

Texas After Violence Project, Visions After Violence

Interview with Kristin Parker

Interviewer: Alexa Garza

Narrator: Kristin Parker

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Summary: Alexa Garza interviews Kristin Parker. Kristin talks about her 10 year sentence and her incarceration at Mountain View unit. Kristin discusses many programming issues that she observed and experienced in prison, including irrelevant industry classes and a 6 month pre release program that provided minimal information and was held in a very restrictive environment. Kristin talks about the lack of services and personal hygiene items in the units, and how individuals who are incarcerated coped with these shortcomings.

KRISTIN PARKER: Okay, sounds good. Is that

ALEXA GARZA: Go ahead....

PARKER: Is that – did you get married?

ALEXA GARZA: I'm engaged. Remember?

PARKER: I know you're engaged but I hadn't seen your ring, pretty and it looks like a band. Yay.

GARZA: Yeah. Wait. Yeah, for sure, Krissy, I just want to say thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me today. I know that your schedule's really busy, and I appreciate you so good seeing you. So I would just ask that you, please introduce yourself, and we'll just sit here and talk and see where we go.

PARKER: My name is Krissy Parker. Otherwise known as Texas TDCJ number 1639368. I was known by the last name of Metz, M-E-T-Z, while I was incarcerated at the Mountain View Unit.

GARZA: How much time did you end up doing, Krissy?

PARKER: I was given a sentence of 10 years Ag, (aggravated) and I ended up doing over nine and a half years flat, as a first-time offender. One thing people don't realize in Texas is that if you have an aggravated or 3G charge, you have to do 50 percent of your time before you're even eligible for parole, once you... Which means in my instance, I had to do at least five years before I came up for parole. You know, I did my five years and I kept getting set off. Parole can deny you at any time. Doesn't matter, if you're a troublemaker or following the rules to the strictest letter of the law, you know, they can set you off. And so therefore, I got continuously set off even though I wasn't a troublemaker.

GARZA: You and I were both in the similar situation where we were at the point of completing our sentences and we both got sent to Marlin for a pre-release program. That's what they called it, right?

PARKER: No, they called it. They came out, you know – there were two initially, the only FI-6 or FI-5 – I can't remember what it was –was safe P, then TDCJ decides they want to make more money. And so they come up with this other pre-release program, which was completely ridiculous for people that have been locked up as long as we had, you know – like I know I wasn't locked up as long as you. But, you know, stuff like, Drugs are bad. This is a bank account. I mean, stupid stuff. It's like, just because we've been locked up for as long as we weren't doesn't

mean we're, you know, like mentally incapable of getting a bank account or, you know, understanding stuff.

So, it was really a moot point, not to mention the fact we received our answers and then they delayed in pulling us, because we were aggravated charges. Remember? We got pulled way later after people that had, you know, piddly non-aggravated charges like one year, two years, stuff like that. They got pulled before us, and we had done almost her whole sentence.

GARZA: Let's clarify that. I remember, I think, for example – for those people that don't know – you see parole, you get a positive answer. And, for example, my answer was – our answer was to attend a program, a six-month program. After that, we completed that six-month program, we were eligible. We were allowed to be released, but in order for us to attend the program, we waited another year.

PARKER: Yes.

GARZA: To attend a six-month program.

PARKER: Exactly.

GARZA: In reality. It was – then after the completion of the six-month program, for us to get processed out.

PARKER: Waiting for a date.

GARZA: Right? Didn't that take a little bit, also?

PARKER: I want to say it took a couple of weeks, because you and I waited a year to get pulled and we finally got pulled on June 8th of 2018. We were pulled together. Yay! So we were pulled together, and once we got to that different unit, you know, we had to do the six months started from the day we got there. So once we completed that, since it was in December, TDCJ kept dragging their feet on giving us a release date because it was around the holidays. So basically in this instance, for people who had done any amount of time, they just – they just wanted to drag it out. They wanted to drag it out and get as much money as they could, before they let us go. And that's just the fact of the matter. It's crappy.

GARZA: Are you in contact with people on the inside? Is it still continuing the same way?

PARKER: I am in contact with people on the inside via mail. I don't have the phone set up for anything yet. I actually have a video visit with Suzanne Landers on Wednesday.

GARZA: Yay.

PARKER: I'm so excited. But um – that was like one of my real close friends, but it's gotten worse. I mean they are – TDCJ is currently 8,000, according to Suzanne and Sherry Martindale, 8,000 officers short. They have no officers in the pipe chase at all. None in the tower pickets. I asked if they were still checking the perimeter. So with that being said, how are you going to run a unit and have offenders, especially women, feel safe without the worrying about, you know, fighting, people stealing. There's no officers there to watch you. Yeah, so it's crazy.

GARZA: I had heard that as well and I'm glad that you were able – I mean – to speak to them by mail. And you're going to actually have a video visit with them. I know that's something new because COVID, we didn't have that luxury of the video visits. I know that sometimes visits were few and far between for some of us, because our family members couldn't, couldn't attend and stuff. So I'm glad that you're able to have that with her. So that's, you know, pretty awesome and stuff. What are your thoughts or your feelings? I was talking to somebody the other day and for me, looking back on the time that I spent there, I don't actually know how I did it. It seems real surreal. I can't believe we went through what we went through. I feel so far removed from that, and it's only been three years for us. But how do you – what are your feelings or thoughts on that? Looking back on that, what is your take? What do you feel? I mean, if you can articulate that?

PARKER: Asking me that question is genuinely, like – my answer would vary from day to day. Today, I feel sadness because it was so many years – you know, for those of us that were incarcerated for the amount of time we were – it was so many years wasted, you know. I had to – For me, I had to be incarcerated in order to change my behaviors, to be a better person.

Yum, Not a day goes by that I don't think about where I was, because if anything it further fuels the fire that I never want to go back there. My heart breaks for the women that have been incarcerated much longer than both of us, and they keep on getting denied parole, and they're not getting in trouble.

Yum, when I think of Mountain View and when I think of the time, I often ask myself how I did it. It got to the point where after I got set off, you know – like I looked so forward to doing five years and then finally being eligible for parole, because I thought there's no way that I won't make it. I'm a first-time person. I haven't gotten in trouble. I have no prior history of troublemaking or getting in trouble. I was like, I'll make it. So excited. And then my heart broke. You know, I got denied. So then I had to do another year. Then I got denied again, and I had to do another year, and I got denied again. Pretty soon I became somewhat struggling with bitterness and resentment. And the way that I got through the time that I did is because I stopped

looking in time of calendar days and I started.... measuring time in terms of seasons. Like okay, you know, it's almost Spring. Okay, it's Winter. Okay, it's hot. It's about to be summer. Oh my gosh, I hope they turn the air conditioner on soon. You know what I mean? Stuff like that. And that is what kept me sane.

GARZA:Thank you for sharing that's a good way of thinking about it. We all did, you know. When I got set off, it was more like I had to mourn the loss. It was like the death of a dream, my dream.

PARKER: Yeah.

GARZA: I had to mourn it, and it had to grieve it like a death. And a lot of people don't understand that because it's not what you see on TV. We were discussing that a little bit ago. It's not like *Orange is the New Black* or anything. You do not see anyone when you go in front of parole. It's not like you were able to talk to anybody, right? It's like a facilitator.

PARKER: Yes, I mean like – it's something pretty much so cut-and-dry. You go in there. They'll ask you to fill out, like maybe paperwork, so they can have a copy of her social security card and your birth certificate on file. So whenever you do finally, get released by the powers that be, you have that walking out the gate. But I mean every time it's almost like that you're a cat and mouse, and they're dangling a string, because they're playing with your heart. They're playing with your emotions, and it's so easy for women, especially women that got incarcerated that had children or what not, or any woman that had been doing her time. It's so disheartening and so discouraging, when they keep on setting you off for no reason. You're given no option to let them know. All they're looking at is your charge and what happened on paper. They're not looking at how – the strides that you've made to become a better person, the strides that you've taken on your own behalf. Not for parole or anyone else's. To try to better yourself because you never want to come back, you know – it got so frustrating for those of us that were never given the chance to leave. Because you'd see the same women come back after back after back, because they had these little non-ag charges and parole kept letting them go knowing that they were coming back and making them money.

GARZA: You're right. You're right. Everything you're saying is correct. It's just like, it's very, it's a broken system. I know thatyum from like medical, to the clothes that we wore, to the food we were served, to the way we were treated. I mean we could go and speak on that all day. Just ...what is your – what was your experience or, explain a little bit about what we had to go through like on a daily like on a normal day for you.

PARKER: Okay. Well. Normally, you know, initially when I first got to Mountain View, I would go to laundry. Okay. I would get my clothes. Yes, sometimes they were dingy, you know, but I

just thought, Okay, I'm going to follow the rules and go to laundry, whatever. Then, it got to the point where people were so busy stealing the soap, and stealing the bleach, that our clothes were coming out gray. They literally smelled like other women's deodorant. If you flip your shirt inside out, you would see deodorant stains, sweat stains. If someone cut themselves shaving like maybe shaving your armpits, they would have bloodstains. It was foul. Women having their period and being caught unaware. You would have stains on the crotch of your pants. Not to mention the craziest thing is that we wore the same outfits that the men did. That being said in TDCJ – for those of you that don't know, women and men have a collared shirt. It looks like a polo shirt with a pocket on the left breast. Okay, and it's a v-neck, you know. So if you have ... a large rack, shall we say, you know, you are going to show some cleavage. Therefore, the officers would want to put you in like a huge shirt that would make you look like a tent, and the pants have an elastic waistband. Mind you, the pants are made for men. So they had a fairly long crotch compared to a woman, so you would always get accused of sagging your pants, being inappropriate as far as cleavage goes, because you are given a sports bra which for women with larger breasts might as well be, you know, two pasties and some granny panties. So, with that being said, you would have to wash your own clothes because sending them to laundry would come back not washed and gray. And if you sent her undergarments, there they would be with other people's dirty undergarments, and possibly, not even get washed, and come back, smelling worse than they did to go there.

Food-wise. Okay, the kitchen – I worked in the kitchen. All right. The problem that you have is that not everybody gives a care about cooking. Therefore, everybody's more concerned about stealing the stuff you put in the food, not to mention the food is so full of soy fillers that half the time you would eat it, it would make you sick. That was one of the reasons why I stopped even going to the chow hall. And once I stopped going to the chow hall, I didn't get really sick anymore.

When they clean the pots, they would use cleaners that are not supposed to be, used be like degreasers and things that are not supposed to be used in metal surfaces or anything that people, you know, cook food in, because the metal was porous. So it would leave a residue, cook right into your food and make you sick. Um, let me think. What else can I touch on laundry, kitchen?

GARZA: What about medical?

PARKER: Oh, let me tell you about Medical! Okay, let me tell you. All right, initially, I'm sure Alexa agrees with me on this. When we got, when Alexa and I, probably each of us, first got to Mountain View, Medical didn't charge you. Okay, in order to go to Medical, you would have to drop a form, a little piece of paper that you would fill out called a I-60 or a medical request form specifically.

So it would take you, you would have to fill it out, what you wanted to see, where you lived, your ID number, all those things. Okay. Then, Medical would drag their feet in calling you in. All right. It seemed to be they didn't really take you seriously if you were hurt.

A prime example is I never used to go to Medical unless, you know, I really needed to go because by the time they finally gave you a pass to come see them you were well. So with that being said, I had hurt my ankle real bad one day. Having never hurt my ankle, I wasn't trying to get out of going to work or anything else like that. I had continuously dropped forms to request to come to Medical, but I never got a reply

Braille – when I was at work one day, Braille called Miss, one of the officers down there called medical, and I was able to go up there. It took me 30 to 45 minutes to drag my ankle behind me from Braille to Medical, upon which I got into medical as a walk-in, sat there for two and a half hours, only to be told there was nothing wrong with me and be sent back to my dorm.

We had a very strict officer in the dorm one day. Her name was Mrs. Scott and Mrs. Scott knew from me not trying to get out of going to work or trying to be a troublemaker that I wasn't lying. So she got me some ice out of the officers' cooler in the pipe chase and made it into a bag, so I could put it on my ankle. I ended up having to have my mother call the unit, and she called Lieutenant Ruiz, and him and that heavyset black guy, whose name I can't remember off the top of my head the officer there, escorted me to Medical, scared me to death, walked in there to get me at count time. Here I am thinking I'm getting arrested or something, you know, and it was like that.

Later on, Medical started charging us \$100 a year, even the women that were indigent. They would put a marker on your books, so if every six months, the sisters of Jesus helped you out by like \$35 e-com (electronic commissary) or money, TDCJ took it.

What the public doesn't realize is that TDCJ for each offender, man or woman that is incarcerated, gets money per year to house, feed, and clothe the said offender. That being said, there is no reason other than monetary capital gain that TDCJ should have charged us for Medical, i.e. the dentist. Because I'm sorry, we're going to need to go to the dentist. We're going to need our teeth cleaned and, you know, cavities filled whatever. TDCJ didn't even want to fill your cavities. They wanted to pull your tooth, so you look like a gap to the jack-o'-lantern, and then when they pulled your tooth, a lot of them, a lot of ladies that had led hard lives, didn't have any teeth. So, TDCJ used to give you dentures and stuff like that, and they would be all gums. They couldn't even eat. So I mean, ... I'm not trying to go off on a tangent or ramble or nothing, but that's just crazy. There are so many things that as humans we need, and simple basic necessities, like medical care, the dentist. We shouldn't be charged for it, if you're getting like

\$35,000, \$36,000 a year per offender. Where is that money going? Because I guarantee you speaking as a woman having done time on the super-max women's unit, it didn't go to us.

GARZA: Yeah, it's funny you said that. Remember, our lack of feminine hygiene products?

PARKER: Oh, yeah.

GARZA: It was a struggle to get sanitary napkins and tampons for us. And yum... there were – or even toilet paper. We couldn't even.

PARKER: As a woman, you know, they used to rotate it because I remember it all very well. For like, Alexa's touching on. They gave you six tampons, six regular-size tampons, and a pack of 24 sanitary napkins. Now, the sanitary napkins for those of us women, you know, that had a heavier flow than others six tampons you go through in like 12 hours, you know, the sanitary napkins kind of were like a Band-Aid for your panties. You would literally have to use multiple because there were more about the size of a panty liner, then they were pads. And after they actually gave us some bigger pads, they were so cheap that the pad would fall apart in your underwear, and you'd be walking down the street with cotton falling out the leg of your pants.

Toilet paper, having one roll, one week, and two rolls the next week. I'm sorry, we're women. We need more than one roll. They should have been given' us two rolls. In the time that we got that toilet paper that instead of two ply was one ply and was literally like half a roll and it was a one roll week.

Come on, you know. Especially for the women that didn't go to commissary. Because later on they started selling pads and tampons on commissary, thank God they did that, because for those of us that needed more than six – that provided an alternative to that. Same with toilet paper, but it was crazy. Once again, the money that the state gets for offenders, they should have been able to give us those items.

GARZA: It's funny that you mentioned commissary, because we were so grateful when they did start selling those items.

PARKER: Yeah.

GARZA: Something as simple as a sanitary napkin or toilet tissue – we were able to purchase that, but a lot of the ladies were not. A lot of the ladies were not able to purchase those items, and even if it's something small like ponytail holders for our hair – for a long time, they weren't able to sell us combs. Remember? We were using the men's combs. We didn't have rubber bands, or anything for our hair. So your hair was always like, it was – it was a struggle to ...on basic

necessity. Deodorant. We were out of deodorant for a while. Remember? It was – looking back, it was real yum....

It's a broken system. That's all I got to say. We need to spread awareness. And that's why I appreciate you so much to just take the time to talk. I know I wanted to ask you: After being released, what kind of post-release help did you get? Was there???

PARKER: (Laughter)

GARZA: No. (Laughter) Let's talk about that.

PARKER: That's a funny question because TDCJ doesn't give you a pot to piss in. And I'm sorry. I'm not trying to be crass. But that's just for real. For women, they give us no help. When you get released – for those of you that don't know – when you make parole, you have an initial meeting, where you sit there and they'll give you – you get your \$50 gate money, when you get out. And then you go to a meeting where they're supposed to give you the option of food stamps or anything like that.

Tell me why – after being locked incarcerated for over nine and a half years, of course, I applied for food stamps because I thought it might help me before I started working, since I was going to live with my elderly mom. And they kept magically losing my application. I had my on-site interview and everything and every single person in there got it, except me.

Other than that, TDCJ doesn't help you with anything since Alexa and I were in the Braille program at Mountain View – thanks go to Mrs. Billman and the wonderful women of the Mountain View Braille Facility for giving us such an awesome, life-changing opportunity and a wonderful career. Thanks guys.

You know... we weren't even allowed to take our books. So when Alexa and I went to try to go do Braille, we had no nothing. No rule books. None of our notes of things –.... we might have written notes, personal notes to help us remember stuff. Not like any kind of weird notes – but I mean, we were given nothing.

The fact that when Alexa and I were at Mountain View for as long as we were, women used to have much more programs. So that upon release, they could actually get out and do hopefully get a job. One of the programs that Mountain View got rid of and gave to the men was Computer Maintenance. Women learning how to build computers. Alexa was able to take that, and she was super smart and super intelligent at that kind of thing, and a lot of the other computer stuff. But for other women who wanted to learn, we weren't given that opportunity. Towards the end before Alex and I left, the only thing that women could do was Horticulture and BCIS. And I'm sorry.

Unless you were born under a rock, most people know how to use Microsoft Word. And just because you know how to plant a tree – doesn't mean that you're going to get a good job upon your release. So in all actuality, TDCJ gives you nothing. If anything – unless you're blessed enough to be in the wonderful Braille program at Mountain View or another industry, you know, like I know they have brakes like different mechanics stuff at some units – TDCJ doesn't set you up for success. They set you up for failure.

GARZA:That's a powerful statement. And it's also – I feel that it's true. In my opinion, it's a true statement. Yum ...I know – paying parole fees, not having a job, having to pay the parole fees, having to attend the meetings, not having transportation to and from the meetings –

PARKER: How about being denied everything because you're a felon? If Texas would just ban the Box unless, you know, maybe you're a hardcore sex offender or something like that. I mean, we can't live. It's hard to get an apartment. You can't, depending upon how long you were incarcerated for – I had to get a car when I got out because my car was having a lot of problems because it was over 20 years old. No one would give me a car loan because I had no credit. You know? Not because I had crummy credit. So, thank God. My mom co-signed. That was the only way I could get a car. I'm the one paying on it. But if she would have been cool enough or kind enough to do that and allow me to live here. I can't get an apartment.You know, no one wants to rent. Thank God, I've worked hard to build up credit, because now it's like everything but your shoe size needs a credit score. So it's just insane.

GARZA: Do you think you were prepared? [... Let me rephrase that: Do you think ... TDC, the program, prepared us in any way?

PARKER: Hell no, ... no.

GARZA: Even though we were there an additional year, waiting to go to the program, ...what would you have hoped they could have done for us?

PARKER: I mean, honestly, there's some anal-retentive in TDCJ. I mean there is nothing that they could have done to prepare us short of allowing us to actually go out and by going out – I mean, I don't mean like going out shopping or doing any kind of weird stuff, but how the trustees would actually go outside the fence and work and get some kind of experience.

That would be more eye-opening than anything else, because there's nothing you can read text off. You can read words off a piece of paper all day long, but there is no nothing to replace real world experience. And the closest that we got to real-world experience, honestly, was working in the Braille facility.

Being able to have – granted it was in a prison setting – but being able to do stuff to help other people being able to use paper clips, pens, paper, to write notes about things that we needed to remember. If for whatever task we were assigned, embossing, tactile, and the laser, you and all this stuff you would do for the different, the warden, you know, and different things that you were requested of, because of your expertise. That is the closest that we got pretty much, that pre-release program was for the birds. I mean, it was great for people that were small-time, but for people that have long-term time, they don't need to do any more time. Your criminal record, or your behavior record, in prison will show whether or not, you're going to try to rehabilitate yourself and change for the better, or act like a jerk. It's interesting. Yeah.

GARZA: I was going to say it's funny that you mention that, because the program was the teacher reading from a book.

PARKER: Ah-huh,

GARZA: The six-month program that we were mandated to take by the state was us sitting in the classroom, you sharing, they didn't have enough textbooks for everyone. So we shared a book with a partner and we sat there in the classroom, and the teacher read from the page. That was six months, right?

PARKER: Yes.

Yes, it was and then the facilitator for that, Mrs. Hall, holy cow. You know...

She's a very special person in herself. They don't need –How do I say this nicely?

GARZA: You don't have to say it nicely, just say it.

PARKER: Someone like that in charge of a program like that. They need someone that has a little bit more compassion, a little bit more understanding, but isn't going to be manipulated by the offenders that want to run the game. You know, they need someone who is more –... actually, they just need someone more in tune because that program was stupid to have at an intake unit. There is no reason why they couldn't have that program at Mountain View. We wouldn't even have had to leave. You know, what? Then –

GARZA: Let's talk about the intake unit. Let's talk about what a culture shock it was.

PARKER: Oh my God.

GARZA: Right? Because every unit has its own culture. For example, if I put my towel in the shower, that means –..... What does that mean? If I put my towel in the shower.

PARKER: It means that you're next on the shower. So when you'd have like 50 towels at Mountain View they'd all be in almost numerical order as far as who's getting in the shower next and who's getting in after them.

GARZA: Correct. So if I put my towel in the shower and you get in the shower, if my towel is there, what's going to happen?

PARKER: You're going to be pissed.

GARZA: Yeah, there's going to be an issue because the culture is you already know my towels in the shower. So the culture at Marlin, us coming from Mountain View where we were, walking into that, please try to explain because I was with you the whole time. So we were, it was –

PARKER: Like instead of going a step up, it was like going in complete freaking reverse. It was almost because in most units you're in two-man cells or you're in a dorm that has cubicles. Sometimes they have bunk beds. Mountain View was separated into cubicles with one bed per cubicle, one, one person bed, not a bunk bed. In Marlin you lived in shipping containers with rows of bunk beds. [00:31:57] You were stacked so close in there it was almost like you were sardines, and you can reach out and touch your neighbor. And if you had the great fortitude, luck that I seemed to have, having lived in Mountain View for several years, before I went to the pre-release program from hell, I lived right in front of the toilets. God bless them when I got to Marlin. I got to live right in front of the toilets again, except to really, really, light my fire, there were no doors. So if you're sitting there pooping or doing whatever it is that you're doing on the toilet, guess who could see up from their bed? [*raises hand*]

Therefore I learned to definitely look the other way because no one wants to see what your poopy face looks like, you know, and it was a complete culture shock. It was... just half the time, some of the things. Fortunately, since Alexis and I were locked up for so long it's like some of the stuff that we encountered at Mountain View, we encountered at Marlin.

One of the favorite ones was turning off the water at random, and then when they turned it on, it was brown. And then another fun one was the toilets always got stuck on high speed flush.

So it's like Niagara Falls in the corner of your dorm. Like I said, Alexa and I had experienced most of this since we had been in a real unit. A lot of the people there hadn't. So you were literally there with people who came right from county to the pre-release program.

So it was quite a shock. If they had a pre-release program, they should have separated it into short-time people and long-time line, longer incarcerated time people. I mean because it was stupid for us to go to a program like that and be around people just came in off the street.

GARZA: I remember that there were no windows.

PARKER: No, there was no windows and in the middle of winter or actually summertime. It was cold. It was cold.

GARZA: Because –

PARKER: It was so cold.

GARZA: They were actual shipping containers. They were –

PARKER: Yeah.

GARZA: Actual shipping containers, shipping containers inside a large warehouse. You never saw the light of day ever. Krissy and I were assigned to the commissary.

PARKER: Thank you, God. [*raises hands*] Thank you, God. [*puts hands together*] That's the best job you can get there. Thank you. There is one person who made it happen, who shall remain nameless, but we are forever grateful to that person for making that happen for us. Thank you.

GARZA: And we were, because of our job assignment, we were actually allowed to go outside. We had to go to the storage and get items for the store and we would volunteer to work all the time so that we don't have to be locked in the storage container.

PARKER: With such negativity. Because there were so many bitter ass people that would crack on us because we wanted to work. Like there was that one Priscilla or whatever the heck her name was. I hated that girl. She was such a jerk and she hated me because I wanted to work. Because I didn't want to sit there and just lay up. I just didn't. So she'd be like, well [*mocking*] there goes Tippy(nickname) always wanting to go to work. I'm like rather than sit around here and listen to you bitch and moan. Yes, please, [*motions hands forward*] let me go.

GARZA: Yeah a lot. It was very different, difficult just between units and it's all under the TDCJ umbrella, but every unit has its own culture and that unit was very difficult for us. Even though we had come from a unit with a big unit maximum security and we had done a lot of time. That unit still was –

PARKER: Hard.

GARZA: I call it my personal hell.

PARKER: Oh yeah.

GARZA: And it was very, very extremely difficult and knowing that after we did the six months, we would go home. That was the only thing that kept us every day, getting up and doing it. Because we knew that at the end of the six months, we had like this – but it was extremely difficult and... God have mercy on those that are there or that are going there because it is not for the weak. It's just not.

PARKER: No, no it's not. Because I mean it, the same thing as being on a real prison unit. You have your own ups and downs, your own good officers, your own bad officers, but there it was a special kind of hell. Because we had come from a real unit and you come there, where it's a completely different environment. Instead of having dorms on a real unit like Mountain View and then walking out in the sunshine to go to a different – your work, or going to laundry, or going to medical, or the commissary, wherever, rec, wherever it was, everything was inside. You remember when they didn't even want to give us jackets and it was cold. Remember that?

GARZA: Because we didn't need jackets because we never went outside, so –

PARKER: Yes. And even when it started getting cold because we didn't even leave until December, ...they still had the air conditioner on. It was like 30 degrees outside, and I promise you with air conditioner inside a metal container it was like 20.

GARZA: Yeah. Describe the shower. Remember the showers?

PARKER: The push buttons? Weren't they push buttons there? Oh my gosh. Okay.

So let me tell you about these special showers that Satan himself designed called push button showers. Okay? Half the time if you want to sit there, number one, in Marlin, you had to turn the hot water on in the utility sink and flush the toilets 20 times to get your water hot. Otherwise, you were showering in an ice cube. And one of the special times that Alexa and I had been working commissary in the middle of summer after we had just thrown (unloaded) a \$20,000 commissary truck, we decide we're going to go wash our bodies in the showers. There were two showers, one right in front of the other with a metal wall. And they had a little metal door and a push button thing. Push button to turn the water on. Okay. So how about Alexa and I are in the shower, she gets out. I'm in there because I need to wash my hair. It was gross. And the water

gets turned off. So my friend, Regina, has to fill up my hot pot. Plug it in to warm it up. And then pour water in a bowl so I can use it over the wall to wash my hair up. It was just crazy. I mean, that's just some of the stuff that we went through, and it was insane. Not to mention if you washed your clothes in the icebox, having the AC be on, your clothes literally took like two days to dry. It was nuts. But the showers were fun.

GARZA: I think they were like refrigerators. Like picture –

PARKER: Yeah.

GARZA: If you have a refrigerator, and you take everything out of the refrigerator, and you stand in the refrigerator to bathe, you push the button, the water comes out for about 2 minutes? And then you –

PARKER: Not even, it was maybe like one because you would –

GARZA: Because –

Parker: Yeah.

GARZA: Go ahead.

PARKER: I was just going to say it wasn't even that long because you would sit there and sometimes you try to just hold the button down to make the water keep going and sometimes it'd work and other times it'd be like, 'ah ha no,' and turn off. So it was hard.

GARZA: Right. Because you're bathing and you are having to push the button continuously to have the water.

PARKER: Get the water. [*nods*]

GARZA: [*nods*] Yeah, it was. ... The conditions, the mindset of – it's not rehabilitation. The officers, I remember,

PARKER: Mr. Boyd. [*laughs*]

GARZA: [*nods*] I remember the officers were very different there also. We came from Mountain View, and Mountain View was like old timers. It was a college unit at one [*PARKER nods*] – we had industry there. So the officers, we had some good, good officers there. They're not all bad like.

PARKER: No. [*smiles and shakes head*]

GARZA: And Marlon the way that we were spoken to, the way that they were we were spoken to, treated, it was like night and day. And I remember like, Why are you speaking to us like that? You know, who? But the behavior. I think is just what they're used to. I don't understand. I mean

—

PARKER: It was like, going from — ... [*pauses and sighs*] You know, being on Mountain View like the officers, not all officers at Mountain View, but the ones that knew that you weren't a troublemaker, you just want to do your time and get go home, and you weren't there to try to take anybody off or be sneaky, devious, and whatever.

The officers treated you, most of them treated you with respect. Going to Marlin was like going to the hood. And I'm not saying that as far as like, disrespectful, not racial nothing. I don't even mean it like that. You know what I'm saying? But as far as the mentality there was nothing rehabilitative about that unit at all. It was like they ... were willing to hire anybody. And they just treat us, talk to us like we were dogs.

There's nothing you could do. It didn't matter if you were polite, didn't matter whatever. If an officer didn't like you, they went and told all their buddies and none of them liked you. So they would mess with you. It was just crazy. It was the most, pettiest bull that I've seen since I was incarcerated. I thought Mountain View was petty, sometimes with some of the officers, how they'd click up and crap, but Marlin took the cake. That was crazy.

GARZA: Yeah, it was different. It's just, again, going back to like the culture of the unit and a broken system. That's why I wanted to talk to you. Like everybody, we go through, we went through it together. I'll say you're my sister and my sisters in white that we left behind because we went through it together. But my perception and your perception, my experience, your experience. They're somewhat different because my feelings are my own — I was very ... quiet. I didn't say much. I didn't have many friends. I just stayed to myself and I read a book.

Other people drew a lot. They drew cards, and drawing, right.

PARKER: Yea [*nodding*]

GARZA: Other people slept, right?

PARKER: Yeah. [*nodding*]

GARZA: They slept 23 hours out of the day to get through the days.

PARKER: Because they'd lie to get on medication and Mountain View had a tendency to overmedicate people and they would just [*mimicking a person sleeping and snoring*]

GARZA: Right.

PARKER: They'd also, yeah.

GARZA: Other people, like you said, did their time six months at a time. In six months, my case is going to be appealed or in six months might. [*PARKER nodding*] We all know people who said that they do ...things. So, like looking back right now. You're, you look great. You have a baby. You are a successful businesswoman in your own right. You are an independent Braille transcriber whose transcribing books and doing this great service and stuff. You've been out three years. What can you say to that Krissy that was nine years ago walking in that gate? Like, what would you say if you could say something to her? And don't be sad because this is not a sad thing. [*laughs*]

PARKER: [*emotional*] It's gonna be hard but don't give up. You're so much stronger than you think that you are. You're going to face a lot of stuff. Some good, some bad, but don't give up hope because that's the one thing that'll keep you going.

GARZA: Yeah, and we did. We made it and again, you have this beautiful baby, your mom's doing well, you look great. This is what it's supposed to be. And I'm so proud of you for that. And I just want you to share, I know there's like a lot of them, but I want you to share, like, one good memory [*PARKER laughs*] of something funny or happy that you, the mischief, because we did some mischief when we were there. We weren't all angels in white there.

GARZA: We got into some trouble and it was good trouble.

PARKER: Can I –

GARZA: It was funny, so, share whatever you'd like.

PARKER: Can I share two, can I share two little ones?

GARZA: Yeah, for sure.

PARKER: Okay. Let's see. Suzanne for my birthday – in Mountain View for women. Folks that don't know, you're not allowed to, if on your birthday or if you buy something for one of your

friends you can't just go give it to them because in TDCJ they think everything is sexual. So if I'm going to give my friend a birthday cake, they think I want to "F". And that's just not true. I was just trying to do something nice for one of my friends. So my friend Suzanne had made me a parfait cake in a jar, in a peanut butter jar. And so in order to give stuff to people, you have to smuggle it.

Now being a woman, unless you're very well-endowed up here, [*gestures to her chest*] you would have to hold it in your crotch, wrapped in a sock. This sounds totally retarded to people that – you guys know what I'm talking about that have done this. So Suzanne, since I love music, Suzanne had cut pictures out of magazines, like Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison, and then wrapped it around the outside of this jar. Okay well, she gives it to me and meets me early in the morning at breakfast one day. Well, tell me why when I get back to the dorm, I have to quickly put my cake in a jar up in my lock box and then go to work. Well, at the end of work each day you have to strip out. When I was stripping out my underwear, since everything in TDCJ is white, had all the ink from the print pages all over it. So I had like – it looked like the 60s had exploded in my crotch. [*laughing*]

It was like, pink, blue, green, all this different stuff, and I'll never forget. I think it was Miss Rashad that was tripping me out one day and she was like, Metz what the hell? And I was like, Dude, don't ask, don't ask. So that was just a funny story because I was like, Oh my gosh, I had no idea. It just didn't occur to me that it would rub off because I was trying to be extra careful.

But another thing is before the Braille facility was allowed to get coffee and bring it in, me and Suzanne, otherwise known as Bologna Dog, and I'm Peanut Girl, would always go into the bathroom and take coffee shots. Well, we had like a little pen that we would call the swizzle stick. And we take our cone cups, pour the coffee in, and a little bit of water, and stir it with the swizzle stick. Well, one day I walk out of the bathroom and Miss Kettler was right there watching me. And as I go to take the cup, [*reenacts drinking the cup*] there's a leak in the bottom and it goes all down the front of me.

And so Miss Kettler's like, Metz, I know what you're doing. And I'm like, Yeah, don't worry about what I'm doing, [*laughs*] and drank it. But it was like, it was so embarrassing because it was – at that time I was handwashing my clothes because of the nasty conditions of the laundry. So I had this pretty white outfit that I had scrubbed with a hand brush and everything else, and pressed it. So I looked all nice. And here it was with this big old coffee stain, right down the boobs, like going all the way down my stomach. So it's just things like that, you can sit and you can – To people that haven't been there, they sound like really retarded. But I mean, for those of us that were there, it was like, Oh my gosh, dude, really? This is just another day. [*laughs*]

GARZA: It's funny that you mention the clothes, because clothes are a big deal there. If you get –

PARKER: Yeah.

GARZA: – a good set of whites, what we call whites, you hand wash them and you iron them.

PARKER: Mm-hmm.

GARZA: And you wear them on special occasions or visits because as Krissy mentioned earlier, the clothes are ill-fitting, the clothes were not meant for females. But sometimes the girls who could sew very well would alter –

PARKER: Yup. Uh-huh

GARZA: Like the shirts right to make them a little bit more fitted. And they would lower the the, the seam of the pants to make it –

PARKER: Waistline, yeah.

GARZA: The waistband. They would trim it some four... some sort, and they were very talented where the uniforms would actually fit us pretty good. But you had to be careful, right?

PARKER: Yes. [*nodding*]

GARZA: Because if you wore it and someone saw it, they would take it from you.

PARKER: Oh, yes, but I mean that then again, they would do it so blatantly. Where you be walking down I mean wearing some skin-tight shirt where it's like nothing but boobs and your pants were so tight and so like low-rise pants and they would peg their legs, which I laughed because when I went to the gas station, the other day, the kids are doing that again. I was like, you're not in TD, see what? So [00:49:43] it was just blatant. And if you went to laundry, you had to make sure you checked it because if you brought back a set and it was altered, they wrote you up for it. They tried to do that to me one time when I had first gotten to Mountain View and I didn't know people took the time to do that. Didn't even occur to me. And so, I saw that and I almost got charged like, 25 bucks for a top and a pair of pants. And I was like, no. I was like, I can't even fit one leg in there. Come on now. I'm not that small.

GARZA: Do you remember the towels?

PARKER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

GARZA: They were. How would you describe them? They were?

PARKER: Like when you go buy a thin dish towel at the dollar store. It was like that. I mean you would try to. Alexa has this long thick, beautiful hair. And she would probably try to dry her hair and the towel would run the other way. They wouldn't. They would repel water. And then, those that did absorb were so heavy and wet. They just didn't dry for days.

So you were kind of screwed because if you want to take, if you had taken a shower first thing in the morning, and then later on, you gotten sweaty and yucky and needed to take another shower, your towels is wet. You might as well just drip.

GARZA: I remember. What about lockdowns? Explain to the people what lockdowns are.

PARKER: Okay. Now, when I first touched down at Mountain View, lockdowns were Cadillac. I mean it used to be. On a woman's unit they dress you up, and they give you this choir looking gown to wear to go to bed in. Okay, it's heavy. It's like a damn curtain meets a choir gown. It's just not comfortable and it's usually pretty itchy. Anyways, not to mention gross. So they would make us wear these gowns and you would have to put your cubicle in compliance. So when I say put your cubicle in compliance is everyday before you leave the dorm, whether or not it was to go to work, or to go to a pass or the chow hall, you have to organize your cubicle according to how this little diagram tells you in TDCJ. In other ways, you have to make your bed, unplug your appliances, except your clock radio, and make sure everything is just organized so it doesn't look like a cluster. Unless you're a psych patient and then they didn't mess with you for that. They had special privileges. Whatever.

Anyways, the first couple, the first three lockdowns I went through, they took everybody out to the day room, which is like a little living room area with a TV and metal benches, and we all had to wait out there while the officers went and searched our cubicles for contraband. Now, when I say contraband, it's not like, they're not specifically looking for shanks and all this kind of, you know, soap knives and things like they show on *Orange Is the New Black* and prison TV shows. I was like – as prisoners most people are way, more smarter than that. If anything they're looking for blades, which are broken down razors, sewing needles, which are referred to as needles, not syringes, and pills, because sometimes people would save their psych medicine from the pill line and take it at once, a larger amount to get high, or the big thing at Mountain View, was free-world makeup because the makeup on commissary sucked. It was like the bargain bin chalk crap you get for your kids at the dollar store. So they would look for those things specifically.

After the first three, they started making you go to the gym in your little choir gown. What was really hard core is that instead of being able to leave your cubicle in compliance, you had to carry every single thing you own to the gym. And what was really the icing on the cake, this will really get your whatever going, you had to make it all in one trip unless you had a medical restriction. That being said, dude, I'm a woman in case you can't tell. Okay. I cannot carry 200 and plus pounds of everything. Including your mattress, including, well not your mattress, your sheets, your blankets, everything. Everything. All your hygienes, your appliances, everything.

That is cruel and inhumane and ridiculous. Because a lot of times we'd have to take our green turtle jackets, which was nothing more than a windbreaker they gave us for the winter time. And it didn't even repel water. It absorbed it. We would have to make a backpack out of that, put all of our stuff in there. Then if you are blessed enough to go to commissary, take your commissary bags, tie them into tied two together with a knot at the handles, and put them on your shoulder like you were carrying a jug of water back in the day and carry it all down there. Now, let me tell you that seriously injured a lot of women. It hurt me. You would have Alexa hurt her. You would have such dark colored bruises. It would be like a black and blue bruise on your shoulder. Excuse me on your shoulder. And if you didn't, if you dropped anything, you lost it. You couldn't sit there, and like make two trips or you couldn't – if you dropped something because it was too doggone heavy. You just couldn't take it. They took it from you. And Mr. Heifercamp was a big one that would actually take your stuff. Now depending upon who the officers were on the street watching you walk down to the gym, in your choir gown mind you, ...sometimes they would let you use the carts because they realize that it was faster for the offenders to put everything in the cart and push it all down there. But more often than not, you didn't get to. And let me tell you, I didn't have a lot of stuff, but the stuff that I had, having to carry it all in my back, your hygienes, your deodorant, your shampoo, everything, was so heavy. It literally, unless I lean forward with all of my might, would pull me backwards.

And I wasn't a weakling because Alexa will testify that I worked out like a beast and ...it was still too heavy for me, man.

GARZA: I agree. I laugh and I smile but it's either that or cry at this moment, because it was crazy as an understatement, everything, our experiences there, that if you didn't know, it would be like, but why? But why did they make you do that? Wouldn't it make more sense –

PARKER: It was all about control.

GARZA: Right. Wouldn't it make more sense and expedite matters to put things on carts and roll it down there so that no one gets hurt and it's quicker? No, it's not about that. It's about power and control. It's about punishment. It's about making our lives completely miserable. The form of prison is to keep us away.

Take us out of society for the purpose of –

PARKER: And piss us off. [*laughs*]

GARZA: Right, it's punitive. It's to punish. I understand that. We were already being punished by being taken away from our family being taken away from our lives. The conditions there shouldn't add to it.

PARKER: Exactly.

GARZA: And that was our experience with it. But I remember lockdown and oh my gosh, right? It was truly. And it happened what, twice a year?

PARKER: Yes. Initially, it happened in like, it used to happen in January and June. Like it because it would be cold and they make you walk down there in your gown and then hot as crap and you'd be there in the gym in June. And there used to be this jerky [MATERIAL WITHHELD] and one time we were in there, and it was in June, and it was so hot. Like we were sweating. Like people were passing out because those choir gown things were hot because they were made of real heavy material. And she walked with an iced down blue bucket from the chow hall with bottled water she had bought for the officers that were going through the offender's property and was like, I bet y'all would like a nice cold water now, wouldn't-cha? So she got a water out of the thing, out of the bucket, went to sit on a table, the table broke, and she went up ass over heels in the air. We're like, Yeah! [*mimicks crowd cheering*]

But I'm just saying that to only say this. There is no reason why we weren't allowed to have water. We couldn't have anything like that. There is no reason to – why be ugly?

GARZA: Yeah, I think that's a good point. Krissy, I appreciate you very much for taking the time to talk with me about this. We did have some good times. It wasn't all bad and it was what we made of it. Krissy and I were blessed to be in a program that gave us a good, specialized skill set that we do today. And, but, that facility only housed 100 ladies. And what about the others? There were 644 females on Mountain View and 100 of us were in Braille. What about the 544 left? You know?

PARKER: Yeah.

GARZA: They didn't have what we had and you know, you got to think about it. But I appreciate you very much and stuff. Don't click off, Krissy. I'm just going to stop recording, okay.

PARKER: Okay.