

Grandma Drone Resister's Letter from Jail

Ithaca Catholic Worker Mary Anne Grady Flores' first letter,
Feb.11, 2016

Greetings, Dear Friends—

Joy swept through our cell block, Jamesville County Jail, Pod 4, Thursday, January 28.

That evening some of the fifty-nine women in our Pod rushed up and knocked on my cell door. They reported the six o'clock news had shown twelve drone resisters handcuffed, sitting on a roadside curb, waiting to be taken into custody.

I just started my six-month sentence on January 19, for photographing protesters of the drone warfare directed out of Hancock Air Base in nearby Syracuse, New York. These eight protesters, many of whom are Catholic Workers, were later acquitted. (See my January 19 press conference statement.)

The resisters had fastened together thirty larger-than-life cut-out photos of the late Jerry Berrigan, standing bold in a blue scarf. This line of cut-outs of Jerry was held by the twelve resisters, blockading the main gate at Hancock Air Base, where Jerry had protested for years on a bi-weekly basis.

Shortly before he died at 95 last year, Jerry was asked during a *Syracuse Post-Standard* news interview what he would have done differently. He said: "I would have resisted more and gotten arrested more."

"The Jerry Berrigan Memorial Drone Blockade" was done to honor Jerry's wishes. It was to protest the ongoing 24-7 drone assassinations initiated by drone operators at Hancock as part

of the Obama administration's "kill chain."

Hancock is presently only one of twenty U.S. drone-warfare bases across the U.S., Germany and the U.K. The "Drone Papers"—leaked by an internal military whistleblower—confirm what whistle-blower drone pilots as well as drone victims have reported: The outrageous fact that 90% of all drone victims are bystanders, among them, many children.

That day my friend Carissa from Pod 4 returned excited from the downtown Syracuse "Justice" Center (Jail) because there she 'd met the four drone protester women—Beth Adams, Joan Pleune, Bev Rice, Joan Wages—who were among the twelve at the "Jerry" action.

Carissa learned that Joan and Bev had knowingly violated the same order of protection that fifty other drone protesters have. I had unintentionally violated it, landing me in jail for six months.

The "order of protection" has been issued on behalf of the commander of Hancock Air Base against drone protesters. Usually such orders are issued to protect people from physical violence and even death from their abusive domestic partners.

Currently "protected" by the order is the commander in charge of Hancock Air Base and its 2,000 personnel and armed soldiers—making him the "victim" instead of the real victims, the many people killed by the base's MQ9 Reaper drones, firing "Hellfire" missiles.

The base commander, testifying at my trial, said: "No, I don't know Mary Anne Grady. No, I've never had a conversation with her. I'm not afraid of her. *That's* just a piece of paper. I just want these protesters away from my base."

Carissa told me: "You folks should be protesting in the courts for the misuse of the order of protection. I'd go with you to protest." That sentiment has been echoed by others here in the

pod.

In fact, a team of attorneys is finalizing the points of appeal of my case to the New York State Court of Appeals, to challenge the use of the order of protection. This is the highest court in New York State. The appeal decision will set a precedent for upcoming cases of anyone else charged with violating the order of protection.

Joan and Bev are willing to risk long jail sentences to fight the drones and expose the absurdity of this use of orders of protection. Joan has been part of resistance movements since the Freedom Rides challenged racist segregation during the Civil Rights era.

In a previous drone protest, Catholic Worker Mark Colville and two Yale Divinity students brought a bouquet of roses and the People's Order of Protection on behalf of drone victims to the Hancock's main entrance. The People's Order reads in part: "Stop the terrorizing, menacing, maiming and killing of the children, women, and men of Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen."

Raz Mohammad of Maidan Shahr, Afghanistan, and a friend of drone resisters locally, requested an order of protection on behalf of his village after his brother-in-law was killed by a drone. Raz wrote: "When my nephew was 5 years old, he asked his mother "Where is father?" My sister replied, "He was killed by a computer." [Drones are piloted by people sitting at computers]. These negative effects persist on all of us to this day."

This is a critical moment in the six years of Hancock Resistance. Stopping killer drones is our #1 continued focus, no matter what tool is used to try to chill the movement. We must keep our focus on the voices of the drone victims.

I don't ask for pardon, nor do my fellow drone resisters, because as people of conscience we must speak out, as Jerry

did, to stop the death-dealing by our government and military. It is our first amendment right to stand at the gate of Hancock Air Base, asking our government for redress of our grievances, specifically, to end this killer-drone policy, which in 2015 alone killed over six thousand people.

Immediately after the Paris attacks, the four whistleblower drone pilots, sent a letter of criticism to President Obama, defense secretary Ashton Carter and CIA chief John Brennan. In part, their letter said: "We came to the realization that the innocent civilians we were killing only fueled the feelings of hatred that ignited terrorism and groups like Isis, while also serving as a fundamental recruitment tool, similar to Guantánamo Bay. This administration and its predecessors have built a drone program that is one of the most devastating driving forces for terrorism and destabilization around the world."

I am filled with gratitude that the local resistance continues, joining drone resistance around the world, We here in Central New York have had 172 arrests since 2010 and over 1000 people have protested and vigiled at Hancock Air Base. I affirm the statement of "The Jerry Berrigan Memorial Drone Blockade."

From my jail cell, I invite us all to take a step beyond our comfort zones into deeper solidarity with all those struggling for justice, including the Black Lives Matter movement, ending climate change, ending immigrant deportations and the Free Palestine movement. Keep in mind the drone killing is only one tool to keep the people here at home and around the world under U.S. control. We must reject the death dealings of empire, and are called to celebrate love, life and creativity, seeking to live nonviolently. As Cornel West says, "Justice is what love looks like in public."

Many thanks to all of you who have written to me in jail, sending poems, articles, artwork and jokes, bringing light and

laughter to me and the women here. Thanks for your photos and reports of your anti drone witnesses! Thanks to all the vets old and young sending me letters of their peace witnesses. Thanks for the MLK quotes and others and your own as well. I'm a slow writer, so forgive me if I don't get back to you. Each of your letters (except the ones held back) are read and treasured.

Thanks to folks bringing meals to Mom. I know many of you have written to me at my home and I look forward to reading your cards when I return. Also thanks to folks who have generously donated towards my home and jail expenses and Mom's care. Thank you for those gifts. I'm feeling so much gratitude for all that you have showered upon me.

I am warm. I am fed. I have good people around me. I'm so grateful for all your prayers and thoughts. I feel so lifted by you and God's grace. I hold you in my thoughts and prayers.

I'll be sending more letters, please keep an eye out for them
In gratitude,
Mary Anne Grady Flores

Please Get Involved in the Resistance to Drones:

For information on how to get involved, please refer to upstatedroneaction.org and knowdrones.org.

Watch the film Unmanned: America's Drone Wars and share it with your friends.

View a short video on Drones of Upstate New York (English, with Spanish subtitles)

March 30, 2016 Symposium in Nevada : Inside Drone Warfare: Perspectives of Whistleblowers, Families of Drone Victims and Their Lawyers. This will be videotaped and is part of Shut

Down Creech Air Force Base (March 27-April 2)

Get involved with ongoing drone resistance at these following air bases:

- Beale (outside Marysville, California), Occupy Beale
- Creech (Indian Springs, Nevada), Shut Down Creech!
- Hancock (outside Syracuse, NY), Syracuse Peace Council and Upstate Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars
- Horsham (Horsham, Pennsylvania), Brandywine Peace Community
- Niagara Falls (Niagara Falls, NY), No Drones Niagara and Upstate Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars
- Volk (Camp Douglas, Wisconsin), Wisconsin Coalition to Ground the Drones

Start resisting drones at these following air bases:

—Arizona Air National Guard; Cannon (New Mexico); California ANG; Davis-Monthan (Arizona); Ellsworth (South Dakota); Grand Forks (North Dakota); Holloman (New Mexico); Nellis (Nevada); Ohio ANG; Hickam (Hawaii); Randolph (Texas); Tennessee ANG; Texas ANG; Whiteman (Missouri); also RAF Waddington (United Kingdom), and Ramstein (Germany); and—with plans for 110 new bases throughout the U.S.—more, coming to a neighborhood near you.

Join a few friends, and come out to your town's busy corner holding signs like "Stop Killer Drones" or whatever message you want to end the wars. (Ithaca's route 13 bridge has 39,000 cars which pass daily. Our local vigil is Saturdays from 10-11am).

More suggestions will be included in upcoming letters.

For Jail Correspondence:

- Put your return address in the body of your letter or in

your card; envelopes are removed before Mary Anne receives correspondence.

- Please don't send cards with glitter or stick ons.
- Send letters to:

Mary Anne Grady Flores #12001966
Onondaga County Department of Correction
PO Box 143
Jamesville, NY 13078

To make a donation:

- Checks are preferred. Please make them out to the Ithaca Catholic Worker, 514 North Plain Street, Ithaca, NY 14850. Put Mary Anne Grady Flores in the memo line.
- Donations will be accepted at the Go Fund Me Page (they take 5%)