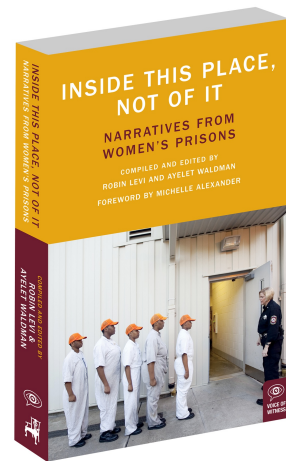


Sarah Chase's narrative is one of the oral histories that appears in the forthcoming book *Inside This Place, Not of It: Narratives from Women's Prisons*. Edited by Ayelet Waldman and Robin Levi, *Inside This Place* will be available in stores in October 2011 from Voice of Witness. The ninth title in the Voice of Witness series, *Inside This Place* reveals some of the most egregious human rights violations within women's prisons in the United States. In their own words, the thirteen narrators in this book recount their lives leading up to incarceration and their experiences inside—ranging from forced sterilization and shackling during childbirth, to physical and sexual abuse by prison staff. Together, their testimonies illustrate the harrowing struggles for survival that women in prison must endure.



## SARAH CHASE

*21, currently imprisoned*

*Sarah Chase sits in a prison several states away from her family, friends, and everything she has known. She keeps busy with books, crafts, and writing, but she is lonely. She was sent here because of her relationship with a guard at her previous prison. Because of her new prison's inaccessibility and the high cost of phone calls, Sarah shared her story with us through letters and one short phone call. She described her experiences of childhood neglect and brutal rape, and how, in 2007, she was sentenced to twenty years to life for the murder of her stepmother. In one letter, Sarah included a picture of herself. It showed a petite young woman with large eyes and very long blonde hair, wearing prison sweats and smiling cautiously at the camera. In this excerpt, Sarah describes the events leading up to her incarceration.*

### I WAS NUMB TO THE WORLD

The summer I was fourteen, after a three-day binge on meth where I hadn't slept, my stepmother told me that she was taking me to get drug tested and that I was going to jail, so I ran next door to stay with my best friend's mom. My best friend wasn't there at the time—he was in California with his aunt and uncle. I would smoke weed with her, sometimes several times a day. One day, my friend's mom also allowed her forty-seven-year-old uncle to start shooting me up with meth—I had never shot up before—and then he raped me. For the next week they shot me up and raped me over and over. Then they sold me to their drug dealer to pay for drugs. He watched my friend's mom do things to me, and I had to do stuff to him and sleep with him. As brutal as the rapes were physically, psychologically I suffered the deepest wounds that would take years to heal.

Once, when I was being raped, some friends of my rapists saw what was going on and went next door to my stepmom. They told her where I was and what was happening to me, but she just told them to leave. Then she pretended not to know where I was or what was happening to me. She even called the police asking if they'd found me yet, saying that she knew something bad was happening to me and that they just had to find me. And all the while she knew I was next door, being raped.

The people who my stepmother turned away went to the police, but unfortunately one had a warrant out for her arrest, and she was put in jail. Two days later, the police came to get me. By then

I'd been at that house for six days, and I believe I was totally brainwashed or something, because when the police came, I was protecting the people who had done horrible things to me. I actually had it in my head that my rapists were trying to protect me from my dad and stepmom, and that they cared about me. I was messed up. After the police got me, I was placed in a foster home for several weeks, and finally I was released to live with my sister Mary in Sparks, Nevada. I'd just turned fifteen. I was so messed up from the rapes that I had no respect for myself. I was embarrassed, ashamed, and blamed myself for it all. I was numb to the world. I dressed trashy and would sit at bus stops waiting until a stranger would come by and pick me up. I didn't care if anything happened to me. I also started having blackouts at that time.

I was spun out when I showed up for my court date about the rapes. The judge ordered me to be detained until I could get into treatment for both the drug abuse and the rapes. So I was then taken to Western Nevada Regional Youth Center, where I stayed for three months in an empty cell. I was locked down for twenty-three hours a day, awaiting an open bed at Spring Mountain Treatment Center in Las Vegas, Nevada. Then a bed opened and I was transported to Las Vegas, where I spent the next year.

During that time, the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the rapes caused me to have night terrors, flashbacks that resembled seizures. I had conversations I have no memory of, and blackouts where I would get violent. Other girls at the treatment center would make comments and then I would freak out and beat them up. Afterward I'd have no memory of any of it.

I punched walls and doors, bloodying my hands. At night when I was asleep, I would claw at my private parts and be screaming and thrashing around, and staff would have to wake me up. The medications were not helping.

I had one good counselor, and she had me do packets from a book on PTSD, and that really helped me. The packets were designed to help me deal with guilt, denial, blame, anger, mistrust, feelings of hopelessness and self-hate. It made me draw pictures and remember details that I desperately wanted to forget, but it made me see things clearer and feel confident that I could protect myself in the end. I pretty much had no choice but to get over it. I was tired. I wanted to be happy.

#### I THOUGHT THIS WAS HOW THE REST OF MY LIFE WOULD BE

I was released at sixteen years old back to my father, and I was still on probation. For the most part I tried to stay clean and sober, but I was not happy. I really didn't have friends at that point, and the trial for the rapes was starting.

We lived in a small farm town with a few horse ranches around. When I was seventeen my dad and I got into a big fight about a horse that was supposed to be mine, but that he had put in his name. I don't think I'd ever seen my dad that mad. I left the house and went to my boyfriend's, and then I got a call from my dad saying I needed to pack up all my stuff and get out of his house. He said I needed to be home in ten minutes to do that or else. I was really, really scared. I don't know why, but I had a bad feeling that my dad was going to hurt me, so I asked my brother to come with me.

I made it exactly on time, but my dad told me that he'd already spoken to my probation officer because I hadn't got there within ten minutes, and that I was going to be locked up. All that was going through my mind was the last time I was locked up and how horrible it was. I don't remember anything after that. I blacked out, like I did after I was raped. The next thing I remember is being in my parents' room inside the house, holding a gun from my boyfriend's house. My ears were ringing so bad and my stepmom was on the floor. I went to the church where my grandparents used to go, and I think I blacked out again. The next thing I remember is crawling through fences from the police.

As soon as the cops came to get me, I got to see how I would be viewed and treated for the rest of my life. I was dragged through the gravel in front of the house, even though I no longer had the gun and I wasn't resisting. The cops told my dad that they would do anything and everything to make sure that I got the max.

I was seventeen years old, I was terrified, I had no clue what was going to happen to me, and I had absolutely no one fighting for me. I was taken to county jail. In county the cops were horrible to me. For the first couple of weeks I was kept in a rubber cell, with only a mattress, a blanket, and a roll of toilet paper. There wasn't even a toilet, only a hole in the ground. I slept on the mattress on the

ground, and sewage would rise up on the floor. Ants would crawl all over the ground and all over me, not to mention the bugs that would crawl up from the hole in the ground. When I was let out at night to shower, the porters would clean the rubber room with ammonia and bleach together, and the cops would put me back in there. I would be coughing and choking and I'd hear them laughing.

The worst thing was that one of the men who raped me when I was fourteen was in the jail that was housed right next to me. For two weeks, the cops would let him yell at me and taunt me.

There was only one cop who treated me well. I wanted someone to be nice to me, so I didn't care why he was doing it. He would stand out of the camera's view and he'd put his hands through the bars and touch my breasts, or put his hands down my pants. Sometimes he'd take me to another room without a camera and "pat search" me, feeling all over me and inside me, but the room was right by other officers, so we didn't have sex. In December 2007 I was sentenced as an adult for first-degree murder. Everyone told me that if I didn't take a deal I would get one hundred years for shooting and killing my stepmother, so I pled guilty. The trial judge gave me twenty years to life.

The women's prison is in southern Nevada, so women in northern Nevada who are sentenced to prison are taken to the men's prison first to await transportation to the women's prison. For eight days, me and an old lady sat in a cell with nothing. We were given dirty orange jumpsuits to wear, and we never got to change them. The room was freezing, and the blankets didn't keep us warm; they were dirty and had holes. We had nothing to properly bathe ourselves, no way to comb our hair. The cell was disgusting, and we were locked in it 24/7. The officers would ignore us altogether or call us whiny, needy bitches if we asked for anything. It really scared me, because I thought this was how the rest of my life would be.

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