

The Women of the Ohio 7



Carol Saucier Manning



Barbara Curzi-Laaman



Pat Gros Levasseur

"Hearts starve as well as bodies,
Give us Bread but Give us Roses, too."



PATRICIA GROS LEVASSEUR

"...Eight of us are charged with conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government by the use of force and we never had any Redeye missiles, we had no tanks, no helicopters and no 100 million dollars. I find great irony in these charges -- charges serious enough to threaten the rest of my life.

I ask these questions -- Wasn't it white Europeans who came to this country and put down, destroyed and overthrew by the use of force whole nations of Native American people, virtually wiping out an entire civilization? Wasn't it our ancestors who stole and enslaved African people? Isn't it our country that has a long history of going outside its borders to determine what form of government people of other countries should have? What is it when high ranking government officials can lie to the people of this country and for their own profit and ideology sell arms and drugs and solicit funds to finance the overthrow of Nicaragua? Is that Racketeering? Is that a Corrupt Organization? Is that Seditious?"

CAROL SAUCIER MANNING

"...I know that I am not a criminal, nor am I dangerous. I am a woman who has stood by her family and tried to raise her children to be responsible, loving people. I have been motivated only to better the conditions and lives of the poor and working class people of our country and throughout the world; a world our children can inherit.

For me to be sent to isolation cells; forced to endure extremely harsh conditions; told that I was designated to the political prisoners' Control Unit at Lexington, Kentucky all before I am put on trial let alone found guilty of these current charges is to me all part of the government's plan -- a plan that began the day they kidnapped my children."

BARBARA CURZI-LAAMAN

"...What they really want to do is make examples of us. By trying to bury some white working class mothers for being part of the Resistance Movement, they are trying to show others that they'd better go along with their plans, quietly...

But as I said to the judge when he sentenced me to fifteen years in prison: any prison term set on me is only a sentence to Barbara Curzi-Laaman, the Mother, because as a conscious woman and committed revolutionary, these walls won't deter me from working for true freedom and democracy until we reach that better day. I trust that either in my lifetime or in my children's lifetime, imperialism will die and people all over the world will truly be free to live in dignity. I trust that people will act now..."

Pat Gros Levasseur

My name is Patricia Gros Levasseur. I was born Patricia Helen Rowbottom on December 11, 1948 in Redlands, California. My father was in the Army and by the time I was five my family had settled in Delmar, on the Eastern shore of Maryland. My parents grew up during the depression in Pennsylvania and Ohio. I have five sisters and two brothers; we were a large poor family. My parents worked hard bringing all of us up; and as soon as my youngest sister was old enough, my mother went to work in the pants factory in Delmar. She then went on to typing jobs in offices. She is seventy now and still holds a job.

I was an average student in school; I loved to draw and read. We were raised Catholic and went to a small Catholic school for eight years. It was there that I discovered the differences between rich kids and poor kids.

The towns I grew up in were segregated and I vividly remember going home and talking about how the kids in school talked about Black people. My mother and father told us that we were all made equal and that the only difference between Blacks and whites was the color of our skin. We were told not to use racist terms. An environment of subtle and not so subtle racist messages prevailed in our community. I feel fortunate today, however, that I wasn't raised in a family that fostered racism. In the mid-60's, when uprisings were occurring in Baltimore and nearby towns like Cambridge and Crisfield, Maryland, the emotions ran pretty high in our community. I was often at odds with a lot of kids my age when racism crept into our conversation. Salisbury at that time was divided by a bridge over the Wicomico River. One side was where the Black people lived. The

difference in the standard of living between Blacks and whites was stark.

One day I went on the other side of the bridge. There were few sidewalks and most of the houses needed paint and fixing up. Children played with old raggedy toys and a lot of adults hung around stoops and corners in the middle of the day. I learned later, as I came to meet and know some Black friends, that old text books from our school were sent to their school.

I developed an interest in the Civil Rights Movement which led to an awakening in myself and a deep desire to study and learn more about the world. I wasn't so much interested in what was being taught at my high school; though I was interested in the history of peoples, in why there was slavery and why there are rich people and poor people.

I graduated from high school in 1966 and was only prepared to get a typing job. I wanted to go to art school but my family couldn't afford it. Being interested in art, I decided to work at a local press; but soon found myself sealing and addressing envelopes. I didn't see any future as a working class woman there on the Eastern Shore. My needs and ideals were reaching beyond what was available for me there. I had read and talked with friends about going on the road. I was questioning many established values and looking for a new kind of life and freedom.

My father was an Army recruiter and the VietNam War was becoming an issue between us. My father felt really torn about it himself. A lot of boys went in the Army, as he had, for training and jobs not available to them otherwise. When boys he had recruited came home in body bags, our family became immersed in sorrow and turmoil. I

left home when I was seventeen, not so much to leave my family, but to be on my own, independent, and to see the world.

I packed up from Ocean City, Maryland in the summer of 1967 and headed out to California with a few friends in a Volkswagon. We took the long way. I came to love the people of this country and their diversity. I fell in love with the road and the beauty of its varying landscapes.

I was out in San Francisco for the summer of 1967 and spent the next few years traveling back and forth from the East coast to the West coast, acquiring my education, such as it is. I lived in Baltimore, New York, San Francisco and points in between. I met people from different cultures and came to develop real friendships with many kinds of people. I learned a lot.

We talked of ways we might model the world. We talked about the rich and poor; about socialism and equality. People gave me books and I came to know some of the real history of this country and the world. My experiences as a woman taught me about feminism and women's liberation.

In 1972 I landed in Portland, Maine. In Portland, there were anti-war groups and a strong sense of community. I got a job as an outreach worker for a poverty program. A feeling of empowerment and unity existed among people; something I had never before experienced. I worked with welfare rights groups and helped to publish a small anti-war feminist paper called "The Rag." I went to demonstrations against the VietNam War and discussed with people the role of U.S. corporations in the war. I learned of the long history of corporate profit making at the expense of the indigenous and oppressed peoples throughout the world. When the anti-war movement died down toward the end of the war, and many programs for poor people were phased out, I got a job at the public library. Then I heard of a group doing work with prisoners and I went to see how I could help.

I began volunteering after work with the group known as SCAR--Statewide Correctional Alliance for Reform. As it began to grow, more and more of my time was spent working there. We opened a storefront which became the SCAR Center. SCAR was mostly politically conscious ex-prisoners who, in the aftermath of Attica, began to apply a political analysis to our country's prisons.

Many VietNam Vets were in prison and victims of the drug plague in



Attica Prison Uprising D yard 1971

this country. As always, the victims of our economic system are the ones imprisoned. I also took an active interest in working with the families of prisoners. It was during my work with SCAR that I met Raymond Levasseur; my husband, and the father of our three daughters. I also met Thomas and Carol Manning.

In SCAR we worked in the community; giving rides to people who visited the State prisons. We did public speaking at area schools and churches; started a bail fund; a prisoners union at Thomaston State prison and published a newspaper called "The SCAR'd Times." We counseled women on birth control and abortion; coordinated work with welfare rights workers and spoke up for people at court appearances. We tried to help prisoners returning to the street; and began political study and discussion groups.

The needs of the poor and those trying to make it after prison are enormous. Many of us felt we were getting in over our heads from

trying to provide so many of the services that people needed. Our approach in the beginning stages of SCAR was that of the 60's 'Survival Programs.' We had been inspired by George Jackson and by the Black Panther Party's "Programs for Survival."

We felt that by empowering people to take control of their lives, and by extension their communities, they would get strength from working together. We felt that if work and unity brought results and improvement in their lives; people would see that their interests lie in unity with each other and with other poor and working people.

When I look at the problems in our country today: the homeless; the crisis of drug abuse; poor education for oppressed peoples; the cycle of poor nutrition; poverty; and attacks on Black and Hispanic people and women; I know that survival programs are what's called for. We need all levels of resistance and organizing; and conscious people today must realize that it takes hard work and a long term commitment. If I were free today, I feel my best contribution to the people would be to do that hard day to day work in the community.

Around 1974, some of us started a book store that we called "The Red Star North." The book store sent political books free to prisoners; and corresponded with prisoners. We had study groups and political education as part of the store's events. I worked there while continuing other community work. In 1974, Ray, Tom and others decided to go underground where they felt they could make their greatest contribution to the struggle. They had also become targets of the Portland Police Death Squad, the existence of which was made public at hearings at the Portland City Hall.

The death squad targeted ex-prisoners. A man named Foster was found guilty of criminal conduct and thrown off the police force for his part in the squad's activities. We were also under heavy

surveillance by both police and the FBI, not only from our work in SCAR, but also for opening what was considered a radical book store in Portland, Maine. I remained in the book store; although cautiously; since one woman worker had been attacked and raped while working there. This happened at a time when the store had been ransacked; and political posters ripped were off the walls.

It became very hard for us to keep the store financially afloat. We were sending out free books but not selling enough to break even; so I closed the store. I gave the remaining books to the Red Book Prison Program in Cambridge, Mass.; and moved to the Boston area. I then discovered I was pregnant. I started doing temporary office work and volunteered occasionally at the Red Book Store.

I decided to have the baby. I was twenty-six; very much in love with Ray; and while everything felt like a struggle against all odds, I knew I'd be a good mother and that our child would be beautiful.

Carmen was born January 12, 1976. Since Ray was completely underground by this time, it was becoming increasingly dangerous for us to be with each other. I made a trip down to Maryland to see my family and show them Carmen. We had a very close time together and we talked about what I would do. I was always welcome at home, but we all knew that my life wasn't in Maryland anymore. I told them I was going to live with Ray and that I may not be in touch for a long time. I told them that didn't mean anything was wrong and that they shouldn't worry. Of course they would worry; but they understood that it was natural for me and Ray and Carmen to be together. That was the last time I saw my father; he died while I was underground.

From reading history I had learned that clandestinity was a necessary component of successful resistance movements. Examples such as Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad; the Resistance in Nazi Germany; Chile; and Vietnam taught us that in order

for people to survive and build in times of great repression it is sometimes necessary to live and operate anonymously -- away from those whose interests lie in crushing such resistance.

When I went underground it was primarily because I loved Ray. I wanted a life together; for him to know his daughter and for Carmen to know her father. Yet I didn't have a realistic sense of what living "under" with a child would be like.

We were underground for almost ten years; myself, for eight years. While underground I was not an armed guerilla. I respect and admire women who have had to sacrifice their lives as mothers to fight for their freedom and that of their people. I, however, made a decision to bring a small baby underground; and the weight of that decision grew as time went on. My responsibility, as I saw it, was to provide as safe and normal a home life for the children as I could, given the circumstances.

I used false identification and rented homes under names other than my own for us to live in. Ray and I both worked different jobs; from waitressing to woodcutting to factory and office work. We learned to cook good food and enjoy the simple pleasures of a life together. Carmen grew healthy and strong. We helped her learn how to read and write her letters. We were very isolated in a sense; since we couldn't get too close to many people. When Carmen was two, we had her sister Simone; born April 2, 1978. On March 8, 1980, International Women's Day, we had our third daughter, Rosa.

I have been asked since our arrest what it was like having children underground. I sometimes sense from people an overly romantic view of life underground; and it is important to me that people understand that it is very difficult to have children underground. It is hard on children for many reasons: their names have to be changed; their friendships are short lived; and they can have no contact with their relatives.

Children are very resilient; and our daughters are strong and well-adjusted; but the risks were enormous. The emotional pull to keep my family together was very strong; so I stayed underground with a lot of conflicting feelings and worried about what would happen next. We are a life-loving people and we wanted to have children and a full life together. Our daughters are well-loved, smart and healthy children. They are very close sisters and we are very proud of them. As time went on and the search for us intensified; I felt that I couldn't go back into public life. I knew in my mind that the state police and FBI would resort to anything to find Ray and Tom and the others. I felt we faced certain interrogations, torture and imprisonment. In fact, these fears became a reality once we were captured.

On November 4, 1984; me, Ray and the girls were stopped not far from our home in Deerfield, Ohio. Many agents with machine guns arrested us. Our daughters were separated from us and within one hour after our arrest, agents were interrogating our oldest daughter. They showed her wanted posters with her and her sisters' pictures on them; and other posters of people she loved. They told her she was lucky her family was alive; and if she wanted to make sure her cousins and auntie and uncle were not killed, she should tell them where they lived. They offered her \$20.00 and a pizza. They scared an already traumatized little girl.

Fortunately our daughters were only in state custody for two days when my mother and brother came for them. Since our arrest we have been daughters. We have had honest talks with them and try to deal with their many questions, their worries and their sorrows as openly as possible. They are hopeful that we will be together again and so are we.

After the arrest I was put in the County Jail in Cleveland along with my comrades. I had never been wanted for any crime and was charged with "harboring a fugitive," (my husband); and possessing

false ID. I was convicted of this in February of 1985; and received a five-year sentence. I am eligible for release on that sentence in March, 1988.

Seven of us were indicted in 1985 for conspiracy and eleven political bombings claimed by the United Freedom Front; actions which called for the end of U.S. support of apartheid in South Africa and U.S. involvement in Central America. I was severed from that case early in the trial because my lawyer suffered a personal tragedy and couldn't continue to represent me.

Those same bombing charges have now been renamed "arson" by the U.S. government in order to fit the requirements of the RICO Statute. We are now charged with a three count indictment that includes RICO Conspiracy, one RICO substantive, and the rarely used Seditious Conspiracy. All three counts of the indictment are based on exactly the same allegations; they get repeated under three different types of conspiracy. The total in time faced is sixty years.

When I look back over my life and the sum total of my experiences so far; I'm struck by the reality of the charges of Seditious and RICO. I know my life has not been criminal or corrupt. Now the government is saying that we are seditious; that we conspired to put down and overthrow by the use of force the government of the United States. I find great irony in these charges -- charges serious enough to threaten the rest of my life. I ask these questions: wasn't it white europeans who came to this country and put down, destroyed and overthrew by the use of force whole nations of Native American peoples; virtually wiping out an entire civilization? Wasn't it our ancestors who stole and enslaved African people? Isn't it our country that has a long history of going outside its borders to determine what form of government people of other countries should have? What is it when high-ranking government officials can lie to the people of this country and for their own profit and

ideology sell arms and drugs and solicit funds to finance the overthrow of Nicaragua? Is that Racketeering? Is that a Corrupt Organization? Is that Seditious?

Eight of us are charged with conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government by the use of force and we never had any Redeye missiles; we had no tanks; no helicopters; and no hundred million dollars. It is our belief that it is the people of a country who decide to throw off an unjust and corrupt government. It is the people of a country who decide what to build; it always has been and it always will be.

There is a tradition in this country that I feel deeply as a working class woman; a tradition of fighting to be able to work for a decent living, and the end product of that work is a life that ensures full human dignity. Perhaps it is this that we have in common with all people world-wide. It is my hope that we as a people can join with the struggling peoples of the world and build a future for all of us.



Carol Saucier Manning

I was born January 3, 1956 in Kezar Falls, Maine. I grew up in this small rural town; the daughter of woolen mill workers.

Being part of a family of woolen mill workers made me question at an early age the way working class people are treated; how a company slowly murders its workers; subjecting them to poor working conditions and having total lack of concern for their health. The people; who give their lives to their work; barely make enough to support their families; while the company extracts millions of dollars from their labor.

As a child, instead of taking the school bus home after school; I would often walk to the mill and wait for my parents. I watched the workers file out of the mill at 3:00 p.m.; shuffling their feet; exhausted after eight hours of constant hard work. Many of them looked much older than their age; in their faces and in their bodies.

Some workers were at the age of retirement; but because of their survival needs, had to keep working. I was proud of my parents. They did their best to provide their family with a nice home and to give their children what we wanted. Yet I asked myself over and over: why did they have to give their lives for just these things? It's not that I felt people shouldn't have to work an eight hour day; but why weren't they given what they deserved -- fair pay, safe working conditions and good medical care?

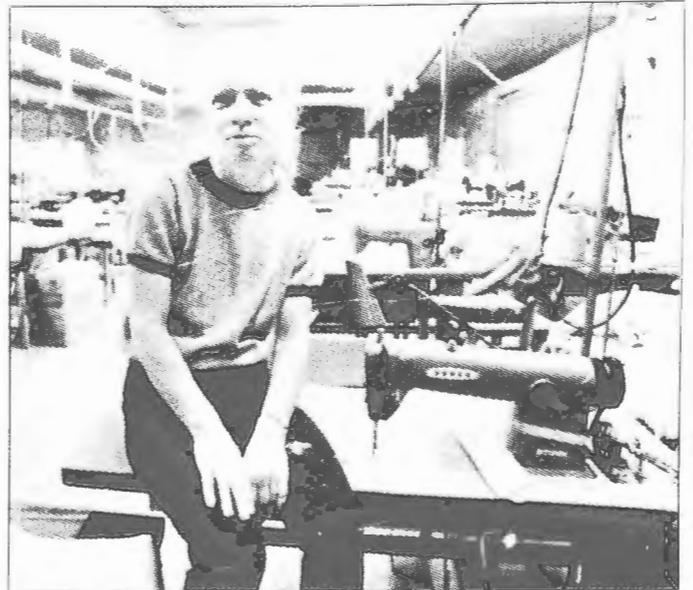
My mother was suffering from cancer and only stopped working when she went to have surgery. Soon afterward she returned to work to pay for her medical care. When I was fourteen, my mother died; losing her twelve year battle with cancer. This was a very hard time for me. I was angry from feeling my

mother's life was shortened by having had to work so hard; even when sick. I was not doing well in school and could see that I, too, was heading for a lifetime in the mills.

At the age of sixteen, in the tenth grade; I quit school and soon after married my husband/comrade, Tom Manning.

Tom and I moved to Oxford, Pennsylvania in 1972. Living in Oxford I saw how mill life extended beyond my home town; and that other people throughout this country were working and living under brutal conditions; just doing their best to get by.

I also began seeing the racism that exists in this country. Having lived in an all white area of rural Maine; I'd never seen it so clearly before. I saw how Black people were forced to live in one small area of town; living in extreme poverty and under constant watch by the largest concentration of police in that area. I experienced how privileged I was treated because of my white skin and how much hatred so many white people felt toward Black people for no other reason than the color of their skin.



I could not ignore this racism and felt a responsibility to fight against it. One day I would raise a family and make every effort to teach my kids that all people have the right to human dignity, respect and the same opportunities in life.

When I became pregnant with our oldest son Jeremy; Tom and I moved back to Maine. I wanted to be close to our families. We decided to live in Portland, about forty miles from where I grew up.

In early 1974, Tom and I became involved in SCAR (Statewide Correctional Alliance for Reform), an organization that supported prisoners; but which also was involved in community work. We helped start a day care center; a newspaper, "The Scar'd Times;" visited prisoners; and helped out the families of prisoners in any way we could. A community bail fund project which still exists today was started; along with a martial arts program for children. We provided many people with food, shelter and jobs.

This was my first involvement in community work. I felt our work could make a change in the lives of poor and working class people; yet, I knew their needs were much greater than what the few of us could help with. We were barely surviving ourselves.

I was involved in study around people's liberation struggles throughout the world; and was learning about the different forms of governments -- socialism, capitalism, etc. I came to understand that our form of government was based on corruption and the oppression of peoples the world over; a system which makes it possible for only a few men and women to be comfortable while the rest of us produce their comfort for them. At this time I decided it was my obligation to struggle for change in our government. It was time for people to start resisting this government that does not work in the interests of its people; but instead, oppresses them. The same government that does not recognize the right of all people to have a decent job; food; good health care; clothing and shelter.

Because of our work in SCAR, we were put under federal police surveillance. This came as no surprise; since the history of this country has always shown that whenever people have taken up resistance against our government-- whether because of poor working conditions; low wages; or racism-- they have become the targets of police surveillance, harassment and even murder.

We continued with our work; and some of us opened "Red Star North," Portland's first and only radical book store with a free-to-prisoners book program. We became aware of a death squad that formed within the Portland Police Department. It was a group of policemen who had made a list of local ex-prisoners and activists who they felt should be killed. My husband, Tom, and Ray Levasseur were two of the people on this list. The city of Portland held hearings resulting in the firing of a policeman named Foster. He was later tried, convicted and sentenced for his part in the death squad. Many members of SCAR were present during the hearings at City Hall; holding demonstrations outside and voicing their concerns over the safety of peoples' lives.

The police repression was becoming more intense; and we began to receive direct threats. One morning, a woman was working alone when two men entered the bookstore and began ransacking it; tearing down political posters and knocking over book cases. One of them attacked and raped her while the other stood guard. They threatened further attacks upon leaving.

It was during this period that Tom began working less and less up front in the community. I was nineteen years old; had a one year old son; and loved my husband very much. I was afraid for my family's safety and didn't want us to be separated. I decided I would go with him and we began living in clandestinity. No one knew where we lived; though I maintained contact with my family.

Then in September, 1976, things changed. A warrant had been put out for my arrest. Joseph Aceto, who

had been associated with SCAR inside prison, was arrested in the summer of 1976. He began cooperating with the police; immediately claiming that I was involved in a Maine bank robbery along with Tom and Ray Levasseur. He was placed in the Federal witness protection program in exchange for testimony at the trials of people he claimed committed bank robberies and bombings. A year after entering the program and being given a new identity, he was again arrested, this time for burglaries. While in jail on these charges, he killed his cellmate by repeatedly stabbing him -- more than sixty times, with a knife and claw hammer.

Joseph Aceto was well known for being a heavy drug and alcohol user with a long history of mental health problems. Using the lies and fantasies of this deranged, unfortunate person; the FBI justified putting out a warrant for my arrest and labeling me dangerous.

It was around this time, in 1976, that I had decided it would be best if I returned up front to the community. This is where I felt I could do the most amount of good for our movement; I also realized it was going to be difficult to live underground with a child. After learning I faced arrest and the possibility of doing twenty-five years in jail; I made my decision not to return. Instead, I had to cut off total contact with my extended family.

For the next nine years I remained underground with my husband and children. There were many times when I felt it would be in the best interest of myself and my children for me to go above ground. I would deal with the bank robbery charge and continue on. But always, the reality of facing many years spent in jail, separated from my children; and always knowing the police would go to any extent (physical torture, set ups, etc.) to try and get information from me about my husband and others; always, that stopped me from taking the step back into public life.

Tom and I have three children: Jeremy, born November, 1973; Tamara, born June, 1980; and Jonathan, born December, 1981. My priority has been to provide them with the best home life we could; living as normal a life as most people. The children were provided with good educations. Our oldest son was very involved in community activities such as little league. We always stressed to them the importance of learning all they could in life; and I'm very proud to say; they are loving and smart children today.

On April 24, 1985, Tom and I were arrested and our three children kidnapped by the FBI and state police. They were held incommunicado for eight weeks. Though Tom and I had family members immediately come to pick up the children; the state of Virginia where we were captured, under the direction of the FBI, would not release our children to anyone. We hired attorneys for the children; who also were not allowed any contact with them, or given any information as to where the children were going to be held. Jeremy, who was eleven years old at the time, was interrogated by the FBI and state police without an attorney present immediately after the arrest; as well as five other times. One of these interrogations lasted seven hours.

During the eight weeks the children were being held, Tom and I were offered various deals from the government. The first offer, on the day of our arrest, was made by an assistant U.S. attorney from the eastern district of New York. He came to the holding cell and said that my children were in a bad situation and if I would tell them what they wanted, I could help out my children. They were holding our children hostage with the hope that one of us would break.

Tom and I felt it necessary to go on a hunger strike after doing everything we could in the courts to gain the children's release. The public became aware of what was happening to the children; and a letter writing campaign along with

demonstrations in cities across the country was underway. They are with family now and have adjusted well; although I am not sure this experience is something our children will every fully recover from. During a time when they most needed love and support from family members, they were put in a terrifying situation. They have suffered much pain since our arrests. For them it is not over, although both parents face long jail sentences. As a family we have not given up hope that one day we will be together. This hope we will hold on to forever.

Since my arrest I was tried in Brooklyn, New York in 1985 for Conspiracy and eleven bombings carried out by the United Freedom Front in support of the peoples' struggles in South Africa and Central America. I was convicted of two bombings; acquitted of one; and for the remaining eight counts the jury was unable to reach a verdict.

I am now being charged with two RICO conspiracies and Seditious Conspiracy -- attempting to overthrow the U.S. government by force. Each of these carries a twenty year sentence.

The government has once again charged me with the same bombings that I've already been sentenced for. Now the bombings are called Arson to conform to the RICO statutory requirements.

The other predicate act I'm charged with is the 1975 Maine Bank robbery. The Federal Court in Maine dropped this charge against Tom, Ray and I in 1986. The government's case was so weak that they did not want to bring us to trial. Instead, they added it to a conspiracy charge, where the government's burden of proof is much lesser; making it easier for them to get a conviction. With these charges, the government is making every effort to portray my comrades and I as dangerous individuals and to criminalize our whole lives.

The government also has held us under horrendous prison conditions. Since my arrest and the kidnapping of my children, the government has used prison conditions to try and

break me. I have been subjected to isolation cells; and transported by plane and car while handcuffed and shackled with leg irons. After the arraignment on our present charges, the Magistrate had ordered us to be held in New York at the Metropolitan Correctional Center. The court disqualified our lawyers of choice and appointed to represent us, as indigent defendants, former United States attorneys; i.e., prosecutors. We were suddenly transferred to prisons all around the country.

I was sent to the Davis Hall segregation unit at Alderson, West Virginia. I was put in an isolation cell and denied even the few amenities given prisoners held there. After many calls from my attorneys, I was finally given some of my property -- one small box with hardly any of my legal papers. The Assistant U.S. Attorney prosecuting the case would not swear to the fact that his office didn't know about the transfers; clearly saying to me that the moves were all a part of the prosecution's tactics. Then the Magistrate ordered us back to the District of Massachusetts and I was taken to Framingham, Mass.; the state prison for women. I was again put in isolation in the Max Segregation Building at the prison. Here, I was never allowed out of my cell without restraints. I was made to shower with handcuffs and leg shackles. I was strip searched with male guards nearby and subjected to sexual abuse and degradation. My lawyers were also harassed, threatened with pat searches, not allowed to bring legal papers to meetings and always told to leave shortly after they arrived. For seven days I had no pen, paper or use of a phone. After a short time in March, 1987, the conditions were the same and this time they were found to be unacceptable for trial preparation. We won a change of venue from Boston to Springfield.

While I was in Davis Hall I learned that I was redesignated to the Control Unit for women at Lexington, Kentucky. The Lexington Control Unit is a reality that

faces all women political prisoners in this country. The Lexington Control Unit is the first explicitly political prison in this country. It is the Bureau Prison's answer to the Marion Federal Penitentiary for male political prisoners; long known for its human rights violations. It is designed to deprive and to control.

A woman has no personal clothing; even underwear and night clothes are issued. The uniforms are beige culottes -- to feminize us. There are no visits with loved ones. Mail is severely censored as to political content. Even the Guardian was banned. Cameras monitor your every move twenty-four hours a day.

The unit is small; sixteen cells in a basement of a building. Strip searches are routinely carried out by guards when just going from a cell to the day room. The only human contact is with guards. There are no discipline charges that send a person to the Control Unit and being "good" doesn't get one out. As long as the Bureau of Prisons perceives some "outside force" may come along to free you from prison, you stay in the Control Unit. As long as you maintain your principles and beliefs, you stay in the Control Unit. Presently, Prisoner Of War, Alejandrina Torres, and political prisoners, Sylvia Baraldini and Susan Rosenberg are being held at Lexington.

Due to public pressure, the Bureau of Prisons has said it plans to close the Unit; however, they have done nothing to this end. The Bureau of Prisons has announced that when it closes Lexington it

will open a larger maximum security prison for women with a minimum capacity of 200 women.

For me to be sent to isolation cells, subjected to extremely harsh conditions and told I was designated to the political prisoners' Control Unit at Lexington, Kentucky, all before I am put on trial let alone found guilty of these charges, is to me all part of the government's plan -- a plan that began the day they kidnapped my children.

I know that I am not a criminal; nor am I dangerous. I am a woman who has stood by her family and tried to raise her children to be responsible, loving people; someone who has been motivated to better the conditions of the poor and working class people throughout the country and throughout the world-- a world that our children will inherit.



August 30th 1987, Hartford CT. Demonstration in support of the Puerto Rico/Hartford 15

Barbara Curzi-Laaman

When I reflect on the experiences that make me who I am today, I'm drawn back to my Grandparents' reality as immigrants from Italy who came to the "land of opportunity." With both of them working fifty to eighty hours a week for slave wages; they did find the "opportunity" to put food on the table; and after forty years of payments, they had a house they could call Home.

I grew up in the working class Italian neighborhood of East Boston, with my Grandmother on one floor and my parents and their four children on another. This house is still Home today.

My family was and is a most positive force in my life. My grandmother and parents always expressed to my two older brothers and sister and me, a great love for what they considered important in life. Music and a love for learning were high on this list; but most emphasized, was people.

Of course, the period in history/herstory in which I grew up did pave the path that I was to follow. Born in November of 1957, I witnessed as a child the Civil Rights Movement's struggles and victories on T.V.. I tried to combine the lessons from home -- to treat others as you want them to treat you -- with those of Martin Luther King Jr.; and I knew I wanted to be a part of King's "Dream." Despite living in a predominantly white neighborhood, I was lucky enough to always have Black classmates throughout grammar school. In the shelter of the school setting, we could talk openly of the new practice of desegregation in this country. We saw no problems with it; and we liked being together.

As my social circle widened, I found that not everyone felt as we did. I struggled with people who



displayed racist attitudes, including relatives; thinking for years that they were just ignorant and if they would only open their eyes for a minute. It wasn't until several years later that I began to understand the depth and roots of racism, especially in this country.

In 1975, after the school desegregation program was implemented in Boston, racist attacks became a daily occurrence. My experiences as a member of the Boston Anti-Racist Committee started to really open my eyes. In response to a call on the committee's phone tree, I found myself standing between the home of a former Black classmate and a gang of white men and boys wielding bats and Molotov cocktails. When the police arrived, to my total surprise, they began attacking us -- the unarmed, peaceful group of old and young; women and men; Black and white; and some even pregnant, as I was at the time!

I shouldn't have been shocked, having seen the role of the police during the Freedom marches in the sixties; but I thought we'd moved ahead. So great was my disbelief, that I stood dumfounded and had to be pulled to safety by friends. The

effects of seeing what I thought was the law -- the rights and safety of all citizens -- under physical attack by those who were supposed to be upholding it, left me with the agonizing question: "Where do we turn now?"

I looked for answers at rallies and marches as well as continuing my involvement in the religious community. At that time I was part of a prayer group in Roxbury, Mass. that included some white southerners who came north as a part of the Taize (France) Peace group.

As a child raised a Catholic, I enjoyed listening to my grandmother read to me from a little book about women saints; but I was even more affected by my later experiences in the local CYO (Catholic Youth Organization). Though mostly a creative outlet for adolescents battling with the drug plague (which I was somehow able to avoid), the planning and participating in the folk Masses with the CYO helped determine my becoming a social/political activist. I was already aware of the many confusing issues in the world -- of wars and hunger and injustices. I was absorbed by "The Diary of Anne Frank" and I promised myself I'd never sit by if people ever again displayed such inhumanity to others. At one folk mass, while my brother played "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" on the organ; I read the "Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi" in front of a church full of teenagers; wondering what to make of their lives. I decided then to do whatever I could to live the words I read: "...where there is hatred, let me sow love; ...where despair; hope; where there is darkness, light; and where sadness, joy..." With the VietNam war raging abroad, and racism and poverty at home; I was growing up fast. I was full of hopeful ideas; but I was also growing impatient.

At thirteen, though I enjoyed school and had been doing well, I was mentally and physically developed beyond my years. The effects of the growing Women's Liberation Movement hadn't yet

reached me; so I decided the best way to make some positive changes in the world would be to have a lot of children and raise them in a caring and socialist community -- that is, my images were of a socialist community; but I don't think I even knew what the word meant at the time. So, I set out to find the husband with whom I could carry out this plan. A year later at the age of fourteen, while visiting relatives in Italy, I met a distant cousin and we became infatuated with each other. We agreed that a dozen socialist children would be a fine contribution to the world. By fifteen I was married; and at sixteen, I had my first child. In December of 1973, we had a beautiful daughter.

We lived in Italy our first year of marriage and were part of a Christian collective. This group was made up of young people from every class background. We shared political goals which we manifested in a free alternative school for the children of peasants and poor workers. We also organized a city-wide strike against the monopoly electric company; its corporate greed left the people with no other option. Community organizing and collective unity became very important to me; but I started to feel that praying in a group for solutions was less productive than working toward them.

At sixteen I missed my family so much that we moved back to the States. Then, my lessons in what it means to live and survive in a capitalist society, really began.

At first we were totally dependent on my parents; though I worked in a sportswear factory and my husband at a bubblegum factory. Both jobs paid minimum wages. Before my second child was born in April, 1975, another precious little girl, it was clear that the idea of a dozen children was an immature fantasy. We knew that without further education we had no hope of better employment; so we both went back to school. We still had to continue working; so while



attending community college classes in the evenings, I cared for my baby daughters and the babies of other working mothers during the day. This was all at the same time I was participating in the Anti-Racist Committee.

With the responsibilities of caring for babies, I decided to focus my studies on early childhood development, nutrition, preventive health care and childhood illnesses. I made it a priority to shelter my babies from "negative" experiences and to provide a warm, loving environment for them. I found that for a working family living hand to mouth, basic human needs and human rights were something that had to be fought for, because they just weren't available.

I found that getting medical care meant not only long lines and hours of waiting; but having to arm myself with medical facts in order to protect my children and myself from the frequent and dangerous oversights that occur in understaffed, low-funded public health clinics. Despite a few well intentioned workers, it became clear that the health care system was designed to give real care only to those with lots of money.

The more I learned about nutrition, the more I understood where the saying "ignorance is bliss"

comes from! The effort to find untreated, healthy, affordable food for my family became an impossible task that left me frazzled.

When we finally ventured out to live on our own, we moved to an integrated, family-oriented neighborhood in Cambridge, Mass. within months, the house we lived in was sold to one of the many landlords who were gentrifying the neighborhood by chasing out working people with ridiculously high rents. Before I knew it, the rent was doubled and rising.

Around this time I also became a single parent. At twenty, with a three and a four year old, I realized that the struggle throughout my teen years to go to school, work and survive financially had disintegrated the dreams that brought me and my young husband together. I knew that as a young mother on my own, I'd have to go on welfare. The odds against me would be greater than ever; but I decided to take my life in hand.

I found a collective parent-run day care center that focused on anti-racist, anti-sexist education. I worked there part time while my children attended the center's classes.

I joined a food cooperative and contributed the hours needed in order to afford healthy food with the few food stamps I got; and to avoid the high prices at supermarkets that I found filled with poisons for profit.

There were many tenant union battles going on in Cambridge as people tried to keep the universities from swallowing up their homes. They reminded me of an old, familiar battle in East Boston against an airport that levelled rows of homes only a few streets away. So, I became involved in the tenants' rights struggles for my own survival and to respond to the outrageous acts of landlords city-wide.

As a woman looking for safe birth control over the years, I had found myself treated as a guinea pig by both clinics and private

doctors. Since my payments were through Medicaid, I was in the right categorization for experimentation. From the health problems I suffered as a result of this treatment, and learning about the government's programs in Puerto Rico and in minority communities in the U.S.; I realized that this was no accident. I found that a strategy of genocide was underway against the Puerto Rican people which includes forced sterilization and experimental use of drugs and devices. This is a strategy that has been and is used on the Black Nation, Native American nations, poor whites and Chicanos as well. By controlling women's bodies, the government knows they can determine a people's fate. This understanding brought me to fight for women's self-help programs and health care rights by writing articles, attending teach-ins and arming myself with as many facts as I could. Later, I worked in a neighborhood health center in an ethnic community translating and preparing women for the gynecologist and children for the pediatrician.

When my girls outgrew their day care center, I became involved in the local public school and a great after school program with them. Through this I met my neighbor and comrade Kazi Toure, (s/n Chris King,) as his son attended the same school.

In the neighborhood, we began a dinner collective which meant each family prepared a special meal once a week for the others; giving us the chance to socialize without children, share food and ideas, and save money. Some of the neighbors were Salvadorean people who fled the war and threat of death in their country. Some were here "legally" while others didn't have any papers. Hearing the stories of what they'd left behind and of being found and forced to return to the danger, gave me a keen insight as to what this U.S. backed war really means in human terms.

I was involved in the anti-nuclear movement and was happy to



Nicaraguan wall mural

have some organizers stay at my home when they came to town for rallies or other organizing work. Their guitars and voices singing radical songs of pro-humanity and anti-war themes had a deeply positive effect on my little girls as well as on their mother. We went to sit-ins and marches; but the kids understood that the reality of nukes is not something I could shelter them from.

With the children in school all day, I cared for elderly people in their homes to supplement our meager welfare checks. Evenings, we played music together, (mostly congas) and I went to African dance classes at the community school with the girls always in tow--trying to keep life in balance.

I tried to find the reasons and possible solutions to the economic problems that seemed to be the root of the many social ills and suffering going on. I started studying Marxism with a group of women at the Cambridge Women's Center and later with a group called the Marxist/Leninist Education Project. At the same time I participated in informal study groups with friends.

Between 1978 and 1979, over a dozen Black women were murdered in Boston; so women's self-defense became a key issue. My girls and I participated in the Take Back the Night movement with a fervor.

During this period, I met and fell in love with my comrade-husband (and now co-defendant) Jaan Karl Laaman. Jaan has been a

revolutionary all of his adult life. He'd been an ardent activist opposing the VietNam war and was always fighting for human rights and social justice. When we met he'd just done seven years of prison for armed political actions against Nixon and the war.

In 1979, Jaan, Kazi and I along with our friend and now co-defendant, Richard Williams, joined in the effort to have a successful multi-national benefit concert in the Boston area to raise funds for relief in southern Africa. It was called the AMANDLA Festival of Unity. Bob Marley and other fine artists donated their talent to aid the liberation efforts in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. We trained in martial arts in a large group of women and men; Black, white and Latin; in various communities for almost a year. With over ten thousand people singing freedom songs along with Bob Marley on a hot July afternoon in Harvard Stadium, the day was a great one! Amandla People's Security continued to train and serve as security for many community functions as well as armed the women of the groups with the ability to defend ourselves. The Ku Klux Klan was increasing their recruiting efforts at the time; so we found it necessary to participate at many anti-Klan rallies as security for the gatherings. Now when the police aligned itself with the Klan, I was no longer surprised; and those of us wearing the red AMANDLA shirts with the black and white fists holding a rose in unity knew that we were being closely monitored by the Klansmen -- those in the white hoods as well as those in the blue uniforms. We started receiving threatening phone calls and mysterious break-ins to our homes, as well as blatant police harassment. By this time, Jaan and I had moved back to my old community since I'd lost the battle with my landlord. I was pregnant with our third child, and we needed to protect our family. We found it necessary to move to a nearby community under an assumed last

name; telling only our closest friends and family where we were. Our beautiful baby boy was born in November of 1981, after we took our first step as a family in clandestinity.

There was an increase in repression by January of 1982; and while living partially underground, we heard we were being sought for questioning in the investigation of the shooting of a New Jersey state trooper. Our comrade, Richard Williams, was a suspect in the shooting along with others from the underground Anti-Imperialist Movement, especially Tom Manning.

With the threat of imprisonment for not collaborating and clearly not being able to continue with the political work he was doing, Jaan decided he had to go further underground. I had to decide whether to go and join Jaan with the children or be separated from him, maybe forever. Staying also meant probable separation from my children, too, because I'd refuse to collaborate with the Grand Jury and then I'd face prison as well. I decided to keep my family together; but by the time I was ready to go, I was being followed twenty-four hours a day by FBI agents and state troopers. This surveillance stemmed from an incident where an illegal, racist arrest led to a shootout resulting in Jaan being wanted and Kazi being incarcerated. After five weeks of constant harassment, being detained, having my home and my parents' home searched by teams of agents and still enduring twenty four-hours a day of surveillance, I managed to disappear with my infant baby and two little girls; cutting all ties with my beloved family and friends. This was certainly no easy task; but I felt that keeping my family safe and together and away from the eyes and ears and threats of the FBI and their friends was a necessary move. I had no idea that my children's and my photos would be distributed on wanted posters all over the country when I was wanted for no crime! Although we did everything possible to give the children a healthy, happy and

"normal" life, it became increasingly difficult to function. The hunt for underground activists and guerrillas had intensified.

The children were doing great in school and all was well in the neighborhood. That is, until November 4, 1984; the day we were preparing for our youngest child's third birthday party. I answered the phone to hear, "This is the FBI. The house is surrounded. Come out with your hands up." At first I thought it was a belated Halloween prank; but within seconds, I looked out the window and saw dozens of guns pointed at us from behind many vehicles lining our usually quiet street; and an armored vehicle on our front lawn. They demanded that the children come out first and alone. I thought I would die when, from the window of our house I had to watch agents order my babies to put their hands over their heads as they frisked them and whisked them away.

Shock sets in at times like these as a terrific defense mechanism against anguish. Locked in a cell of concrete and metal in Cleveland's county jail, I found myself singing Bob Marley's "No Woman, No Cry" in an effort not to break down.

The first thing was to try to get the kids free and to family which took six long weeks of battling with the state bureaucracy. Agents immediately began interrogating our children. The three of them somehow survived the month and a half in a kids' prison where they were separated into different units and reprimanded for crying for each other or for us. Our children are divided into two households now; but are with family and doing okay. Though the scars from that experience will stay with them always; perhaps they will be stronger people for having survived it, if anything positive can come from such a horrendous experience.

I was granted bail as my father put up our family home for collateral; but before I was released, the FBI came with court

orders for hair and handwriting samples. Because of our stance on non-collaboration, I was held in contempt of court for not eagerly aiding the agents trying to prosecute me and my comrades; and sentenced to an indefinite prison term.

Then began the never ending indictments. First, "harboring a fugitive", my husband; and then possession of a fake I.D. and weapons. They dropped those charges after we were indicted in New York for actions of the United Freedom Front. The UFF actions consisted of bombing the offices of corporations that support and profit from apartheid. Weapons makers that profit from imperialist wars and military facilities were also targeted. After getting convicted of only three of the possible twelve counts, and after receiving a fifteen-year sentence instead of the government's desired one hundred and fifteen, they felt compelled to reindict me on the same exact acts --the UFF bombings. Only now, the charges come under three separate twenty year conspiracy charges. Two are RICO (Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organizations) counts and one charge of Seditious Conspiracy. For two of these, a person only has to have agreed with, not even committed, any illegal act. The third count requires the commission of two violations of their laws. The prosecutor in this case hopes to bring in certificates of guilt for two UFF bombings; and the conspiracy count, for which I'm already doing the fifteen years. They want to give me sixty additional years for the very same actions I'm already sentenced for -- a possible seventy-five years total.

What they really want to do is make examples of us. By trying to bury some white working class mothers for being part of the Resistance Movement, they are trying to show others that they'd better go along with their plans quietly; and buy into their offers of a white supremacist American

way. This shows how threatened they are by our spirit of resistance. It bewilders them that they haven't been able to break us over the past three years of constant trials and the kind of sentences that could keep our husbands in prison all their lives. Even after they tore us from our children; pillaged our homes and are using every book and piece of paper seized as evidence of a conspiracy to overthrow their "wonderful" government; we're still standing strong! They want to destroy our lives. But as I said to the judge when he sentenced me to fifteen years in prison: any prison term set on me is only a sentence to Barbara Curzi-Laaman, the Mother. Because as a conscious woman and committed revolutionary, these walls won't deter me from working for true democracy until we reach that better day. I trust that either in my lifetime or my

children's lifetime, imperialism will die and people all over the world will truly be free to live in dignity. I trust that people will act now that life may prevail...

