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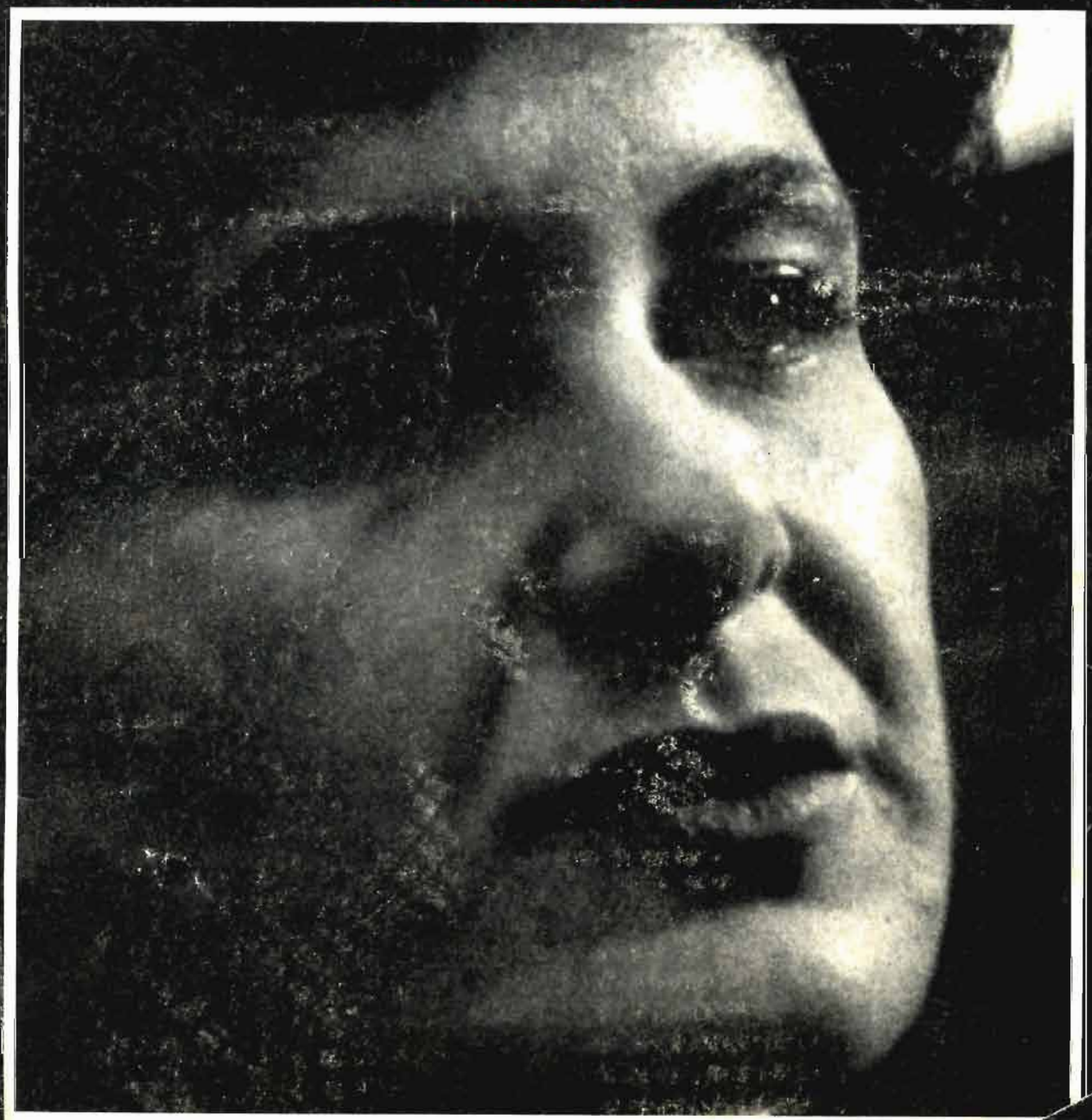
ISSUES ON THE

THE JOURNAL OF SUBSTANCE FOR PROGRESSIVE WOMEN VOL. XIII $2.95

THE MOST DANGEROUS WOMAN IN AMERICA?



One of the "Hysterical Housewives", Louise Geddings, blocks a truck from entering a landfill in Sumter County, SC, an area known for hazardous wastes.

FEATURES

SPECIAL FEATURE

DEPARTMENTS

ISSUES ON THE
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VOLUME XIII

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ON THE ISSUES: A feminist, humanist publication dedicated to promoting political action through awareness and education; working toward a global political consciousness; fostering a spirit of collective responsibility for positive social change; eradicating racism, sexism, ageism, speciesism; and supporting the struggle of historically disenfranchised groups powerless to protect and defend themselves.

UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS
All unsolicited material will be read by the editors. For return, enclose self-addressed, stamped envelope with proper postage. Articles should be not less than 10 and not more than 15 double spaced, typewritten pages on women's health, social or political issues by people with hands on experience in their fields. Professional papers are accepted. All editing decisions are at the discretion of the editors. Feminist cartoons are also acceptable under the same provisions.
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PHOTO: COURTESY CITIZENS CLEARINGHOUSE

America's most dangerous woman ?

SUSAN

ROSENBERG

Manacled and shackled, Susan Rosenberg sits behind a plexiglass wall in a Washington, DC courtroom, April, 1988. Rosenberg is considered by law enforcement authorities to be "a grave danger to the security of the United States".

"...it was the prison that had proved the best school. A more painful, but a more vital, school. Here I had been brought close to the depths and complexities of the human soul; here I had found ugliness and beauty, meanness and generosity. The prison had been the crucible that tested my faith. It had helped me to discover strength in my own being, the strength to stand alone, the strength to live my life and fight for my ideals, against the whole world if need be."
Emma Goldman — Living My Life, Volume I 1931

Interview by Merle Hoffman
Profile by Patricia Golan

She signs her letter, "Venceremos, Susan Rosenberg". The old slogan of the Cuban revolution — We shall overcome — seems ironically symbolic of the plight of a woman whose political beliefs have led her into direct confrontation with the United States government, and to the prospect of virtual life imprisonment.

On the far left of the political spectrum and a self-proclaimed revolutionary, 34-year-old (Oct. '89) Susan Lisa Rosenberg's path of dissent against government policies has provoked an extraordinary reaction on the part of judicial and law enforcement authorities.

"Why interview me rather than the others involved in the case?" Susan Rosenberg asked **On the Issues** publisher Merle Hoffman when she visited her last May in the Washington, D C jail. "Because," Hoffman answered, "Your background paralleled mine to some degree and but for fate, fortune or choice I could be where you sit now."

Free-lance writer Patricia Golan was living in Tucson, AZ when she first heard of Susan Rosenberg. Rosenberg had been sent to a Federal lock-up in Tucson when she was first imprisoned. "I had never before considered the possibility that there could be 'political prisoners' in the United States," said Golan.

"For all my adult life I have held a certain set of political beliefs, and have lived my life accordingly. What, I wondered, would happen if my politics were so fundamentally opposed to the government in power that I would feel forced to break the law? How would *I* behave in a situation similar to that of Susan Rosenberg's? Would I refuse to renounce my politics, or become a psychological cipher by giving up the 'me' that has invested so many

PHOTO: COURTESY DAEDALUS PRODUCTIONS

Bella and Emmanuel Rosenberg share thoughts of their only child in happier days. Photo on left: 12- year- old Susan at an anti-Vietnam war demonstration in Central Park, New York City, 1969.

years in an ideal? "It was this aspect of Susan Rosenberg's story that made me want to meet her and to find out more about her."

Despite her many months of harsh incarceration, which included a 20-month ordeal in a women's "control unit" in Lexington, KY, Susan Rosenberg remains articulate and self-assured. Whatever one's political stand or attitude towards the movement that led her to her present plight, there is something about her quiet, unwavering presence that inspires respect.

In April, 1988, Susan Rosenberg, considered by law enforcement authorities to be a grave danger to the security of the United States, sat manacled and shackled behind a plexiglass wall in a Washington, DC courtroom.

Already serving an unprecedented 58-year sentence for the possession of arms and explosives, 34-year-old Rosenberg was under indictment again. Along with five other radical activists (Alan Berkman, Tim Blunk, Marilyn Buck, Linda Evans, Laura Whitehorn) who had long histories of political involvement and most of whom also were serving lengthy sentences for politically motivated offenses — Rosenberg was indicted for complicity in a series of bombings in 1983 in and around Washington, following the U.S. invasion of Grenada.

The seven were charged, among other things, with "engaging in a conspiracy to resist foreign and domestic policies of the United States government". The defendants' attorneys and supporters maintain the indictments are politically motivated.

The government has been extremely vindictive in this ["Capitol Bombing"] case because of the leftist, communist politics of the defendants," comments Ronald Kuby, a cooperating attorney with the Center for Constitutional Rights.

Why, asks Kuby, should abortion clinic bombers be allowed to plead to

PHOTO: COURTESY DAEDALUS PRODUCTIONS

lesser offenses? "It's clear," he says, "these kinds of indictments are exclusively reserved for political radicals."

Last spring, the charges against Rosenberg and two other defendants were dismissed by a U.S. District Court judge on the basis of double jeopardy. As of July 5, 1989, the U.S. prosecuting attorney has appealed the ruling, but whatever the outcome, the publicity surrounding the case has revealed a side of the American system of justice of which few citizens are aware.

Rosenberg has already served four years of her 58-year sentence. Most of it has been in isolation. For 20 months she was held in a special "high security" facility for women at the Federal Correctional Institution in Lexington, KY. Described by Amnesty International as "deliberately and gratuitously oppressive," and by the ACLU as "a living tomb", the unit — ordered closed down by a Federal district judge — had been specifically designed as a control unit for women convicted of politically motivated crimes. Unfortunately, in mid September the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned that lower court decision. At the present time, the federal government has been given a green light to create "control units" for female political prisoners like Rosenberg. (see box "Lexington")

Her photo appears among a series of headshots under the banner WANTED!. She is a smiling, pretty young woman with curly hair, magnetic green eyes and gold hoop earrings. "These fugitives are dangerous and may be armed," reads the caption in the lurid 1984 *Reader's Digest* article "Terror Network, U.S.A.", which describes what the magazine terms "self-styled revolutionaries engaged in a war on American society".

How does a "nice," middle-class, Jewish girl end up with her mug shot on the FBI's most wanted list? Rosenberg was the intellectually privileged daughter of liberal activist parents who grew up in comfortable surroundings. How did it happen?

"It's hard to answer," Rosenberg replied. "I think it's a combination of time, place and conditions."

Indeed, it's a long way from the Washington, DC jail to Candlewood Lake, a serene, haven near Danbury, CT, where Dr. Emmanuel and Bella Rosenberg have had their summer home for 20 years. A semi-retired dentist, the 71-year-old Emmanuel Rosenberg keeps up his practice two days a week at his clinic in Spanish Harlem. Bella Rosenberg was a theatrical producer. Today, most of their energies are taken up with rallying support for their only child, fighting each legal battle as it comes up. They also help in the legal battles of others.

"It is a matter of principle," says Bella Rosenberg simply.

Matters of principle were a part of the Rosenberg household when Susan was growing up on New York's Upper West Side. Emmanuel Rosenberg has moments when he blames himself for the path his daughter took. "We were always liberal, always into causes, taking part in Civil Rights demonstrations and anti-war marches," he recalls. "Susan asked to go with me even though she was only 11 or 12 at the time. I never pressured her."

Her strength and honesty and willingness to "put her money where her mouth is" is a challenge to us all

Susan attended Walden, a progressive private school. A gifted child with a talent for singing and acting, the young Susan Rosenberg was an accomplished athlete and straight-A student.

A political prodigy, politics were her passion from an early age. At 11 she wrote a paper on the effects of McCarthyism; at 17 she went to Cuba with an American youth work brigade.

She was accepted to prestigious Barnard College after 11th grade. Then, finding Barnard too isolated and protected, she transferred to City College where she earned a degree in history.

Lisa Roth, a political activist living in San Francisco, has known Rosenberg since Susan was 17 and remembers her having a maturity beyond her years. "I was always surprised at her age," says Roth. "She had a very clear political vision for someone so young."

"Susan was always very fierce and tenacious, but she also loved to laugh and have a good time," says Roth.

After college, Rosenberg became a drug counselor at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, then studied for three years to become a doctor of Chinese acupuncture and holistic medicine. Throughout this period she was deeply involved in radical politics, working with the New Afrikan and Puerto Rican independence movements and the May 19 Communist Organization, an offshoot group of the earlier Weather Underground. (May 19 was the birthday of both Ho Chi Minh and Malcolm X).

Rosenberg was working in a radical health center in Harlem using acupuncture to treat drug addicts, when Brinks happened.

In October, 1981 a Brinks' armored truck was held up in Nyack, NY, allegedly by members of groups known as the Black Liberation Army and the Revolutionary Armed Task Force. There was a shootout. A Brinks' guard and two policemen were killed.

Brinks would prove a turning point in the U.S. government's efforts to eliminate what was seen as a dangerous threat. Through a concerted effort by law enforcement agencies, anyone who had ever associated with the groups involved in the heist was rounded up or issued grand jury subpoenas. This included a long list of radical groups, including May 19. Susan Rosenberg was on the list.

There were those who went to jail rather than cooperate with the grand jury investigation; although she has always denied any part in the heist, Rosenberg went underground. "I did not believe I or anyone else could get a fair trial given the incredible hysteria generated by the FBI around the case," she says. "I also knew that because of my long history of support for Black liberation I was a target of the investigation, and I believed that going underground would enable me and others to continue our work in opposition to the U.S. government."

(The indictment linking Rosenberg to Brinks was eventually dropped. But references to the original indictment persistently appear in subsequent documents and reports. Thus, while the indictment implicating Rosenberg in the Brinks' case has long been dropped, she may be forever stigmatized by it.)

Since litigation in her case is ongoing, Rosenberg's life as a fugitive for two years cannot now be known. What is clear is that, having previously worked with various national liberation, "anti-imperialist" groups active in the U.S., she was drawn further into clandestine political activities.

In November 1984, she and Timothy Blunk were caught by police and the FBI in Cherry Hill, NJ, in possession of several weapons and a carload of explosives and carrying false identification. At the subsequent trial, the two

Women's HSU at Lexington was cited by the Soviet Union as an example of human rights violations by the U.S.

WOMEN'S HIGH SECURITY UNIT(HSU) AT LEXINGTON

We arrived here (in Lexington) last night at five in the evening...caravaned with four cars and a van.

We drive right up to the entrance of this unit. The entire prison was locked in, and there were hundreds of prisoners' faces at the windows watching this entrance. There must have been 25 police of one type or another. One woman screamed out "Hello Susan, we know it's you." I started jumping up and down, and screamed "Don't let them bury us down there." Someone else screamed, "We won't." They hurried us inside. Inside three doors and into the unit's own R & D (receiving and discharge). Such a big deal for the two of us; it was frightening and ridiculous at the same time.

Susan Rosenberg, writing to sociologist Gilda Zwerman, quoted in *Social Justice,* July 1988.

Susan Rosenberg and Alejandrina Torres, a Puerto Rican nationalist were the first inmates of the special unit. The two were joined by Silvia Baraldini who had also been convicted of politically motivated criminal offenses, and later three other women. (As of this writing, Silvia Baraldini is awaiting transfer to her native home to serve in an Italian prison according to the Strassburg Convention.)

In his order to shut down what was, at first, a secret underground unit, Judge Barrington Parker said the treatment of the women "skirted elemental standards of decency".

Widely publicized before being ordered shut down, the Lexington unit was the first prison specifically designed with politically motivated offenses in mind. At last year's summit in Moscow, the Lexington unit was cited by the Soviet Union as an example of human rights violations by the United States.

"Consigning anyone to a high-security unit for past political associations they will never shed unless forced to renounce them is a dangerous mission for this country's prison system to continue," Judge Parker said in his ruling.

The unit was unlike any other in the prison system. Kept in isolation in small, starkly lit cells, the women were monitored constantly by 11 surveillance cameras operated by male guards who watched even while they took showers. They were subjected to random full-body cavity strip searches, kept awake for long periods and denied medical treatment. All the women suffered extreme physical and psychological deterioration.

A video segment "American Gulag?" on the Lexington unit from independent film maker Nina Rosenblum was shown on NBC's "Today" show. Originally commissioned by ABC's 20/20, that network, apparently under pressure, decided against showing the segment.

Sociologist Gilda Zwerman, an associate professor at The State University of New York at Old Westbury in Long Island, has done extensive research on women in the American prison system. She maintains that the HSU at Lexington reflected "the emergence of a new strategy in correctional philosophy." The HSU, Zwerman writes in *Social Justice,* "utilizes and manipulates the 'terrorist' label...in order to justify the 'special' treatment of political prisoners," and represents "an expansion in the use of incapacitation, surveillance and deterrence as mechanisms for social control and repression to a degree heretofore unprecedented in the U.S. correctional system."

The Bureau of Prisons has appealed the ruling, citing internal security needs for keeping it operational.

—Patricia Golan

were each sentenced to terms of 58 years, with a recommendation of no parole.

According to Arizona State University associate law professor Jane Aiken, who has followed Rosenberg's case since she was first held at a federal lockup in Tucson, *the severity of the sentence, on a first offense conviction in which no one had been hurt, was unprecedented — 16 times longer than the average sentence meted out to weapons-possession offenders, and twice the average for first-degree murderers in the Federal Courts.*

Clearly, maintains Aiken, the judge was responding to the political nature of the case. Rosenberg, writing from the DC Jail, August 8, 1989, says "[Judge] Lacy's sentence of us was a vicious political move. We suggested at our sentencing that our 58 years could read "The God that failed"...

At their trial, Rosenberg and Blunk, acting as their own attorneys, tried to introduce a political defense. Describing themselves as "resistance fighters" in a "revolutionary struggle against U.S. imperialism," they cited Nurenberg, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international law which gives citizens the right to resist the war crimes of their own nation. Among other things, their brief outlined U.S. crimes against Central America, the Contra war, crimes of colonialism and genocide against Puerto Rico and Native Americans.

The judge refused to allow this line of defense.

Nina Rosenblum, an independent film maker now completing a film on United States prison abuses, has followed Rosenberg's case and interviewed people who were present at the trial. She believes the handling of Rosenberg's case in court damned her.

"Their friends were coming into court wearing Arab head garb and raising clenched fists," said Rosenblum. "Blunk put his feet on the table, to show they had been shackled and that he did not recognize the court's authority.

"It became so theatrical, the worst that could happen did."

Professor Aiken agrees. "There is no question that Susan prejudiced her own case by putting on a political defense," she says. "If you behave as if you're contemptuous of the court, you

PHOTO: COURTESY DAEDALUS PRODUCTIONS

lose. They wouldn't play the game."

Lisa Roth was at the trial and believes the conduct of the defendants and their supporters was legitimate. "We all knew the process was stacked against them from the beginning," says Roth. "They had obviously been shackled to enhance the jurors' perspective that they were dangerous and evil. The prosecution didn't have to say anything. [One has] a political responsibility to disable that line of attack."

According to Rosenberg, she stated in response to her sentencing that she would continue to struggle, and fight for her beliefs alongside other political prisoners in prison. Rosenberg states that her statement was translated by the press into "Rosenberg called for armed revolution in prison" and that became the basis for her "high security status" and one of the reasons given by the Bureau of Prisons for her transfer to Lexington.

Theatrics notwithstanding, the severity of the sentences shocked the legal community. Experts often cite the earlier Weather Underground for comparison, whose members, though admitting to bombings, were rarely, if ever convicted of anything.

For example, in the early '70s, Weather Underground leader Bernadine Dohrn sent a communique with her finger print to the authorities, declaring she was responsible for a bombing, but she was never charged.

"In 1970 the Weather Underground Organization bombed the U.S. capitol — *no one* ever served a day in jail for it," Rosenberg says bitterly. "Now we are charged with bombing the capitol and are called 'the most dangerous terrorists in America'."

"In the 1960s and '70s, trials of various radical groups were carried out in an openly political manner," says Mary K. O'Melveny, a New York attorney who became Rosenberg's lawyer after her trial. "Today, people are afraid to question or challenge the system in the same open way, so that judges who have repressive positions regarding political dissent can punish the dissenters far more severely, without fear of triggering wider political protest."

There is scant information on any of the radical leftist groups active in the 1980s. Few historians or political scientists have ever heard of Susan Rosenberg, or the May 19 Communist Organization. Most tend to be dismissive, some denunciatory, others frankly mystified.

Sociologist Douglas McAdam, author of the recently published *Freedom Summer*, calls this period "the black hole of political science."

"Characterizations in the press of radicals of this period portray them as unrepentant, crazed terrorists," McAdam comments, "but those who have surfaced are clearly not crazy people. They are radicals who took the new left to its logical conclusion."

It is, in fact, the label "terrorism" that attorneys for defendants in the current trial take exception to. It is, they maintain, the government's excuse for retrying defendants already serving lengthy prison sentences; in Rosenberg's case, relitigating her original trial in New Jersey.

Society really hates women. Most women who are imprisoned are in for social crimes — crimes of survival

"It's like the '50s," states attorney O'Melveny, "only instead of communism, it's the rubric of terrorism. The point is, if these people are terrorists, then their rights can be abused." And then, there was Rosenberg's religion.

Although both her parents come from Orthodox Jewish homes, for the most part they led secular lives. Since her imprisonment, Susan Rosenberg's reaffirmation of her Jewish identity is, she says, connected to the "profound" anti-Semitism she has encountered in prison and at the hands of law enforcement officials.

Carrying false identification at the time of her arrest, Rosenberg refused to reveal her true identity. The police had called in FBI agents, one of whom looked at her and told the police officer, "That bitch is a kike. Go check the records for a name."

"When I heard that," Rosenberg recalls today, "I knew that I was at the beginning of a whole new stage of my life. I knew I had really been captured."

"Anti-Semitism in prison is really extreme," she says, "more so than I ever experienced growing up in New York. This has really pushed me along, along with my own internal processes, to fight very hard to be a Jew in prison."

Rabbi Sholom Kalmanson, director of the Chabad House in Cincinnati, often visited Rosenberg in his capacity as Jewish chaplain at Lexington. The Rabbi was the only visitor allowed other than her parents for 14 months.

Kalmanson agrees that anti-Semitism exists within the prison system, despite the fact that there are relatively few Jewish prisoners.

Denied her request to observe Chanukah her first year at Lexington, her second year she was allowed to light a menorah. "Susan and I fought strongly for her to be part of the Jewish services and to take part in the Seder, but she was forced to do chores during the holidays," he stated.

The dialectics between the Chabad Orthodox rabbi and the anti-imperialist revolutionary woman must have been curious for both of them. Kalmanson calls Rosenberg "an interesting, seeking person, but very gullible. Had she been more exposed to Judaism she would have been a very different person."

Perhaps.

Whatever the case, Rosenberg is convinced that prison authorities view her requests to practice Judaism as a ploy.

"I can't tell you how totally enraging that is to me — being Jewish is just part of who I am."

"There are not many Jewish women in U.S. prisons, so I am a rarity for many reasons," she continued. "At first it would bother me when they'd yell 'Rosenberg!' [in a deprecating tone] at me, and now I'm just glad."

Those who have met Susan Rosenberg, both before and after her imprisonment, have been powerfully affected by her. Among her political friends and supporters there is a tendency to idealize her, to speak of her in terms of near martyrdom. Women especially find her inspiring.

"She touches that part of us that is dissatisfied with the way the world is," remarked one woman attorney who has befriended Rosenberg.

"Her strength and honesty and willingness to 'put her money where her mouth is' is a challenge to us all," says Lisa Roth. "You look at her and think, if she could survive Lexington, then you could too."

Many women identify with Rosenberg. "I can imagine myself, under different circumstances, taking the route Susan took," says a legal aide who works with prisoners.

Another woman attorney, after visiting Rosenberg in prison, sold her business and is dedicating her life to helping a woman who, in all probability,

will never leave prison.

Like chasing a shadow, it is difficult, if not impossible, for someone not directly involved in her case to understand who Susan Rosenberg is. She is locked up literally and figuratively.

She will discuss her beliefs, describe prison conditions, talk about the comraderie she felt with the other women at Lexington. Under continuing litigation, however, she cannot discuss her life underground, and those who knew her then will not speak.

In a letter on Rosenberg's behalf to the sentencing judge requesting her sentence be commuted, author Doris Schwerin wrote: "I would stake my own life on the certainty that Susan Rosenberg is a garden to be saved, that she may save others."

There is much beyond the slogans, the political rhetoric, the endless legal battles — even for the right to eat with the other women or to walk without shackles. Perhaps some day she will write about herself — her loves, her sexuality, and what drove her to such extreme confrontations. Perhaps some day she will write her own book.

For now, she speaks to us from her silence.

Merle Hoffman: If I were to say "Who is Susan Rosenberg?", how would you define her?

Susan Rosenberg: I would say I'm a revolutionary. I'm an anti-imperalist. I am woman-oriented woman in the sense that I believe in and am totally committed to the liberation of women; and I'm a doctor of Chinese medicine and acupuncture. I'm a product of the social movements of the '60s and '70s in this country with a very unique kind of experience that made me dedicate my life to justice.

MH: What was that experience?

SR: My parents had many, many friends who were touched by the McCarthy blacklist and were associated with left-wing organizations. I went to a progressive high school and grade school that was completely involved in the Civil Rights movement. This combination of the Viet Nam War, the Civil Rights movement and seeing a need for justice, put me in a direction that I've basically never left.

MH: Did you have any role models?

SR: Emma Goldman. I read *Living My Life* when I was 13. I feel fortunate that I became part of a movement when I was in my early teens. There was a sense that you could really change something. I guess I could say that I fell in love with the idea that people could control their own destinies, free of serious class, racial and sexual differences. I think the other political prisoners involved in my case came out of this period of intensive activity against the government. One of the most important things about us is an identification with the oppressed. I feel as if I never could stop learning from oppressed peoples.

MH: Many people have feelings for the oppressed and the injustices of this world and many people connect on different levels of political struggle, but you put yourself at risk of completely losing your freedom. What motivated that level of activity? Is it just the final step in a political process?

I'm not involved in revolutionary social change because I love the violence

SR: In part. I really believe that you have do what you say you believe in.

MH: That includes armed struggle — does it not?

SR: Let me put it this way. I believed then and I believe now that under international law oppressed peoples/nations have the right to determine their own destinies, and that includes the right to wage an armed struggle — and that's happening — it's happening all over the third world and it's happening here as well. I believe that and I support that. I also believe that when you come from a country with the greatest war machine in the world and a country and a government that is responsible for state terrorism all over the globe, we, as citizens of this country, have an absolute responsibility to try and stop that in a number of ways. At the time I felt that supporting national liberation struggles that were fighting the United States was the most important way I could make a statement and say *"No, this is not going to go on in my name as well."* So in that sense I support armed struggle.

At this point I have a huge amount of questions about a number of things. When you're in prison for a long time you get to think about and evaluate everything. I would look at the question of life and responsibility and armed struggle much more seriously now than ever before. But, I couldn't tell you that I would condemn violence.

MH: You know, there's a wonderful saying by Ghandi, "The means are an end in process." One must question what kind of "just society" is built on the foundation of armed struggle.

SR: I agree. It's something that I've thought a lot about in the last number of years. I wish I had then.

I'm left with all these questions, but one of the things that's clear is that the government is trying to get us to reassess, to apologize, to get us to say we won't ever do anything again — and, for all of us, certainly for myself, I'm not going to say that to the greatest terrorist state in the world.

MH: So in essence you are willing to stay in prison under intensely difficult conditions for the rest of your life?

SR: If I have to, that's what I'll do. It's not a pleasant thought but I didn't do it for personal gain to begin with; and there wasn't anybody saying "Do this". I think you have to take responsibility for your own actions.

MH: Do you see yourself as a martyr?

SR: No. I don't want to be.

MH: You may have to give up all hope for a so-called "normal life".

SR: Yes, but I like to think that the best part of my life is in front of me. I like to think, and I do think, that most of the contributions that I and the other imprisoned people in this case have to make are important. You have to make certain sacrifices.

The limitations on physical freedom are so profound. Last weekend was the first time any of us [in this case] had been outside in almost a year — literally, we finally got a court order from the judge to let us go outside. I guess he decided a year was enough, and it did a lot of good on the human rights record. We went outside for two hours — what can I say, it was great. For me it was the biggest space I've been in for four-and-a-half years. What you said about the physical reality of spending a lot of time under these kinds of conditions is very true, but, at the same time, it's also true that I feel freer in my heart than I ever have before.

MH: There are wounds and there are very intense scars, I'm sure.

SR: And I haven't begun to fully understand them yet.

MH: Tell me about your days here — what are they like?

SR: DC is a county jail and we are in a category that is known as "pre-trial detention". So, we *technically* have a lot more rights than federal prisoners. However, we've been in jail probably longer than 80 percent of most people

who ever even go to prison; my term now stands at 58 years. DC is totally different than federal prison which is centralized, bureaucratic, repressive and a much more controlled environment. Most of the time that I've been in prison I have been in solitary confinement or in small isolation with a group of three of four other people. Now as a result of a lot of legal and political fights with the courts — I'm in the general population. I've never been in the general population before. It's both completely better on a human level and also very, very difficult.

MH: How is it difficult?

SR: Well, you get used to being locked up and you make a certain kind of mental adjustment...there is a question of resocializing. It's very intense. This is a 99 percent Black jail and we are white prisoners in for a political crime, so there is a very great divide between what we are here for and what the majority of the prisoners are here for.

MH: But aren't you here for them in essence?

SR: Absolutely, but when we first got here, the authorities locked us up, put us in individual cells, and called meetings of the prison population saying that we were racists who had tried to bomb Jesse Jackson. For the first couple of weeks they created a very, very dangerous situation, basically hoping that somebody would do something to one of us so that we would have to ask for protective custody. Protective custody in prison marks you forever because it implies that you are working with the police. So they put out all these rumors, and, fortunately, we were able through talking and through our reputations that preceded us and through some people being conscious, to say — no we're here for the exact opposite. Since then, we have been able to build a lot of unity with the population, but it's not perfect because even inside this situation, racism continues to function. Now things are okay, and people have an enormous amount of respect for us and we've been able to organize here. I write letters to judges for people, which is clearly one of the reasons why they put political people in isolation or control units: They know we are going to organize against the conditions that exist. There are no real programs here as resources for people. There's no rehabilitation to speak of. The main things that exist are the religious ministries that do try to provide some kind of social services for people. There is one educational program and two

Alejandrina Torres (left), Susan and Silvia Baraldini were monitored constantly by male guards.

drug wards for a population of 1300-1400 people. There is really no activity that people can do. There are no books. There is a law library but we are not allowed in. I teach a yoga class a couple of times a week and we are trying to help people learn how to read.

MH: What are the options for you in terms of your own sentence? You say you don't expect to serve it out.

SR: It's so extreme. There is a certain irony about all this. From the beginning it was obvious that the government was being completely vindictive because of who we are. There are six of us in this case and we've all been imprisoned for at least four years or longer and, out of the six of us, we've been through 14 different classifications in four years. We have a total of 300 years worth of jail sentence time among us already. They used the word "Terrorist" in order to punish us in ways they wouldn't normally do. There are constitutional and human rights for everybody except terrorists.

MH: Are you a terrorist?

SR: No, I am not a terrorist — I've never been a terrorist. I'm against terrorism. I'm against terrorism on the right by the United States, and I'm against the terrorism on the left. Terrorism is a political and military strategy that I think is wrong. A lot of what passes as right-wing stuff is absolute terrorism and this is also true of the left wing. I hate to say that...

MH: I think it's important to be said. The results of terror and violence have no politics. People can suffer from the activities of the right and/or the left.

SR: I'm against terrorism but I think the whole issue of violence or a relationship to violence and terrorism is complicated. There is violence in a system where you have 30 million people who have no health care — how many people are dying of AIDS who have nothing? — no programatic answer in the richest country in the world that should have socialized medicine. So, violence has many faces...I'm not involved in revolutionary social change because I love the violence — I think that violence has to be stopped — but I think that the most extreme and difficult forms of violence stem from the system under which we live and I think it's the system that's responsible for a multitude of these faces of violence.

MH: What is the essence of being a revolutionary?

SR: For revolutionaries there is the need to change the system fundamentally. I don't really think change can take place through politics without a complete restructuring of the system from beginning to end, from top to the bottom, but maybe it can. Maybe the kind of massive social upheaval that will take some resistance forms and legal forms will be able to do that.

MH: You are idealistic enough to still believe that people can change fundamentally?

SR: I hope so.

MH: There is a very heavy price for that kind of change. What we're talking about is revolutionary struggle which in it's wake can potentially cause the deaths of millions of people.

SR: I don't want you to come away

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ally no more than three people really understood the problem. Now, two-and-a-half years later, I run for office and 8,000 people vote for me. That says an awful lot."

And, like Diana Steck, the 90-pound woman fighting a billion dollar corporation, it changes us. Diana says of her work, "It changed my personality from being a person who thought that she always had to go along with the system, into a person who had learned to speak up and really take control. I believe whole-heartedly that one person can make a hell of a difference. Anything that you set your mind to, you can achieve. And I never ever thought that way in my life."

It is because of the Lois Gibbses, the Cora Tuckers, the Diana Stecks and countless others that this movement exists today. They are to be thanked for the hard work they are doing, for the risks they are taking with their health and their lives, and for the role models they are providing to women everywhere. Thousands of women in all areas of the United States and millions throughout the world are fighting toxics because they have to. These women should be joined by those of us who still have a choice, to preserve their victories and to win new ones for ourselves. ■

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thinking that I'm repudiating revolutionary struggle for the United States because I'm not. I think all kinds of resistance are necessary. At this moment in the United States we live in a violent society where the question of morality and idealogy is defined by the ruling class. There is no alternative vision in place within any of the organized political movements. I think, for example, of the escalating violence that is going on against women and children in this society and the fact that there is no response.

MH: Let's talk about women and feminism.

SR: I always felt independent and that being involved in social protest wasn't enough without a very clear and conscious struggle about women. I wouldn't say until recently I considered myself a

feminist, although I was in on the Women's Liberation movement and involved in organizing and consciousness raising when I went to Barnard College where I met a number of women who were influential in the growth of women's centers and the development of consciousness. I was also involved with women in the anti-apartheid movement where we tried to organize and deal as women within that reality.

MH: You saw class rather than gender as the primary oppression?

SR: It was both. Now I have much more of a commitment and dedication to the liberation of women. You know, being attacked as a woman in prison has been a really intense and ongoing experience — probably the worst part of being in prison. I was in Tucson before I was transferred to Lexington — we were sexually assaulted by federal prison guards.Males actually did the assault but the females who were in charge held us...it was a rectal and cavity search — a full body search. It was very intense...it took five women to hold me and a man did the search. I was very angry and very upset but I think that experience, along with looking at the experiences of women in our society really up close, further radicalized me concerning women's struggles.

Interestingly enough, our case has been embraced by the Gay Liberation movement far more than by the left.

MH: Why do you think that is?

SR: Part of it is that there are very vocal lesbians in the case and their coming out has really been a very important thing. No matter what city I've been in, people who don't necessarily support my politics or support what I stand for have been willing to build a dialogue, have wanted to communicate, wanted to visit — there's a collective embracing of us. It's great, because whatever my actual immediate sexual orientation is now, I feel completely committed and dedicated to the full emancipation and human rights of gay and lesbian people. In our current society, homophobia dominates — I don't want to have any ideology that classifies, categorizes, oppresses or makes a judgment about what's an acceptable form of life and what isn't.

MH: So in other words there can be no judgments about behavior?

SR: Oh no. There are societies that define a particular sexuality as being a type of decadent capitalism. I disagree with that. When you start quantifying oppressions, you're making a mistake. I also feel when you look at the world after you've been locked out for a long time, things become abstract. It's a very big problem trying to figure out how to stay in the world because what you know now, no longer is what is— but from what I can tell, there seem to be viable movements of social change.

MH: Define what you mean by political prisoners.

SR: I would define political prisoners as people who, because of their beliefs, their associations and their actions, have come into direct conflict with the United States government and, as a result of that, have been incarcerated. There are over several hundred in prisons in the United States.

That's a very generic and broad definition, but one that I think is acceptable to the world. It is also one which we fall under whether we're in prison for being part of social movements that oppose nuclear arms, support Puerto Rican independence or are fighting against racist violence; are a product of sanctuary movements, are looking at U.S. foreign policies in Central America, are resisting the attacks that have gone on against women. Under that definition there are also other people who are still in prison from what the counter-intelligence program of the FBI did in the '60s and '70s — people who were framed by the government. But most people in America don't believe that there are political prisoners or political oppression.

MH: ...or censorship — or any type of restrictions...

SR: Right, nothing. We're democratic and free. One of the reasons the government has gone to such great lengths to bury us in prison — given us the incredible sentences — separated us — sent us to different places — is to try and keep a lid on the fact that there *is* social opposition — there isn't exactly 100 percent social peace inside the United States. To recognize our existence means to recognize that there is something going on with social movements in America (as limited and marginalized as they may be).

MH: Let's say a revolutionary change takes place and a new order comes into being — your vision of a just social society, but people want to overthrow it because they find it intolerable to their moral value structure. If you were in a position of power, how would you deal with them?

SR: I don't think I'd put them in a prison. I don't believe in prisons anymore. I don't believe that prisons work.

MH: What do you do with felons and people who break the law?

SR: It's a real problem. I'm not sure I have any answer to it. No state recognizes its own opposition or gives it legitimacy. I understand that completely; but there is an issue of being allowed to have human rights while being imprisoned. This country violates our human rights at every level. If there's going to be "special" treatment of us [harsher treatment, isolation] there should be recognition; there should be political prisons; we should be allowed to have political associations.

MH: They don't consider you political prisoners. They consider you terrorists. The judge compared you to drug dealers who shoot people on the street and then claim a political orientation.

SR: Well, I haven't shot anybody on the street...

MH: But they did pick you up with hundreds of pounds of guns and explosives.

SR: They did, but what I'm convicted of is possession, not use. Don Black, one of the imperial wizards of the Ku Klux Klan, was arrested with a boat load of weapons the same time that I was. He was on his way to invade Dominica to try to overthrow the government. He got four years and was out after 23 months fundraising for the Ku Klux Klan. If it's from the right it's terrific and if it's from the left — it's death. We don't line people up against a wall and shoot them the way they do in every third world country. We kill them slowly over the years, bury them in prison, where the brutalization, the contempt and institutionalization is used as a means to destroy people's political commitments and beliefs.

MH: But then, it's very primitive psychology because if anything gives you more to live for, it's fighting for your beliefs, more opposition makes you stronger in your opposition.

SR: They don't see it that way, that's why Lexington was able to be turned around. They never expected the kind of opposition that merged around the high security unit at Lexington. I think that now we will see more sophisticated and not quite as extreme forms of political and social control over women who resist.

There's a new place that they built, a high security unit in Marianna, FL, which is 100 women in an enclosed place, inside an all male prison. That's where all the federal, maximum security, high profile crimes go, it's completely controlled. It's not as bad as Lexington; it's not an experiment in total psychological torturing behavior, but there are no programs, no education and it's completely deviant by being in a men's prison. I've been a woman in a men's prison. It's the worst possible thing. I spent seven weeks in segregation in Tucson in the men's wing. It was the most frightening time I spent in prison. For example, I was in one cell

and a man in another. When he heard there was a woman (this man hadn't been near a woman in years) it was an obscene barrage of verbal abuse — 24 hours a day. It was okay with the guards, it was okay with the men prisoners. That mentality is the same mentality that's constructed a situation like Marianna.

The men's prison has educational classes — you can go to college and get a degree. I'm not saying that prison for men is good, but relative to what they want to create for women, it's better. So, I think they are trying to use women political prisoners and our so-called "special security needs" to justify increasing the repression for all women in prison. Society really hates women. Most women who are imprisoned are in for social crimes — crimes of survival. Let me tell you a story: In this place, like many places, they distribute sanitary pads. You're given a certain number a week. If you need more, you have to ask for them. One day there was a woman in my unit yelling, "I need more than my four sanitary pads I'm allowed." The male guard said, "Why?" And she said, "I need more sanitary pads." He said, "If you don't tell me why, forget it." She said, "Fuck you", and he said, "Well, you're not going to get them," and she started screaming "I'm bleeding, I'm bleeding, and if you don't give them to me, it's really going to get rough." He said, "I'm really glad you told me that. Bleed, bitch." And walked away.

MH: How do you deal with the rage and the frustration?

SR: I got sick at Lexington from that kind of rage. I didn't make myself sick — they made me sick. You get sick because you contain the rage.

I lost sleep. I wrote about it. I, too, feel that one day — consequences be damned...I'll fight for our dignity every time I can — what else can I do? There's really not much else to do. I get angry, I scream, I bounce off the walls — I hate men more and more and more every day. I don't mean it politically or quite that way, but it's increasingly difficult for me to navigate politely when the rage is contained — all of us are defined and labelled "terrorists" — and they're just waiting for us to riot...The issue is to never lose it. I never have in quite that way. That was the thing at Lexington. They pushed us and pushed and pushed...

MH: But they haven't broken you. You're still talking about the best years. That's a lot of energy positively directed.

SR: It isn't quite that self-conscious. There's a poet I love a lot, named Nazin Hikmet. He's a Turkish poet and a communist who brought epic poetry to that part of the world. He spent 17 years in prison and he got the whole thing when he talks about being captured and says that capture is not the point — the point is never to surrender. I think he's right — I agree with that as a mentality for living in what is basically a war between the government and us, so every time you survive, you win.

MH: What do you miss the most?

SR: I think, aside from the human touch, the ocean. I miss the ocean — very basic things. I miss the social contact. I miss having any children.

MH: Is there a message in all this?

SR: I can't say I don't believe many of the same things — I do. But in terms of a view of the world — dogma; you can't resist repression with dogma. As far as prison, the repressive apparatus tries to dehumanize you and create a mentality that's defined by brutality. If you abuse that humanity, then they win and you lose — you have to identify with the people that you're with and love them — understanding all the contradictions — there is something to be gained and learned from every interreaction at every level. It's a challenge to one's own continuing racism and arrogance. Even in this system where you get labelled to be the most extreme of the extremes, there's always a choice — at every corner.

MH: So you would never see yourself as a victim?

SR: I've been victimized by the state in terms of its repressive apparatus; but, on a subjective level, no, I'm not a victim — I made my choices and commitments — I'll stand by that. ■

HOFFMAN *from page 3*

that women truly feel responsible and empowered about their sexuality and life choices. As long as women remain economically and politically inferior, all education and intellectual, ideological or political gains along the way will be shallow victories. Alternative programs should be developed whereby women's groups, organizations and college Women's Studies departments can activate volunteers to go to the junior high schools, high schools and community groups to educate students about birth control in the context of their lives, which would necessarily include discussion of politics and individual responsibility.

Women are the majority of this country's health care consumers, yet have almost nothing to say about how funds or Research and Development monies