverly Axelrod
Pacifica, California

Dear Beverly,

I have written to everyone who cares, everyone to whom I owe thanks and love: to my son and daughter, to my husband, to my lover, and to loyal friends who have been helpful. In this letter (as in all the others) I will mention none of them by name, only by an assigned letter, an initial, which may or may not be actually their initial. You understand my caution. Anyone connected to me in any way could be destroyed by a complete stranger, as I was. It could happen within days of someone casually mentioning a name in connection with mine, or years later, as it did to me. You may feel safe, since we were never really friends—more like cordial but distant colleagues—and have had no contact for years. I have never mentioned you at all, even by an initial, in all the letters—the brief farewells—I have written. This letter will be longer than any of them because, before my final exit, I need to wander through facts and feelings freely, wander with someone who really understands, yet is neither so close to me as to be deeply grieved by them nor so opposed to me as to be smugly satisfied by them. Does this make sense to you? Perhaps not, so let's just call it—getting something off my chest.

Writing all these final letters has been comparatively easy, even soothing. Something to do, since I never really sleep anymore. I write, take a pill, doze, wake up, remember someone else who should get a letter, then write until the pain demands another pill.

A more difficult chore was the one I finished before I left the Bay Area— clearing things out. Anything worth keeping, I "loaned" or "stored" with friends who might value a keepsake. Stacks of piano music went to the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Jewish Charities picked up the rest—clothes, trinkets, books—all the junk I left back in my house in Berkeley, whatever M or the kids didn't want.

I considered sending you the plaque I put on the mantel a few years back: NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED. It seemed to me that you, of all people, would appreciate that one. But, since we've never really been close enough for ironic jokes, you might misunderstand, might think that, after fifteen years, I was trying to revive the grief Eldridge Cleaver gave you, trying to draw you into bitterness with me.

So I threw the plaque into the fire along with letters, documents, manuscripts of books I never finished, logs of legal work, personal diaries. I kept that fireplace blazing night and day until it was all gone, every scrap. I walked away (metaphorically, you know, the way blind people express agreement by saying, "yes, I see.") from forty-seven years of life and work. Then I flew away, literally, across the Pacific to this high-rise.

I've been here almost a month, in a sleek modern apartment with a breathtaking view of the harbor. I have all the amenities—television, record player, round-the-clock care-givers. There was even a piano, but I got rid of it. It only reminded me of another of my losses.

As a middle-class girl, you, too, must have been given the privilege (or sentence?) of piano lessons. Of course you were, everyone was. But not everyone had a mother like mine—willing to wheedle, nag, fight, to make sure I practiced every day. I always listed that among my mother's faults, though, of course, without her pushing I would never have come near being any good. And I was good. Just getting into the SF Symphony's Young Musicians Program meant I was top level. And being selected to play Beethoven's Fifth ("Emperor") Concerto with the SF Symphony—at fourteen—meant I could be on my way to big things. I was just as proud of myself as my mother was.

It was only after I finished high school that I insisted on doing "greater service to humanity" than "entertaining privileged people," as I told my mother self-righteously. I started skipping practice, refusing to be "chained to the piano."

Greater service. Even before I was murdered (you'd have to agree that I'm three-quarters dead), I had begun to wonder about that idea of greater service. Sometimes, when I'm lying here, I wonder if devotion to creating one moment of beauty—in music, art, poetry—would have been of equal service to humanity. In the long run. That's the trouble (one trouble) with being immobile—insomnia, too many pre-dawn questions. And that's an especially pointless question since I don't even have the strength to depress the keys. So the piano had to go. So did my record of the Emperor Concerto. I had my bed positioned near the window so that I can take in the view of harbor at sunrise. The only thing left to do was to choose music to accompany my exit. No piano solos. No Verdi or Chopin—nothing operatic or romantic. Skip the 19th century. Something modern, dry, ironic. Maybe Eric Satie?

Then I realized that I have one more letter in me, a long one to the woman I knew only from a distance, on the same path, but ahead of me, a model to emulate, yes, a model to surpass—the amazing Beverly Axelrod.

Our similarities are remarkable, you must admit: female; breaking into male-ruled trial law; Jews—although a New York Jew is nothing like a California Jew. I don't want to get bogged down in tracing the differences. Enough to say that when I was a kid, neither my mother nor anybody else found it troubling or offensive or odd that I filled in for the organist now and then at San Francisco First Congregational Church.

Both of us made good marriages—to archetypally nice, educated, Jewish husbands, who typically work, bring home the money, and, if they have affairs, never

dump their wives for a younger woman. But our husbands were even more than exemplary Jewish family men. In those days middle-class women were supposed to go to college to get a man, then stay home, bear his children, and promote his career. The enforcers of these rules were other women—bitter women, who had played by the rules. The only feminists we knew were a few of the men we worked with and hung out with until some resentful wife pulled them away. You and I, the lucky ones, married nice Jewish feminist husbands who loved us and supported our right to a profession, from the start and up until we left them—both giving us a smile and a handshake at the end, decent to the last.

When and where did you and I meet? NAACP? CORE? Not doing voter registration in the South or I would have remembered. Was it at one of those fundraisers I did in Berkeley for Bay Area Friends of SNCC? Or one of those huge parties at your house in SF after a day of picketing the Palace Hotel—not to get black guests admitted, anyone in SF with money could stay there—just to get poor black women a lousy job making beds. One of those parties stands out in my mind. Q was there, so it had to be before you two broke up, late 1964? Early 1965?

You were dancing (and could you dance!) with a white guy with two left feet and shyness he was trying to drink away. All of a sudden, you called him a few choice names and pushed him away, so hard that (with some help from the alcohol in him) he fell over. Someone helped him get up and stagger to a chair. I heard you tell V that the guy was going through a nasty divorce, getting reamed out by a Filipina who'd gotten a smart black lawyer to paint him as a WASP bigot, and you told him, "I work for a black firm, and lots of people think I'm black. I'll take you on." He made the mistake of answering, "That's all I need, a woman lawyer," and landed on the floor.

Yet all he had done was to sum up your position and mine back in those days—always the only woman in the law seminar, the only woman speaking up at an NAACP meeting, the only woman sleeping on the floor of a black church after bomb threats—but rarely the woman arguing a case in court. Most judges hated women doing trial law. It was my brief that got Huey Newton off, but Charles Garry kept me out of the courtroom because, he said, I came on too strong and might turn the judge against us. (What he really meant was "too strong for a woman.") K once told me I talked with an exclamation point at the end of every sentence. Okay, that's me, too emphatic. For a woman.

It was one of those parties that ended in the small hours with a few of us diehards arguing about the latest developments in the struggle for justice: about "Black Power" prescribing that SNCC and CORE throw out all of us whites; about what to do next. Was that when someone first mentioned the Black Panthers? Nobody at that party, black or white, was quite sure what they were doing, except cop-watching, which we all agreed was badly needed in Oakland, and toting rifles, which we all agreed was legal, though we were split on whether or not it was a good idea. We knew for sure, at least, that the Panthers did welcome white support. As did prisoners, convicts of all colors.

You took the lead in acting on that knowledge, while I watched you with awe and—I admit—envy. In no time at all, you had orchestrated your correspondence with Eldridge Cleaver into a public drama, a wide-screen, Technicolor triumph. You got the staff at *Ramparts* (the classiest of the alternative press popping up all over) behind Cleaver, selecting, rewriting, transforming his letters to you into articles, month after

month. It was those articles in Ramparts that first brought me a pile of mail from convicts who'd been ignored by male lawyers. They were desperate enough to turn to female lawyers like us, and we were brave enough or stupid enough or—no, it wasn't stupid to take on work for prisoners, but it was stupid to

what was I saying? Too much morphine. I still can't calibrate exactly how much will deaden the pain enough to let me think, and how much will numb my brain so that

should close my eyes for a bit until

Okay. So everyone who read *Ramparts* was dazzled by Cleaver's genius. Correction: by the image you created: Black Brilliance Behind Bars. The truth was spelled out in his contract with Random House—yes, R quoted the clause assigning a good part of the royalties for *Soul on Ice* to you. (Not that you've ever collected a penny from him, which doesn't surprise me. Pardon the bad joke, but you should get yourself a good lawyer. Money won't mend a broken heart, but a pinch of justice eases it like an antacid tablet eases heartburn.)

Some day someone will write a history of these past ten or twelve years. The Decade of the Prisoner; how's that for a title? Some day—when it seems safe to lay out facts and name names. Some day—when some historian (yet unborn?) can look back with cool objectivity on how the passion for social justice became focused on the most despised, the caged criminals, their victim-hood finally recognized—"invented and romanticized," said our critics, whom we called "rightwing bigots," though they weren't always—I'm getting tangled up in my words again.

Maybe it started with Malcolm X—redeemed and self-educated in prison, and then so quickly martyred? But after M L King was assassinated, wasn't Malcolm out of the conversation? I would like to read a clear history to help me understand how we came to identify so closely with these caged black men. But it could never be written in my lifetime (even if I could endure a normal life span) or, especially, not during the lives of our children. By the time writers stop being afraid to do it, in detail, naming different phases and dominant actors, readers will have moved on, forgotten, lost interest in what we did and why. At best, you and I will appear in a footnote to some minor episode of prison reform in the mid-20th century.

We didn't feel like footnotes. We were convinced we would become chapter headings in the Great Reform, the true "radicals" who (unlike the "liberal" Quakers who'd been around prisons for years) defined black convicts as political prisoners .

We thought we had discovered the hidden brilliance of Cleaver and Jackson, but even we underestimated them. Their self-education, their reading and writing in prison, was impressive, but it was nothing compared with their innate psychological genius. It was as if they intuited our fairy-tale fantasies, our dreams of the hero in the heart of the beast, our desire to kiss the frog and release the prince from dark enchantment. Or the modern version of the fairy tales, the corny movies we scoffed at—murderous Humphrey Bogart redeemed by a good woman—all those unconscious susceptibilities of ordinary women that we were certain we were immune to—through our intellect, our education, our political awareness.

Yes, we had read Freud along with everything else, and were on guard against sexual undercurrents. We thought. I was careful to avoid any hint of sexual provocation. I dressed like a strict schoolmarm when I visited the prison—loose suit coat up to the neck, hemline well below the fashion. And I required that every woman lawyer or para-legal in the Prison Law Project follow the same dress code for prison visits.

Nevertheless I was (and I know you must have been) unprepared for the erotic charge in the privacy guaranteed by law to a prisoner with his lawyer. Between Huey Newton and me, nothing went beyond smoldering looks, but between you and Eldridge, George and me—that was another story. (K tells me the prisons have installed new lawyer/client tables built like four-foot-thick solid walls, to prevent hands from slipping under a table top, passing notes, fondling other hands, or—) Oh, the pure energy of a sex-starved young man making love with scorching looks and quick touches, and more, right under the outraged eyes of hostile guards. I wouldn't be at all surprised to hear you admit that your forbidden gropings with Eldridge were more exciting and satisfying than that all too brief honeymoon after you got him out—before he dumped you for—

off the subject—sorry—pain can make a person cruel.

But it was not just our middle-class delusions and their hormones. The horror of those places drove our passion. The reality was so much worse—the daily, hourly brutality, humiliation—so much worse than the stupid prison movies. An old friend, a conscientious objector during World War II, who did a year in prison, said it well: "The place was full of mentally unstable men, and it seemed designed to drive them completely mad."

Still, there were those fantasies.

Most seductive, not only in those awful movies, but in all the great novels, was the Innocent Victim Fantasy. How I hated to see that one collapse—to realize how few victims of injustice are necessarily innocent or harmless or redeemable. Of course, we knew the limits of the verdict "not guilty"—that it only meant "guilt not proven." We knew that unjustly injured does not mean innocent. We knew, and yet—

K used to remind me that, in order to win, we prisoner-advocates must behave in court as if the world were a Western Movie, populated by black hats (police—"pigs") and white hats (prisoners and us). The truth we presented must be what K called the "technical truth," the few facts selected from among all the facts that made up the whole truth. We had to say (factually) that no indisputable evidence supported Huey's conviction for shooting that cop. We must insist that George had been kept in Soledad for ten years for a mere $60 holdup. We must leave out all the other facts, complicating facts, unpleasant facts about their conduct in and out of prison. "But!" K would say, "but! don't make the mistake of swallowing the set of legal, 'technical truths' you present and spitting out the rest." I always nodded, but, on some deeper level, I must have needed to believe that the technical truth I preached was the whole truth.

Was it faith like mine that fueled your brilliant performance?—whipping up Eldridge's letters into articles, getting them featured in *Ramparts*, taking a stack of them to Random House, getting Eldridge paroled to your house—where the Black Panthers actually started putting out their newspaper. Climax: that photo of Huey Newton in your sons' Cost Plus rattan chair—the photo that went up on walls around the country, around the world. Brilliant.

Then, suddenly, your affair with Eldridge was over. Did you see it coming, the shift in the fashionable forbidden? Your defiant white/black love affair, so offensive to racist whites in 1960, only five years later became repugnant to the new Black-Power politics, especially if the white woman is a smart Jew as well? Within a couple of months of his release, Eldridge dropped you for a middle-class college girl just black enough to fit the new Black Power ideal. By the time *Soul on Ice* came out, did you regret including those love letters between you and Eldridge? especially when the reviewers ridiculed them while calling the rest of "his" writing pure genius. At the time, I pitied you. Now I admire your good sense in fleeing, getting as far away as Europe. You missed the whole circus sideshow—his shootout with the police, his rants to worshipful crowds of white students on the UC campus, his Peace and Freedom Party nomination for U.S. President, his jumping bail and skipping out to Cuba.

By the end of that insane 1968 of assassinations and shootouts and FREE HUEY marches, you were forgotten—by *Ramparts*, by the Black Panthers, and by readers of Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*—the *New York Times* "Book of the Year"! You, the woman—as usual throughout history—erased from great historical movements. Your writing credited to a man; your role reduced to a few sentimental love letters.

How quickly you were forgotten. How lucky can you get?

I owe you an apology for that letter I wrote to your address in Italy. "Come back and help" with the mountain of prisoner cases coming to me, and especially with my case for "the brilliant writer George Jackson." I wallowed in a sense of finally catching up, even being one-up on you. Cleaver had already been thrown out of Cuba, thrown out of the Black Panthers, reduced to running drugs with Timothy Leary in Algeria. In the middle of that endless, farcical funeral at the graveside of your work, your hopes, I was inviting you to my party. Forgive me.

You were still in Europe during the events that put me in contact with George. According to K, frightened guards at Soledad—and you know how dangerous frightened men can be—decided that a prisoner named Nolen posed the greatest danger to them. At the time (well, today, too, I suppose nothing has changed) the prison world was divided, mostly by race, into gangs that were always at war. Nolen was educated, intelligent, respected by the other convicts. He preached that prisoners should stop fighting one another and unite against their mutual enemy, the prison authorities, the guards.

The few people who still read *Soledad Brother* ignore the fact that George's letters from that time show he wasn't listening to Nolen.

But the guards were. They were frightened enough by Nolen to set him up. (I pieced the story together from what George told me—and from rumors. How can I know this version is true? I can't. I can only try to pick out what sounds likely from the morass of stories.) Facts: on January 12, the guards let half a dozen black prisoners, including Nolen, into the yard with about the same number of white prisoners. Sharp shooters in the guard towers fired shots to "break up a scuffle." Only three days later, a board of inquiry declared the killing of Nolen and two other blacks "justifiable homicide"

When the news spread through Soledad, George threw a guard over a railing to his death. (How do I know that version is true? I don't. It simply is what George told me, the last time we spoke, argued, shouted at each other.) George and two other prisoners, Drumgo and Cluchette, were charged and pleaded innocent. A month later, George

emerged from solitary declaring himself Nolen's successor, destined to carry out Nolen's mission to unite all prisoners against prison authorities. That was when he wrote to me asking me to take his case. He knew I had written the appeal that freed Huey Newton; Huey had told him I might be able to do the same for him.

In 1970 I left Charles Garry's firm, started the Prison Law Project, and took on the three defendants we titled The Soledad Brothers. And I began repeating your history, which, they say, is what we do when we forget it. I hadn't forgotten your history. It was worse. I was sure that I had learned enough to improve on it, to avoid your mistakes, to top your performance.

There were letters, and visits, and then the collecting of earlier letters to his family, especially touching ones to his teenage brother Jonathan, born when George was twelve and already on the run. George was in prison by the time Jonathan was seven. Jonathan knew his big brother George only as the shackled, hallowed hero of his letters, seen briefly, under guard, during rare prison visits.

George and I talked of making a book of his letters, gaining his freedom and—possibly, maybe—I don't know what we imagined—or what I imagined. There was a way he had—he even described it frankly, proudly, in one of his letters—a way of encircling, surrounding, "breathing in" a person he wanted at his side, on his side. Sound familiar? Is that how it was with Eldridge? A powerful, hypnotic form of total attention enhanced, eroticized by the prison restrictions?

Oh, yes, I was sure I had learned from your mistakes. For one thing, George really wrote all the letters in *Soledad Brother*. All I had to do was select, clean up, and arrange the letters that would get him paroled. I included only a couple of vaguely affectionate and grateful letters to me, nothing that would come off maudlin in print. Selling the book to a publisher was no problem; *Soul on Ice* had paved the way for convict writing

My real coup was getting Jean Genet to write the foreword. No one impressed our kind of readers like the name of a famous French intellectual-literary ex-con who hated white America. Is that a cheap shot at the Prison Movement? At myself? Does my pain make me cynical? Am I making a deeper point or just wandering off the

dozed off again. I don't really sleep, just lie here propped up and full of drugs. I write, doze, write again. Where was I?

My time at that high point was brief. By June of 1970—less than six months after George had first contacted me, the collection of George's letters was ready for the printer—and I had been dumped, fired. (And not because he had found a more suitable woman—black, intellectual, communist—which he had. I could accept that. I even included a couple of his "Dearest Angela" letters in the book.) I kept moving forward, got the trial moved to San Francisco, got the three defendants moved to San Quentin, so that I needn't travel so far, so often, could spend more time with my children.

But the closer we came to publication, the more George and I quarreled—over everything BUT Angela. We fought over his book, the letters, the work I had done for him. The trouble was that I knew what George couldn't know, locked up in a cell. Times had changed. Three years of assassinations plus on-going anti-war demonstrations had split the country, frightened people. George's letters had to be more human, less

threatening than Eldridge's, more personal, letters to parents who loved him and argued with him, letters to the little brother who worshipped him. The letters had to create a full human being that any reader could identify with.

Which was the last thing George wanted. He wanted the book to be, not the cry of a victim, but a revolutionary challenge. He fought all my attempts to dilute his creation. His creation? He didn't even realize that what I tried to edit out was not even his creation. It was made up of scraps of slogans from books of revolutionary theory he'd read during his long isolation from the real world.

All this Marxist rhetoric, I insisted, these threats of violence, would frighten some readers and bore others. Once I got him out, he could write whatever he wanted. First, I had to gain sympathy for him, hit the courtroom with the "technical truth" of his indeterminate sentence for a petty robbery, head off questions about his conduct while in prison (especially his bragging about how many other prisoners he had killed!—which, of course, I hadn't believed, attributing his bragging to a tough, defensive pose). We had to keep hitting on the lack of any witness to the killing of the guard. Over and over, I repeated my carefully worked-out strategy, my sequence of steps: publication, reviews, interviews, gathering of international support—and then the trial on every front page of every newspaper, on all television news, throughout the world. What I had done for Huey, I would do it for him. He had to trust me.

He did not. He had begun working against my plan long before I had any idea that he would consider—

All my work was destroyed on August 7, 1971. Fact: his young brother Jonathan, just seventeen, walked into a randomly chosen San Rafael courtroom, carrying guns registered to Angela. I'm sure you read about that horror, even in Italy. Believe me, it came as news to me too. Only a deluded boy on a diet of comic books, gangster movies, and revolutionary rhetoric from the white Left who embraced him as the brother of their hero could have conceived such a plot. A bizarre kidnap of hostages. Purpose: to ransom George and hijack a plane to—where?

Delusion was quickly corrected by reality: five people dead—the presiding judge, one of the defendants on trial, two guards, and Jonathan himself, a boy with no record of delinquency, not even truancy from school.

George's final, brief letter in Soledad Brother describes Jonathan's death as "the black man-child with submachine gun in hand, free for a while," then describes his own feelings, "I want people to wonder at what forces created him." But had George asked himself that question? Had he ever imagined himself as one of those forces? During their rare, brief visits, did George "breathe in" Jonathan as he had breathed me in? Had Jonathan sacrificed himself in a crazy, doomed plot to liberate a distant, unknown god, who—according to rumor—knew about this child's crazy plot and did nothing to stop it?

I never got the chance to ask George that question. The next time I saw him, he demanded that I use the royalties from Soledad Brother to buy and smuggle in weapons. His plan: on the way from San Quentin to his trial in San Francisco, he—with help from the Black Panthers—would overwhelm the guards and escape. With a few good men, he would rob banks for enough funds to gather a "revolutionary army," which would form a base "in the hills," training men to launch guerrilla attacks and finally "bring America to its knees."

Had he been reading history and confused himself with John Brown, attacking to free the slaves, anticipating the Civil War? Or was George's rant just another movie fantasy, surpassing Jonathan's: Bonnie and Clyde make the Cuban revolution. No, I didn't say that. I simply reminded him that I had no control over his royalties; the prison authority had strict regulations about prisoners' funds. Then I should have shut up and left. But I couldn't just abandon him. Even if I could get his money, I told him, I'd never use it for anything so crazy. How could he even dream of anything so ridiculous, after what had happened to Jonathan? A stupid question—maybe it was Jonathan's death that had driven George over the edge. We went on yelling at each other. I called him suicidal, insane. He called me greedy, pocketing funds donated to pursue his case. No, not you too! I shouted. After all I had done, he had turned on me with the most tired, worn-out cliché of prison legends, the story that we lawyers—who had all turned down more lucrative work in order to advocate for convicts—must be in some way profiting, making vast amounts of money from donations.

Two more shouting matches and George fired me.

In slow motion, quietly, not to jeopardize his case, I withdrew, turning the case over to S. I was finished with Huey Newton too, sitting up there in that Oakland penthouse, snorting coke while terrified people whispered rumors of beatings and killings traced back to him. By that time, I was the only person brave enough or stupid enough to argue with Huey. Charles Garry dragged me out of that penthouse while I was crying, screaming at Huey, was this why I worked so hard to get you out? was this why I believed you were, on some higher level, innocent, justified—even though I knew you must have killed that cop? was this why I

nodded off again. The moon is high, a full moon, the sky cobalt blue. Where was I? After George fired me. At home. Thinking. Catching up on my reading. Playing piano, all the way through the Well-Tempered Clavier, then starting again with the first prelude in C—order, symmetry, voices interweaving threads of yearning, tangles forming logical patterns, resolving in sacred harmony.

Around that time, the editor from Bantam—who was doing another book for George, made up of the "revolutionary" rants we'd cut out of the first book—came to see me. He sat with me as if I were a mental invalid who needed cheering up. He sat ticking off all the improvements I had helped bring about. "Just publishing your description of the actual solitary confinement holes. And what about the libraries you got for prisoners? What about the classes? There are hundreds of guys who swear you saved their lives."

Oh, yeah, right, I did that and that, a real do-gooder. I'm Jesus Christ, or everybody's Jewish mother? I bring all my brains and education to save George, the way I saved Huey—so George treats me like a stupid starry-eyed bitch, a "mule" to carry in guns or dope or whatever to him? After what happened to Jonathan, inspired by big brother George? Well, he's right, I had been stupid, blind, and now I was furious, damn it. (I almost feel that rage again—helps the pain more than the morphine does.)

I waved him away. As he left, he mentioned that a white prisoner-advocate twice Jonathan's age had just given birth to his son. He spoke in a flat, dead-pan voice, and I just nodded. As I shut the door behind him, I wondered if Jonathan's son might one day

ask his mother if she had known about Jonathan's plot to "ransom" George, had helped him get the guns, had allowed him to destroy himself.

Wherever you were in August 1971, you must have read or heard about George's death. Take your pick up among the contradicting "facts:" gun smuggled in by George's lawyer, or not; knives planted on dead prisoners by guards, or not; George set up by a conspiracy of guards and snitches, or not; George supplied with guns and knives through his drug-selling profits, or not.

I stayed out of the arguments among Movement people, the claims and counter-claims of events. I knew that everyone—prison authorities and prisoner advocates—would select whatever "technical truths," supported whatever each wanted to believe. Only the final results were clear and uncontested: three guards and two trustees killed before George ran out into the yard, challenging the tower guards to shoot him, which they did, then locked up George's six surviving accomplices in the hole. Within a few days, George's death had inspired the Attica uprising, shifting the headlines eastward.

Numbing grief made worse by everyone blaming me. The prison authorities said people like me filled convicts' heads with revolutionary fantasies; we had tried to make heroes out of dangerous criminals. Prisoners said I'd abandoned George, though they all knew, through the prison grapevine, that he'd fired me. The younger women in the Prison Law Project wanted to take up the defense of the "San Quentin Six," the survivors of George's mad escape plot. When I refused, they tore the Project apart.

That was when I bought the plaque and put it on the mantelpiece: NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED.

Quietly, as so many people had done before me, I withdrew from prison work. I knew no one would ask me why. We never asked people why they were dropping out. We all—those who stayed and those who left—obeyed the unspoken taboo of good causes: don't ask, don't tell, don't even listen to any criticism that might "hurt the Movement" and "give ammunition to the enemy."

Where was I?

Yes. I was starting 1972, trying to figure out what to do next. If I'd realized it was virtually impossible for some criminals to give up their old habits, I knew, as well, that it was impossible for me (as for you) to give up ours—battling for a just cause. Fortunately for people like us (this is probably worth another bitter motto inscribed on a plaque) this world provides a constantly renewed supply of victims of injustice.

Like so many just causes, it sat right in front of my nose. So many of the battles I'd fought, the betrayals I'd suffered, kept coming back to being female. The oldest, broadest, most universally blatant oppression, shifting and changing, yet constant, and complicated by contradiction. Not all men were oppressors. M was an exception, the perfect husband, which was beside the point.

Young feminists were speaking out, silencing the women who had been our enemies, who had told us to stay home and shut up. These new young feminists could be my friends, allies, sisters in this oldest of all freedom struggles.

The current battle was family law—despised and ignored by progressive male lawyers as prison law had been—divorce/custody/child support—the courts designed to punish women for not staying put in marriage, regardless of abuse—the laws designed to

line the pockets of lawyers who could turn a bitter break-up into prolonged litigation. The ongoing punishment—women and children thrown into poverty, no effort made to enforce child support settlements.

Lesbian mothers were even worse off. These women had committed the crime of loving another woman, and for that crime they were losing their children. For that crime, they were more hated and despised than the killers I had defended.

I felt alive again—and clear-sighted—fighting for a woman—lesbian or straight—to keep custody of her children and to win a good share of assets that her husband (and the judge in most cases) wanted to withhold. I was brutal, sometimes vengeful, as if each single case might redress age-old wrongs against women. But I was never in it to enrich myself, like those super-star male divorce lawyers. I'd lost the Prison Law Project, but I was finding loyal, beautiful, smart friends in the community of lesbian lawyers. We formed a new group, California Women Lawyers. (You know CWL, I think they invited you to speak once; sorry I had to miss that one.)

Around that time—1976, was it?—you might have picked up the newspaper and seen the photo of Eldridge with FBI agents and his new friends, right-wing Christians. So, born-again Eldridge had a new scam, to get him back home without going to prison. Poor Beverly, I thought, just back in California after eight or nine years—and he turns up again, doing his silly dance from Moonies to Mormons. I pitied you then, but now I know you were lucky that he came back to the scene of his old triumph, persistently making an ass of himself, ignored and forgotten by those who could. You were busy, you were safe, working, flourishing because everyone had forgotten you were the creator of the hero Eldridge failed to be. On the other hand, I had succeeded in making George into a hero whose death gave him permanent mythic stature. There ought to be a motto for a plaque in that: BEWARE OF SUCCESS

At the time of Eldridge's return, I took another "divorce" case that still gives me pain no drugs can blur. You know the one I mean. You knew X, knew how, when X and E broke up, he cut her off, refused to share any part of the money from the only profitable—hugely profitable!—underground paper of the sixties. E had given years of her life and work to it, to him, to the two children she bore him. The case should have been simple, the Left setting its house in order, honoring an oral agreement between two of their own.

The first blow was learning that X was represented by two old friends of mine—and yours—allies in so many good causes. The second blow was X's surprise, producing a legal wife from his distant past. That killed E's case for community property. But there still was a case for compensation for the unwritten business partnership.

And I, like a fool, trusted the word of my friendly adversaries. I let my old comrades trick me into accepting a brief delay before filing. They used that delay to get most of the money out of the country. I got a small settlement for E. Still, I had been betrayed, in the most cynical way, the kind of trick we had saved for our attacks on right-wing lawyers. I had been written off by my oldest friends, expelled from the club, excommunicated by the Church of the Left, drummed out of the Army of the Just.

My new friends were not surprised. The Left had never been particularly supportive of gays and lesbians. Among my lesbian friends I felt valued, comforted. I spent more time with them, more time writing for the new feminist magazines, and more time playing the piano.

Women flirted with me. I flirted back. Had an affair. (Not my first. My marriage had always been what we called "open" in those days.) Another affair. Then I met P. My relationship with her was a complex tapestry of passion and conviction, personal and political, the way my husband and I had started out. The personal was now extremely political. A serious lesbian affair demanded a different commitment, more restrictions than I had ever accepted in marriage. Moreover it posed dangers—possibly pain and shame for my children.

I needed distance, not to escape from sadness and betrayal, as you did, but to make what could be the biggest decision of my life. I left the country just as Eldridge's second book came out. I read *Soul on Fire* on the plane to Greece. (Not even your talents could have cleaned up that mess.) The only interesting—and possibly honest—pages were his account of his 1968 plot to stage a shoot-out with police from a fortified tower of Oakland City College. That chapter reminded me of Jonathan's crazy assault in San Rafael or George's even crazier San Quentin "escape."

Huey had vetoed the plot from prison, had arranged to get Eldridge safely out of the country. That was a different Huey, long before the days when he would go along with Jonathan and George in their fantasies, and then let them die. It was before more recent "mysterious" deaths, like

off the subject—where was I?—on my way to Greece.

From there to a conference in Warsaw, then to friends in Geneva, where I turned over and over in my mind the question M was waiting for me to answer, the answer P was hoping for, the decision I knew I had to make. I spent that dark winter of 1978 in Stockholm, writing, playing the piano, exercising, dieting. I needed to be sure my decision would be the right one, made at the top of my form. A decision made, not out of confusion or depression, but out of strength to make the right choice and hurt as few people as possible.

Suddenly, events in San Francisco settled everything. I had kept myself insulated from the news at home, but not even the distant dark of a Swedish winter dimmed the news that on November 27, San Francisco Supervisor Dan White had smuggled a gun into City Hall, gone to the mayor's office, shot him dead, then reloaded and gone to another office to kill Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man elected to the Board of Supervisors. So was Dan White gunned down by police, as Jonathan had been? No, the photo in the newspaper showed police patting his shoulder comfortingly as they escorted him to jail. He was one of their own: White, Irish, Catholic, ex-policeman, ex-fireman—you know the type who had run San Francisco—until recently. Or had become some of the meanest guards in the prisons. The English edition of the Chicago Sun quoted one of these old-boy politicians on the "the gay invasion" of San Francisco. That was enough. My decision was made. Justice and decency demanded devotion, commitment, comfort, and support for my lesbian sisters, especially P.

I telephoned M and told him to decide the conditions of our separation and divorce. Decent to the end, he let me keep our home and all its contents intact so that our son and daughter, both enrolling in college, would have their old base to return to.

By the time I got back to Berkeley, he had moved out. Our son and daughter were ready to welcome P. She moved in, and we began making plans to open a firm of women

lawyers. We would hire the best and brightest of our friends to advocate for women and children, especially lesbian women and victims of domestic abuse. I still saw M occasionally and met the woman he planned to marry as soon as our divorce became final. We all gathered for a Seder at Passover, all friends, all wishing each other well in our new lives.

My new life lasted less than three months. Then—well, you know what happened. I've relived it so many times, in testimony to authorities, in my mind (not in my dreams, where I'm always whole and free and playing jazzed-up Bach in a piano bar.) I spared my family and friends the details. I won't spare you. Why? To tell you again what a narrow escape you had? That, instead of living on that cliff in Pacifica, you could have been—you understand. Bear with me and my deathbed confessions. Somehow, it helps to lay it out for someone whose experiences even slightly resemble mine.

Eight years after George Jackson's death—seven years after I left prison law—who would have thought any convict or parolee would remember me? would even know my name? Yet, we did have a warning, Fleeta Drumgo (out on parole) passed O on the street and mumbled "someone is looking for your mother." She was used to hearing those drug-inspired street rumors—not worth repeating to me.

On May 27, 1979—no, it was after midnight— about 2 a.m. on May 28, 1979, my life ended.

P and I were asleep in my room, N and O asleep in their own rooms. N heard knocking on the front door. He went downstairs alone and looked through the little window in the front door. He saw the face of a black woman, eyes blinking, nervous, frightened. Since I had started doing family law, it was not unusual for a woman to show up at our house, even late at night, even to stay for a day or two while looking for a safe shelter from a wife-beater. N opened the door just a crack to ask what she wanted.

The woman was pushed aside by a black man pointing a gun. The man said my name and ordered N to take him to me. With a gun at his head, N led the way up the stairs to my bedroom.

"Which of you is Fay Stender?"

"I am." I pushed P's head down under the covers. He flipped the light switch. He was dark, big and burly, in his late twenties. His eyes blazed red— drugs? alcohol? just pure, wild, insane hatred?

Looking into those raging eyes, all I could think of was how to protect N and P and O. Suddenly, I thought of George's last words, his screaming, "It's me they want," as he ran out into the yard to die and save his deluded followers from dying in the mess he had begun. Yes, I thought, it's me he wants. I had to keep his attention on me. I gave him my wallet—money, credit cards, everything. Was that enough? No.

"Did you ever betray anyone?" Odd question.

"Did you betray George Jackson?" A chill ran through me. He had dragged out the old prison myth that should have died with George—blame the lawyer, it's always the lawyer, the greedy lawyer, who profits from the writing of the prisoner, who doesn't try hard enough to set the prisoner free.

"Sit down and write. 'I, Fay Stender, admit I betrayed George Jackson and the prison movement when they needed me most.'"

I moved slowly to the little desk in the corner, sat down slowly, wrote slowly. I tried to embody calm, to communicate calm to him. I controlled my voice—no winning arguments, no sentences punctuated by exclamation points—I spoke softly. As I pushed the pencil across the paper, I said, "I'll write whatever you tell me to write because you're holding a gun. But it isn't true, you know."

Silence. I was about to ask if he'd ever even known George, but I was sure he hadn't; that question would only infuriate him even more. He made N tie P up, then he tied N's hands behind his back. I was afraid O would wake up and come in and he would shoot her, shoot everyone. I had to get him away from the bedrooms.

"There's more money downstairs in the kitchen. I'll show you where."

He followed me, gunpoint bumping against my head, step by step, down to the kitchen. I opened the drawer where we kept some grocery money, handed him the bills. Then I tried again. "I didn't betray George Jackson." He grabbed the money, gestured with the gun for me to lead him toward the front hall. He followed, pushed me aside, then went past me and opened the door.

For a second I believed we would all be safe. I believed he was satisfied to have blamed me, to have forced me to write a confession. He would rush out to use my credit card before I could notify the bank.

Then, in the doorway, he turned around to face me. I knew, even before he began firing, that my hope had been false. He had come to kill me. Taking our money was an afterthought, a habit, part of the "pimp mentality" (a phrase George had used to dismiss Huey as a worthy leader.) At the last moment my killer had remembered his mission. Maybe I should have groveled and wept instead of denying that I'd betrayed the mythic hero I had created. In that split second, of all the thoughts racing through my mind, the worst were images of the faces of several aging prison guards, grimly nodding at the poetic justice of this end to the Dragon Lady, as they used to call me nearly a decade—a lifetime—ago.

The first bullet hit me in the mid-section. Something snapped, and I collapsed like a puppet whose strings are cut. I heard myself screaming as the next bullet hit my right arm. Another passed through my left elbow. The fourth bullet grazed the side of my head. The last one hit me in the chest. I stopped screaming as blood poured into my lungs. I am dying, I thought. Impossible. Is this what all people feel in their last moments—simple disbelief? Could I really be dying? No! Yes. I am dying.

At the first shot N had run out of my bedroom and down the stairs while screaming at O to wake up and call an ambulance. He sat down on the floor beside me, working his way out of the cords on his wrists, holding my head, talking to me, waiting with me for help or for death. Darkness must mean death.

No. I awoke some hours later filled with the pain that has never left me, pain that only oozes from one region of my body to another, like molten lava that cannot be cooled by the drugs that addle my brain. The doctors confirmed what I already knew—spinal cord damage. I would never stand, let alone walk again. I learned later that I cannot even sit erect for more than a few moments without unbearable pain. They waited a day or two before adding humiliation to agony: they had removed a good part of my intestines; the bag attached to me to collect my shit would be permanent. They tried to add some good news: the weakness in my arms, hands, and fingers should lessen, might even return to normal.

They were mistaken.

I lay there helpless, expecting another madman to sneak in to finish me off. A police guard was stationed in my room. He became—another irony—my friend, as well as my protector, the one person I could talk to. Yes, he knew who I was, knew all about my famous attitude toward felons, toward cops—"pigs." He didn't want to talk about any of that. He had a job to do. "You rest. I'll watch out for you."

The doctors let in other cops to question me. I told them I didn't know the man who shot me, and he didn't know me, only my name. They nodded. I told them I doubted he had ever known George Jackson. They nodded. Mostly likely, they told me, he was an outside contact of a prison gang that had ordered my killing. They already had a line on him. An undercover cop had barely missed catching a drug dealer who had outrun him, dropping a bag with a gun and a list of names. My name was on the list, and the gun was the one used to shoot me. They showed me a mug shot. I nodded.

"Edwin Glenn Brooks, did three years in San Quentin. Must have got his George Jackson story there. Just confirming. Your son already picked him out of our book."

A shudder ran through me, a spasm of pain that cut right through the morphine. My son. My daughter. My lover. My husband, marked by the name Stender printed on his office door. Maybe the woman he was soon to marry was in danger. The list of possible victims grew. It is still growing.

My police guard pushed the inspectors out and called for a doctor. Don't bother, I said. Let him come to get me. Let me be the bait. Just be here to ambush him before he can kill my family. Then a nurse appeared with a needle I couldn't even feel piercing my skin. Brief oblivion—from which I soon awoke with fresh surprise, disbelief, and horror at the nightmare my reality had—has—become.

A week later, the police were back to tell me Brooks had been caught trying to rob a bank in Berkeley. My son had identified him a second time. They showed me a video. I nodded. "You're sure?" Absolutely. My police guard, my protector, my friend, patted my arm softly. "We got him now, Fay. Your kids are safe."

Safe from Brooks, I thought. But what about others who come out next week, next year, looking for someone to blame for the ruin of their lives? Can the police assign a round-the-clock guard for my children? for P? for M? for how long? five years? ten? fifteen years?

And yet, for the first time in the seventeen days since my murder, I had a reason to stay alive: "How long before he goes on trial?" Six months? Eight months? I would, I must stay alive long enough to testify, I, the witness, the victim. I must confound any attempt by a smart civil rights defender—like me—to get him off on a technicality. I must live to confront the man who called me a betrayer, but was himself the real betrayer of the Prison Movement, betrayer of everyone who tried to help, and, most of all, betrayer of those who could be helped—if even the Quakers would dare, after what had happened to me.

This killer wanted respect? I would give him respect. I would be in that courtroom as a broken but living witness to his crime against us all. I would see him judged, not as an impaired victim of society, but as an equal—fully human, and fully responsible.

On my last day in the hospital I overheard an interesting conversation, carried on, as usual, across my body, by people who re-arranged the needles piercing my skin and the tubes in my every bodily orifice. One was telling the other that he'd signed up to

work on a research project started by his old professor. The professor had a theory that ingestion of lead not only lowered intelligence, but affected those parts of the brain that inhibit impulsive behavior. "Now that this new law bans lead from paint, cooking pots, etcetera, Professor W expects we'll see a decline in violent crime in the next generation. So I'll be deep in crime statistics for the next twenty years." I won't be alive then to hear whether or not the old professor's theory proves out. Makes some sense. But isn't there something—well, boring—about lead on the brain being the villain in our struggle? Or funny—like a bad joke out of an old gangster movie—both my killer and I suffering from "lead poisoning?"

Remember the sixties, how we all wanted to free everyone of inhibition. We were so sure that inhibition of natural urges only caused violence. Freedom was the prevention, the cure. We meant freedom to dance naked in the streets, freedom to have guilt-free sex. What blind innocence. Compared to 99% of our inhibitions, keeping our clothes on is nothing. Most of our inhibitions probably keep us from killing one another.

After the hospital, I spent a month in a private rehab facility where cheerful young therapists laid me on a metal slab, dipping me in and out of a warm pool, pulling my limbs this way and that—tireless cheerleaders urging me to attempt this or that impossible movement, and reciting their lying mantra: time, all it takes is time and effort. That mantra had worked for me once—thirty years ago when I wanted to be the youngest pianist on the big stage—but I knew it wouldn't work now. So did they.

After rehab I went to a secret address in San Francisco—secret from everyone but M, from my son and daughter, from two friends who, if I requested other visitors, would blindfold them, then drive them in circles to my location. I was in a high rise, not a luxury penthouse like the one Huey enjoyed, but on an upper floor of a building with several layers of security to penetrate before a visitor could reach me. My mother had always insisted on living in a secured apartment house. My favorite joke had been to sneak through those layers of security, then show up at her door without warning, laughing at her dismay.

So her dismay came back to haunt me. If I had so easily penetrated her secured building, someone else might do the same, might show up unannounced at my door and finish the job before my murderer came to trial. But that was nothing compared to my fears for my son, who also planned to testify. He and O were staying with a succession of friends, passed from one place to another, homes of those who were brave enough to shelter and hide a target.

One friend who had a small child was especially brave to take in P. I told P our relationship was ended, refused to give her my address, refused to answer the letters she gave to O to deliver to me. I had already written my last words to her—find someone else, a lover who is whole and safe.

Then there was the problem of money. I'd never thought much about money before. We worked hard, didn't want much, and there was always enough to pay the bills. Now the medical bills soared, and income was non-existent. Not only had my private liability insurance weaseled out on a technicality, even Workers Comp kept stalling, as if, slumped in a wheelchair or propped in a hospital bed, my brain half-drowned in pain-killers, I could still practice my profession. I don't know what I would have done without

friends like K, who fought them, who started a trust fund for me, held fundraisers, tapped every possible source.

They raised money for M, as well, who was still in practice—but would you have hired a lawyer with my name on the door? Even if you didn't get caught in the cross fire, would you want to hire a lawyer who was half out of his mind with worry about dangers to his son and daughter?

While I'm on the subject of M, you could do him and me a favor. We all have mutual friends. When a couple breaks up, people take sides, spread gossip, the old urban legends of cruelty or desertion that come out of nowhere but won't die—like those prison legends of who is to blame for what. Someone started circulating the rumor that that M left me for another woman AFTER I was shot. If anyone mentions that story within your hearing, please kill it with the simple facts (which, in this case, are not just "technical truth," but the whole truth.)

I attended a couple of fundraisers held for me in public rooms of good hotels with good security. California Women Lawyers and dozens of their friends came. Old friends on the Left too, people I hadn't seen for years. I don't know what was worse, being alone with my pain and my thoughts, or being in a crowd, playing the role of the grateful, gallant, brave, good-humored victim, bloody but unbowed, etc. etc. All that noble smiling was exhausting. I prepared witty thank you-speeches for their donations, for their courageous presence, always finishing off with a joke, like, "I'm still active, organizing the Jewish Lesbian Nearly Fifty Paraplegic Gun Club." Loud, hearty, hollow laughter.

I was grateful to go back to hide in my secured apartment, as the level of paranoia rose. Fleeta Drumgo had shown up at a police station, shaking and sweating, saying he knew who had ordered me killed, then running out before anyone could talk to him. Next day he was found dead on the street, shot "execution-style," said the newspapers. My mother started getting death threats in the mail. M and N were afraid to use our family car. They had to ask friends for a volunteer brave enough to drive one of them (disguised by a hat or head scarf) to the bank, to the market, in a car unlikely to be recognized. Only one, not both, lest a killer get a "two-for-one" as N put it, trying to laugh. M made sure that our son and daughter switched homes every few days, while they made plans to move far away from California as soon as the trial was over.

The trial finally began last January. Because I was still technically alive, the charge against Brooks was only attempted murder. N and K took turns calling me with reports from the courtroom, packed with my supporters, all the good people who'd given money and time and love. N described Brooks swaggering in and clenching his fist in the black power salute before sitting down at the defense table. No one we knew would touch his defense, and everyone felt sorry for the man finally appointed to defend him.

On the day that I was scheduled to testify, I was wheeled in by armed guards. I wore a wig, a high collared coat, sun glasses, head scarf, whatever might confuse someone planning to shoot me on my way to court. No one recognized me until my name was called.

I had been a first-rate lawyer. I knew how to be a first-rate witness. I sat up as straight as I could, despite the pain (I'd gone easy on the drugs that morning so that I wouldn't slur my words). I was cool, objective, brief, letting the prosecutor lead me, minute by minute, through the events of that night. I quietly pointed to each place where a bullet had entered, coolly describing what I felt as it ripped through me. I never raised

my voice. I might have been reciting the list of ingredients in the recipe for the cake O and P had made together that night after dinner. The subdued defense lawyer asked me a couple of competent questions, doing as decent a job as anyone could for his client. I managed to hold myself almost erect until he said, “No more questions.” The judge told me I could go.

The jury didn’t take long to come back with a guilty verdict. Z, who attended the sentencing, told me Brooks tried to read a speech that sounded like garbled excerpts from George’s published letters, mixed with my own articles indicting the racist criminal justice system. The judge interrupted him, “I’m not going to listen to this,” and told his lawyer to file the statement. Then he passed the maximum sentence, seventeen years, and adjourned the court.

But Brooks had one more stunt, one more re-enactment to perform. You probably never heard about the courtroom scuffle between George and a guard, ten years before, during a pre-trial hearing; it had turned into a near-riot as his supporters in the court joined in. While Brooks was being led away, he suddenly broke free, jumped the prosecutor, knocked him down. This time there were no allies and supporters like George’s to join the fray. Guards grabbed Brooks, cuffed him, and dragged him out, still yelling slogans and curses. It was all over. My reason for staying alive.

I thought of you just before I flew out of SF. A friend told me that Eldridge has settled in Berkeley, looking scruffy and paunchy and hung over, in and out of detox. He now appears at every local political squabble—usually with a sign protesting whatever he understands the Left position to be. Between these meetings he sits and dozes in a coffee house on College Avenue. My friend recognizes him, turns away—then watches as everyone else who enters the coffee house does exactly the same, as if in a choreographed dance. Maybe Dante’s God has designated Berkeley as Eldridge’s circle of Hell, where he will eternally suffer silence and averted gazes, the opposite of the fame he once tasted. And maybe other, minor, mischievous gods have assigned the ghost of Eldridge to haunt aging Berkeleyans who once wore FREE HUEY buttons and chanted, “Eldridge for President!” Why no one has shot or stabbed him dead remains a mystery—unless Huey’s cocaine-high sense of humor dictates “hands-off,” as the best way to torture him with a slower, more painful

is that the whole story, done now?

Since the trial ended, there has been nothing for me to do but take my drugs, try to find a position that eases the pain, and endure the smell of bags of my own shit waiting to be emptied. And always—the fear. How much danger is there, and for how many years? For how many people? Even the prosecutor at Brooks’s trial began taking extra precautions for his family. And then there was the jury and their families.

For one final time, I became the old, emphatic Fay, took charge, made decisions, made plans to remove the main source of danger—myself—from sight, from mind, from memory. I made reality checks first, called K and Z and V—the sharpest and most straightforward lawyers I know. I carefully adopted our courtroom-cool tone. “I’m thinking of killing myself. Help me weigh the evidence. Here’s my list of reasons for doing it.” (I put pain and incapacity first, danger to others, last. No point in assuming a self-sacrificial tone.) “Can you think of any reasons against?” K came up with one—the drugs: was I sure the pain-killers weren’t fogging my judgment with depression? I was

sure. Z volunteered to help, but V cautioned me to leave friends and family out of it—"the laws in this state can leave them in a mess afterward." Okay, I could do it alone. Furthermore, I had no intention of having my body found by anyone who loves me.

I did my research, chose a far-off country. A vacation in Hong Kong sounds lovely, I started telling people. A different culture, a city mixing old and new, far enough away so I'll feel safe. Then I'll be able to think, to decide what to do next. I asked my doctor for a good supply of pain-killers, enough for a month's vacation. Plus a written prescription, should I decide to stay longer.

Then came the clearing out of things, the burning of documents, tedious, but easier than I expected.

The hard part was sitting with friends I invited, one at a time, for what we both knew but didn't say was a final visit. Friends stared into the blazing fireplace during the long silences that broke up our awkward, cheery talk. It was so wearying, so lonely, each of us playing our roles in this staged drama, pretending, each for the sake of the other, that I'm not going to do what I'm going to do.

Since the night of my murder, I've never slept more than two hours before waking with pain. Here in Hong Kong, I have stopped trying to separate night from day. I give all my waking time to writing letters. I nod off for a while, wake up with the pen still in my hand, go on writing. I write letters of love and gratitude and comfort. Letters that tell my children to be brave and happy and free of any worry about me. I write that the men who could be dangerous to them will soon have forgotten me and destroyed each other—and yet, and yet, be careful. Letters to old comrades. Letters of motherly advice to friends who no longer bring me the problems I know they haven't solved. Letters to lovers, starting with M, who is now someone else's husband. Yes, I did see P again—she came with M to see me off at the airport—and I promised that we would be together again soon. Soon. In my letter to P, I asked her to forgive that one and only lie I ever told her.

Over and over again, I thought I had written the last letter. I would reach for the bottle of pills, but then I would think of another letter that should be written, a few personal, private words to remember me by. All this writing has been quite a chore for a paraplegic befuddled by pain and drugs. On the other hand, I've discovered that while writing a letter, I occasionally, for a moment, am the whole person I used to be. In letters, a writer can almost be free of the body, can select any mood or role, can create the image most comforting or most attractive to the reader. You and I know all about the power of letters, don't we? We learned from experts.

The sky is getting pale. I'd better finish this before my care-giver wakes up. She'll not disturb me when she sees that, for once, I can sleep for three hours, six, seven. By the time she suspects anything, it should be too late.

Good luck,
Fay

After the death of Fay Stender her son and daughter relocated thousands of miles from the Bay Area and from each other. For nearly thirty years family and close friends have discouraged anyone from writing about Stender, refusing to be interviewed or to cooperate with any proposed biography. Brief interviews with and legal articles by

Stender from 1970 were not helpful. My sole source was what seemed to me to be a sympathetic, fair, yet insightful article by David Horowitz, written after the memorial gathering for Stender in San Francisco in 1981. When the article came out, Horowitz, a former editor at Ramparts *and former fundraiser for the Black Panthers, was furiously attacked, first by Eve Pell (former prisoner advocate/ friend of Stender) then by others on the Left—attacks which may have played a role in his political shift to the far Right.*

In 2007, I asked friends of friends of Fay Stender if anyone might now—28 years later—feel safe enough to talk to me about her. I got nowhere. Then I asked a lesbian friend— who knew someone who knew Stender's last lover— if she could get someone to do a fact check on my only source, the Horowitz article. My request provoked anger directed at me, which increased as I pressed for an explanation of exactly what was incorrect or offensive in the article.

Disturbed, but not quite ready to give up, I kept asking around Berkeley. I learned that a casual acquaintance of mine (designated as "K" in my letter/story) once a legal advocate for prisoners in the east, had, after coming to California, become a friend of Fay Stender. K agreed to reread my copy of Horowitz's article and mark the factual errors. When we met again, K handed back the article, on which he had made minor corrections. "I remember how furious we all were at Horowitz, but now I don't know why. He got most things right."

In a 2009 memoir Eve Pell offered an explanation and defense of this undying anger. Horowitz, she wrote, "painted Fay and the rest of us as misguided ideologues— silly, oversexed women awed and bamboozled by slick, violent con men . . . much of his information had come from me, and it was true . . . ." As Pell also pointed out in her memoir, Quakers had been working on prison reform for decades, "when we came on the scene . . .and were hard at work when we left . . ."

One last, high-profile incident wrote finis to the few years of well-intentioned, "misguided ideologues . . .bamboozled by slick, violent con men." A year or so after Stender's death, Norman Mailer arranged for well-promoted publication of a book by, and release of, his convict protégé Jack Abbot. Within weeks of parole, Abbot killed a waiter in a coffee house.

Edwin Glenn Brooks never served his complete 17-year sentence. He was killed in prison.

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