

My Green Scare Arrest

Or, why does it take 30 cops to arrest one person? Couldn't be anything about creating public hysteria against forest defenders, could it?

Marie Mason

2008

Up until March 10, I lived in a small, wooded, old neighborhood on the edge of Northside in Cincinnati.

That morning, I left the house with just enough time to get to my job while my 16-year-old daughter, Arianna, was asleep in her room. I drove to the end of my block and was startled to see an SUV come around the corner and stop directly in front of my car, blocking my way.

Another vehicle pulled up directly behind me, and suddenly, I was surrounded by several others, including a Cincinnati police car. I was ordered to get out of my car, and that's when it finally dawned on me that I was being busted, although I had no idea for what.

I was frisked by a male FBI agent, my hands cuffed behind my back, and placed in the back seat of a police car. I was finally told that I was under arrest and that anything I said could be held against me. Special Agent James Shearer asked if I wanted to make a statement, but another federal officer from Michigan told him I had already said that I had nothing to say.

I struggled to get my cell phone out of the pocket of my coat and got off a call to my friends at Cincinnati's Books4Prisoners informing them of the situation and asking them to come over quickly and stay with my daughter.

My street filled up with cop cars and agents

Meanwhile, my street quickly filled up with cop cars and agents. It was a real circus, with media from every outlet in Cincinnati camped out on my lawn, obviously tipped off by the feds that they were making a major "domestic terrorist" bust. My upstairs neighbor, who does daycare in her home, was prevented by the police from picking up the kids from school and had to remain on the premises as the FBI searched my downstairs apartment.

I was taken in a three-car motorcade to the downtown Cincinnati federal building where I was frisked again by both male and female cops, fingerprinted, and photographed. They made a big deal out of my modesty when they insisted on photographing the dragon tattoo on my stomach, like I was hiding something. I was asked again by Agent Shearer if I wanted to make a statement and told me, "not to wait too long," whatever that meant. I told him again that I had nothing to say, and I was then brought to the chief investigative agent's office and told I could call my attorney.

As I had been the subject of numerous investigations for years and was somewhat prepared, I had previously asked the nearest National Lawyers Guild attorney, Fred Slough in Kansas City, that in case of an arrest, would he be my advisor until I could locate an attorney in Ohio. He had kindly agreed, so I called him for advice. He advocated silence and to use the services of a local public defender until I could secure an attorney of my own. I was taken to a holding cell to await my arraignment. While I was in the lockup, someone from the FBI began calling on my cell phone to various friends and activists whose numbers were listed in my phone book trying to get information.

I was appointed a public defender for my hearing before the presiding judge where I was finally told of my charges—three counts of felony arson and one count of conspiracy involving two actions claimed by the Earth Liberation Front in 1999 at Michigan State University and the next year in Mesick, Michigan, at a logging facility.

I was immediately put on suicide watch

On the public defender's advice, I signed a waiver agreeing not to fight extradition to Michigan and was taken back to my holding cell. I was uncomfortable during the hearing due to a bladder infection I had just developed in jail, but I wasn't allowed to use the bathroom as there was no matron present to escort me. I didn't get medical care for my ailment until three days before my release, though I requested it immediately. After hours of waiting, I was taken to Butler County Jail in Cincinnati.

I was immediately put on suicide watch for no particular reason. Were they hoping? All my clothes were taken from me. I was given a "pickle suit", a velcroed black plastic short vest and showered for lice. I was photographed and put in a cell with another woman going through withdrawal from heroin. We had some very interesting conversations about life and her addiction.

I wasn't allowed a phone call to tell anyone where I was. After 36 hours, I was interviewed and asked by a jail shrink if I wanted to kill myself, and then showered again and given the charming circus balloon outfit all the federal inmates wear. I made a quick call to the only number I could remember, a friend from the IWW. It was late at night, so I was placed in one cell and then moved at dawn the next day to another cell block.

I had no way to call from my new location since I didn't have access to the commissary where I could buy a phone card. There wasn't much food I could eat, since my vegan diet prevented me from eating anything but applesauce, oatmeal, or the occasional steamed vegetable. I spent my time playing cards and scrabble with the other inmates, getting to know some of them.

I was in my cell reading the next day while the rest of the block was out in the main area watching television. Suddenly, there was a huge uproar and my bunkie came running into the cell. "You were on TV!," she yelled excitedly. The local news station had run a special on the Green Scare cases. They reported my arrest and ran stock pictures of the arson at Vail, Colorado, though my case has nothing to do with that action. From what the other inmates said, the report made me sound pretty scary.

After a couple of days, my friends on the outside got me a phone card and it was such a relief to be in touch with them and my daughter again. I discovered that most cell phones and many landlines won't take collect calls from jails. At first, I thought this meant my friends were refusing my calls, but folks inside told me the phones didn't interface sometimes.

I was still without a lawyer, and still unsure of what was happening with my co-defendants. Most importantly, I didn't know that Frank Ambrose (my soon-to-be-ex-husband) was cooperating with the feds. He had actually been cooperating with them for nearly a year and was gathering evidence by traveling around the country and visiting me and other friends.

After a week in the Butler County jail, I was awakened very early, cuffed and shackled, and brought to the intake area. I had not been told, but I was being extradited to Michigan that day. I was driven to the federal building and brought to a holding cell to wait. Again, with the endless frisking and waiting around in cells.

After several hours, I was cuffed and shackled again and taken to the basement parking lot and placed in an agent's car. From there, we drove at frightening and excessive speeds to reach an airport in Kentucky where a private government plane flew me to Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I appeared in federal court there before a magistrate, and refused the offer of a public defender, insisting that I would soon retain counsel of my choice. I was bound over for trial and taken to the Newaygo County Jail in White Cloud, a small mid-Michigan town.

The next day in jail, I received a message that my family had retained an attorney for me. The following day, I was awakened early and cuffed and shackled and taken back to the federal building in Grand Rapids. Once there, I met John Minock, who within seconds entered the official record as my attorney. He had me "stand mute" before the

court, a version of “not guilty,” and made a motion for me to be released on a non-cash bond as my co-defendants, Aren Burthwick and Stephanie Fultz had been in Detroit.

This was denied, based on federal prosecutor Hagen Frank’s unfounded allegation that I was a threat to the community’s safety and a flight risk on the basis of what they called my “international contacts,” since I had traveled to India for the World Social Forum.

Minock countered that I could be released into my mother’s custody and wear an electronic tether. This was accepted, but there was a delay because of the Easter holiday and the time needed to set up the tether.

So, I was driven back to Newaygo and spent another weekend in jail. Finally, on the Tuesday following Easter Sunday, I was taken to Grand Rapids, met with my probation officer, was attached to the tether, and released to my Mom.

I am now staying in northern Michigan under house arrest, having lost my home and job in Cincinnati. I am forced to live eight hours away from my daughter, my friends and political projects. I am able to call, write and e-mail. I can cook vegan meals and receive visitors.

It’s nowhere near as uncomfortable as jail had been, but definitely a strain on my family and not the same as being free.

I’m very grateful for all the support from friends and people who have heard about my case and been in touch. And, for everyone for putting in so much effort to support my legal fund.

Thank you so much. It gives me so much hope to see such solidarity. As a strong community of resistance, we can withstand the repression of the state and continue to fight for the Earth everywhere.

Stay strong, I am with you in spirit. My time may be done, but yours is just beginning.

Free Marie online: www.freemarie.org

Web Archive update 2-11-2019: for the above, see <https://supportmariusmason.org/>

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