

PRISONWORLD

by Jenny Triplett

It was one of the hardest things I have experienced in my life, but it was Allah's plan from the beginning. I was briefly incarcerated 11 years ago. Not ever thinking I would be without my freedom, I found losing it extremely difficult.

I had embraced Islam several months before going to prison; that made me a Muslim in prison. I was truly like a fish out of water as I had very few things in common with the people with whom I lived.

The lack of commonality was bad and the lack of freedom was worse, but there was something more terrible. During my time in prison, my mother passed away and I was not allowed to attend her funeral.

All of a sudden, my safety net – my connection with my mother – was gone and I was hurting badly; however, I could not show any signs of weakness as the situation behind prison walls does not allow for that. I needed to find a way to channel my sorrow, and that outlet came in the form of extra-long showers. There I cried my eyes out so my grieving could be in private.

During that time I reflected deeply on my life. I spent days thinking of the skills I had which I could use to help people. I could not save my mother, but I could make a difference in the lives of others. I knew there was so much more to me than my incarceration. I had been a straight-A

student, for heaven's sakes, and I had been a writer!

Ever since elementary school, I had received accolades for my writing. One of my teachers saw me as a great storyteller, a writer who really could make people feel the narrative.

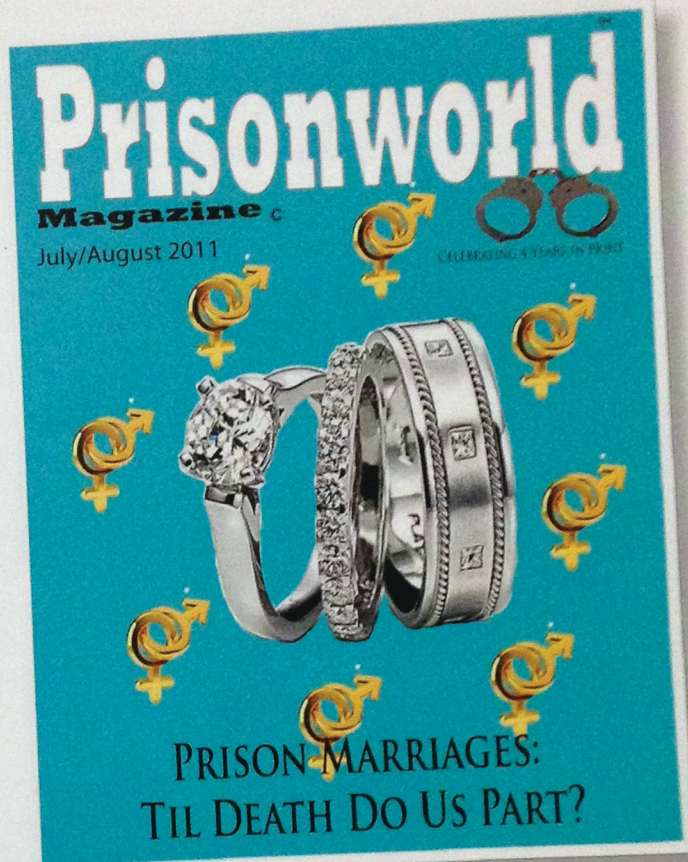
She described that ability as a gift and submitted some of my work to a writer's conference, where it won an award.

Later in life, I actually had an agent and I wrote scripts for television shows such as *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*. In the late '80s when I married my husband, Rufus Isma'il Triplett, I put aside my writing aspirations to help him with his music career.

Later, as I sat in prison thinking on my talent, I decided to focus my energies on my writing again. I thought of bringing the outside Muslim world into the prison to help educate the Muslim community and with that idea *The Muslim Community Newsletter* began.

The Muslim Community Newsletter became overwhelmingly popular across the prison compound. It contained tidbits of the outside world, some hadiths, stories of the prophets, a little humor and information on where you could write various organizations for help. Because I was able to call home up to seven times a day and since I was the only one in the community married to a Muslim, I always had current information about events in the outside Muslim world.

During the week, I spent time writing and laying out the articles by hand. Every weekend I would send the material home with my husband and family who visited me then. My three sons typed it up; my husband put it in



newsletter format, printed out several copies and by Monday it was in the mail back to me, ready for distribution.

We printed dozens of copies but there never seemed to be enough; I was always asked if I had any more to share. Even though the newsletter was directed to the Muslim population, the majority of the inmates read and loved it as well.

After I was released and had acclimated to life with my family again, my husband and I decided the need for information, education and motivation



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