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CAPTION(S): Picture 1, Women, children board one of the private vans near 11th and G Streets NW going to Lorton; Pictures 2 through 5, On a recent day a minibul rolls away from The Avenue. A woman asks the driver of the van about going to Lorton. The cost is usually \$4. Three vans left and the minibus regularly carry visitors to the prison. Photos by John McDonnell -- The Washington Post; Map, LORTON REFORMATORY. The Washington Post

Drug Smuggling and Hot Goods: A Ride on Prison Visitors' Buses THE AVENUE TO LORTON; Part I

By Athelia Knight
Washington Post Staff Writer

No bus stop in Washington is quite like the one downtown near the intersection of 11th and G streets NW, along a stretch of pavement they call The Avenue. There, most evenings and weekend mornings, scores of women gather to ride the unofficial shuttle buses that take them over the Potomac and out of the city, down the highways of suburban Virginia to the place where their men live, Lorton reformatory.

Hundreds of shoppers and office workers scurry along the intersection near Woodward & Lothrop and the Metro Center subway station at dusk, oblivious to the remarkable street theater that is playing out in front of them. There are no signposts marking the location as a departure point for trips to the prison, but signs are not necessary. If you have a man at Lorton, you know where to go to get a ride to visit him.

Before my journey into this subculture began, I had a specific question for which I was seeking answers. I had been told that inmates can get drugs more readily in Lorton than they can on the streets, that a large percentage of prisoners there show traces of drugs in their bodies. Some corrections officers claim Lorton's top officials do little about the drug problem because they want to pacify the inmates. Some judges say they are so concerned about the easy availability of drugs at Lorton that they have recommended sending felons with drug problems elsewhere.

How do visitors get drugs into Lorton? That is the question that took me to the corner of 11th and G. For several weeks from November through January, I explored The Avenue, waiting for the buses, taking the rides, getting to know the women and the drivers, going through the routine at the other end of the 20-mile trip from the inner city to the suburban prison, where corrections officers and inmates await.

Over the course of eight trips with five different drivers, I was able to get some answers. I saw many women carefully stuff marijuana into small balloons. One woman rolled more than a dozen marijuana cigarettes and hid them in her clothing. Another woman concealed a cellophane-

wrapped white powdered substance that appeared to be heroin inside her hat. On several trips, riders smoked joints and PCP-laden cigarettes. On one ride a passenger tried to sell me some marijuana. On a few rides I did not see any drugs.

At Lorton, I went inside the prison on six of the eight trips, using my driver's license for identification and going through body searches like all the other visitors. Usually I was patted lightly. On one search I was patted and touched by a female officer in so many places that afterward I felt I had been violated. I saw the many ways women can slip drugs past the guards and the ways they can transfer the drugs to their men in the visiting lounges. Inmates explained how they swallow drug-packed balloons, lodging them partway down their throats and then coughing them up in the privacy of their cells and dormitory rooms.

And along the way, I came to understand The Avenue beyond just the smuggling of drugs, as a peculiar underground subculture with its own unwritten laws and codes.

With few exceptions, the regular riders were black teen-agers and women in their 20s and 30s who had low incomes and did not have cars. Most talked about everything, from the men they were going to see to the local news. They all had memorized the six-digit prison numbers of the inmates they were visiting, and when they talked about what their men were doing, they would say things such as "five to 15" or "20 to life."

Some were less friendly and refused to speak. None asked me my name or who I was going to see; I must have seemed like just another woman with a husband or boyfriend locked up.

I also got to know the drivers of the jitney buses, campers and vans, and the more time I spent with them the more it became apparent that they were central characters in this subculture. The competition among the drivers, who pocketed \$4 per passenger, was intense.

One rainy night, my driver, who was handicapped, had his tires slashed. A week later another driver was killed on the street corner. His life and death, and the way the other drivers and passengers reacted to it, is one of the many stories that unfold in this series recounting my experiences along The Avenue to Lorton.

My first visit to 11th and G was on the afternoon of Thursday, Nov. 3. I was wearing blue jeans and a black leather jacket, and carried a small purse containing my wallet with my driver's license and press pass. It was 5:17. The Avenue was coming to life.

A teen-aged girl wearing a red jogging suit hopped out of a Winnebago-sized recreational vehicle parked near the corner.

"Lorton! Lorton!" she shouted as she strolled down the sidewalk.

Behind the RV was a Chevrolet van, and behind that was an old blue school bus with a young man standing in the doorway, arms folded.

Two women in dresses and coats, high heels and stockings, with hats cocked to the side, walked up to the bus. They paused for a second and looked up and down the block. The bus driver smiled at them. One of the women asked him, in a hushed voice, if this was the spot where they could catch a ride to Lorton. He nodded his head. They gave him \$4 each and got on.

Suddenly, a motorcycle police officer appeared. As he parked at the curb, the RV driver jumped into his vehicle. The bus driver turned on the ignition and cast a disgusted look at the approaching officer. The officer waved his hand and told the drivers to move from the "No Parking" zone. The bus driver made a U-turn in the middle of 11th Street. The RV and van drivers went around the block. All three returned to their unofficially assigned spots a few minutes later, after the policeman had gone.

A man wearing a down jacket walked up to me and asked if I needed a ride to Lorton. He said his name was Tony. He could take me for \$4 if I rode in his RV, which holds 30 passengers, or \$3 if I rode in his blue van. After a few minutes, I decided to take the \$4 ride. I gave Tony \$5 and he pulled out a fistful of bills and handed me one dollar. He escorted me to the door and told a chubby woman called Selena that I had paid.

The vehicle was already crowded, and a thick fog of smoke hung in the air. I made my way past a butcher-block table in the kitchen area, where four women were sitting on benches. One of the women was smoking a marijuana cigarette.

Selena was sitting at the table, carefully taking small portions of marijuana out of a small yellow envelope and stuffing it into a red balloon. She shoved the marijuana deeper into the balloon, then stretched the balloon with her hands. She stuffed and stretched it until she had a tight knot of marijuana in the bottom. Then she handed the balloon to a woman seated in the back.

I sat on a cooler of beer in front of a side closet near the back. There was hardly room to move. Several women were standing. Tony had to turn away some late-comers. Selena announced that if anyone wanted to buy food or drinks they had better do it now because it was too crowded for her to serve them once we hit the road.

A few women asked for cans of "Bull"--Schlitz malt liquor beer. I got off the cooler to let one of Tony's helpers get the beer. There were all sorts of items for sale, and a yellow handwritten sign on the wall next to the toilet listed the prices:

Sodas: 50 cents

Kools and Newports: One dollar

Hot dogs: One dollar

Hot dogs with chili: \$1.25

Half smokes: \$1.50

Balloons: 20 cents

Tops rolling paper: 50 cents

Doublemint gum: 40 cents

Just as Tony was about to shut the door, a woman with a whiny voice ran up. "Tony! Tony!" she cried. "Tony! Don't leave me."

She was carrying two shopping bags--one from Garfinckel's, the other from Woodies. She climbed across the women in the aisle, saying: "Excuse me, Hon. Excuse me, Babe." She wore blue jeans, a navy blue sweater, a light blue blouse and a tan, wide-brim hat. She took off the hat, handed it to another passenger and told her to wear it. She handed her shopping bags to one of Tony's helpers, who placed one on the counter next to the sink and the other on the floor between her legs.

It was 6:15, and Tony was ready to roll. There were 25 women, two men and three small children on board.

The last passenger seemed to be having a hard time getting settled. As Tony drove through the downtown streets, she swayed back and forth, trying to steady herself as she fumbled in the pockets of her jeans. She pulled some white plastic tags--the kind that sound an alarm when a shoplifter walks out of a store with them--out of her pocket and placed them on the counter next to the sink. Next from the pockets came a blue bandanna, which she tied around her head. And then she pulled out a roll of bills. She folded them neatly and tucked them under the sides of her bandanna.

This woman, who appeared to be in her mid-20s, began to talk of her exploits. She bragged that she can steal anything that is not nailed down, and even things that are nailed down. She said she had been taken to the manager's office once at Woodies after a sales clerk had accused her of shoplifting. She said she cried "real tears" in the manager's office, implying that had gotten her off. Then she asked Tony's helper, who had been holding her shopping bags, to hand her the Kleenex box in one of the bags. The show was beginning.

"Ladies! Ladies! Listen up," she said, reaching into the tissue box. Out came several pairs of colorful bikini panties and bras with sales tags attached.

"One hundred percent silk," she said, holding the underwear above her head. They could be ours for good prices, she said.

A woman in the front teased the woman for stealing such small-ticket items. The shoplifter then bent over, reached into the Woodies bag and pulled out a cranberry-colored knit dress, which also had the sales tag on it. She held the dress up high and turned from side to side so everyone could see it. The dress cost \$78, she said, but she wanted only \$22 for it. Then she looked at the

tag again and revised her price upward. She wanted \$27.

Someone inquired about the dress size. The shoplifter said the dress was quite expensive, and that even though it was small the woman probably could wear it. The more expensive the dress, she argued, the smaller the size you need. Another woman said the shoplifter was dead wrong: the more you pay, the larger the size you need. This started an argument, which eventually was settled by a plump woman sitting next to me. This woman, who had arched eyebrows and manicured nails and had been "oohing" and "aahing" at the clothing, said that if you wear a size 18 in clothing from Lerner's, a less expensive shop, you could probably get into a 16 or 14 in the same outfit from Woodies. The shoplifter nodded in agreement.

"You got class," she said.

The classy, plump woman then leaned over and borrowed my pen, explaining that if she had known that the shoplifter (whom she referred to as a "booster") was going to be on this trip she would have brought extra money. She said the booster looked like a woman who had sold hot goods in her neighborhood. Then she asked whether the booster would be anywhere near Third and I streets SE on the next day, and the shoplifter said she might. The woman wrote her name and telephone number on a paper towel and handed it to her.

As Tony barreled down the car-pool lane on Shirley Highway, past bumper-to-bumper rush-hour traffic, the shoplifter reached into the bottom of her shopping bag and pulled out a wrinkled black-and-white checkered wool dress. The going price was more than \$100. There were no takers.

"You all ain't got no money," she said, shoving the dress back into the shopping bag. "I'm going to take it to the fence."

But the shoplifting bazaar had not yet closed for the day. She asked Tony's helper to look in the Garfinckel's bag on the sink and hand her a pair of gloves. The woman reached deep in the bag, pulled out a pair of light brown knit gloves and handed them to the shoplifter. "Look in there," the shoplifter said, directing the woman to a corner of the bag. "There should be a matching hat." Out came a matching hat. Again, no one offered to buy the goods. The shoplifter finally decided she was wasting her time with us. She asked Tony's helper if she was going inside Lorton. She said no. If the helper watched her bags, the shoplifter told her, she would get "something" next time.

The shoplifter then asked if anyone had some perfume she could use so she could smell good for her man. Two women gave her perfume. A third woman let her use her blusher and a mirror. A fourth lent her an eyebrow pencil.

We were approaching Springfield, just a few miles from the prison.

In the back, a woman in tight-fitting blue jeans took off her boots and stuffed green bills in the foot of her gray socks. She packed some cigarettes near the top of her socks.

Another woman in the back called for Selena, who was standing next to the table in the kitchen area. She asked Selena to put some marijuana in a balloon for her. As she started to pass the plastic bag of marijuana and a balloon up to Selena, a young man in the back said he would do it for her. He did not appear to be a regular. He had on a pair of earphones attached to a Walkman on his waist. A regular told him that he could not take them inside Lorton.

Several of us watched as the man placed a sheet of paper on his lap and emptied some of the marijuana from the plastic bag onto the paper. He picked up the marijuana with his fingers and rather sloppily put it into the balloon. As he did that, the woman who earlier had Selena fill a balloon for her told the man that he had to push the marijuana into the bottom of the balloon until it was in a small, tight knot. The man looked up, somewhat puzzled, and asked why.

"Because," came the answer, "the guy's got to swallow it to take it inside."Next: Taking it inside
CAPTION: Picture 1, Women, children board one of the private vans near 11th and G Streets NW going to Lorton; Pictures 2 through 5, On a recent day a minibul rolls away from The Avenue. A woman asks the driver of the van about going to Lorton. The cost is usually \$4. Three vans left and the minibus regularly carry visitors to the prison. Photos by John McDonnell -- The Washington Post; Map, LORTON REFORMATORY. The Washington Post

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Visitors Make Drug Deliveries to Inmates THE AVENUE TO LORTON; Part 2

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Tony's camper reeked with the smoke and aroma of marijuana as it rolled up the hill toward the prison, carrying 25 women on their way to visit the men of Lorton. The trip from The Avenue in downtown Washington had taken about a half-hour on this evening of Nov. 22. It was enough time for some of the passengers to smoke a joint or two, and for one rider, who wore her hair in tiny braids held by silver beads, to roll a dozen marijuana cigarettes.

I had watched her during the trip as she wrapped her dope--she called it "diamond"--in small sheets of paper, licked the ends shut, and placed the cigarettes in her breast pocket.

The first stop was Central, the largest of Lorton's six facilities, a village of medium-security dormitories that house inmates serving moderate and long sentences. Three passengers got off, including me and the woman I had been observing. As we approached the front gate we were greeted by a large sign that read: "Attention: Search Yourself Now So You Will Not Carry Contraband Into Visiting Hall." What would the woman do?

She slowed down, unzipped her beige corduroy slacks, rearranged something in the crotch, and proceeded to the tall, wire front gate, which was opened electronically by a watchman in a tower above and to the side of us. We walked along a short sidewalk about 15 feet and entered the checkpoint hall of the prison. It was a medium-sized, rather nondescript room, not unlike a rural bus station, with a half-dozen or so sofas scattered about, and orange, blue and yellow lockers--where we could store our pocketbooks--lining a side wall. On the other side of the room, behind a desk, sat a female corrections officer, and behind her were two green doors leading to bathrooms for men and women.

By the time we got there, about 15 people were in line waiting to get through a metal detector, past another electronically opened door, into a partially glass-enclosed room where we would all be searched. Before taking a place in line, the woman with the marijuana went into the men's room. When she reappeared a few minutes later, I got in line behind her. She seemed extremely anxious, shifting her weight from one foot to the other, nervously tapping her right foot. When her turn came, she showed the officer an identification card and gave the name and six-digit prison number of the inmate she was there to see. The officer punched the computer to check whether her name was on the visiting list; it was.

The woman then walked around the counter and stuck her right hand through a small window

opening. An officer stamped the back of her hand, and told her to go into the next room, where she was searched by a female guard. It was a lightning-quick search; she was cleared for the visit. I had arranged to visit with a prisoner myself, so I went through the same process, following behind the woman.

We walked out a back door and along another sidewalk for about 20 feet, through another tall wire gate, then down the pavement another 50 yards to the visiting hall. It was a large room, the size of a school cafeteria. Two corrections officers sat at a desk near the front of the room. More than 100 visitors and inmates sat in rows of worn cushioned sofas and straight-backed chairs facing one another.

The woman, after handing one of the officers a slip of paper on which her inmate's name had been written, was ushered into an adjacent waiting room containing a few church pews and chairs. Soon a muscular inmate in blue jeans, a V-neck red sweater and brown shoes came to the door and waved for her to come out. They took seats three rows away from the two guards at the desk and about the same distance from a third guard who was leaning against a door that leads to the room where inmates are strip-searched after the visits. She sat in the cushioned seat and he sat in the chair facing her. They talked for more than an hour, rarely touching, and showing little emotion.

Finally she went to a dimly lit bathroom in the corner of the visiting hall. When she returned to her cushioned seat, she was clutching something in her right hand. The two leaned forward in their seats and wrapped their arms around one another's waists. She slowly ran her right hand under the inside of the back of the inmate's sweater and up to the middle of his back. She then took her right hand from beneath the sweater and her hand was empty. The transfer had been made so smoothly that the guards did not notice.

During several visits inside three of Lorton's facilities, I learned the many places where women hide drugs so prison officers cannot find them. The most popular hiding spot was the crotch of the pants. The female guards generally patted the thighs, but no higher. If an officer questioned a bulge there, the standard reply was: "It's that time of the month." I never heard a guard challenge that story.

One night on my ride from The Avenue to the prison, a slender woman, wearing a gray two-piece outfit, taped a cellophane-wrapped white powdered substance that looked like heroin inside the center of her gray wool tam-o'-shanter. She then had a second woman carefully pat and shape the tam over her shoulder-length hair so the packet did not bulge.

The second woman, who was wearing a hat lined with fur, told the woman in the gray outfit that she put her "stuff" around the sides of her hat.

When the two women reached the prison that night, their hats were not examined.

Three weeks later, I wore a hat on visits to three Lorton facilities--Central, Maximum and Youth Center 1. Only once--at the youth center--did an officer ask me to take off my hat so that she

could search it.

The manner in which one was dressed seemed to determine the thoroughness of the search. When I wore jeans and a leather jacket, I was patted very closely by a female guard. A few weeks later, I returned in tweed slacks and a full-length coat; the same guard patted me only slightly.

The visitors often seemed to know which officers at Lorton search them closely and which ones do not.

One night in the parking lot at Central, a young mother carrying a baby talked with a companion about how they hid contraband on an infant when they visited Occoquan, one of Lorton's medium-security facilities.

"Do they check the baby's diaper?" the woman asked.

"No," the mother said. "They just pat around the hat on his head."

"They are sweet over at Occoquan," the woman said with a smile.

In the crowded visiting areas, sometimes as few as two officers watched hundreds of inmates and visitors. Once I saw a fat woman with a short Afro hair style place something in the unzipped fly of an inmate's bib overalls as they hugged. Another time I saw a woman pass something under a table to an inmate. They also transferred drugs in kisses.

The one part of the drug smuggling routine that I could not see firsthand during my trips to Lorton was the final stage: how inmates got the drugs past the officers who strip-search them after most visits. Several prisoners told me they had become masters of the art of partially swallowing a drug-packed balloon so that it lodges in their throat and can easily be coughed up once they get past the strip-search. They said that if they have difficulty prying the balloon from their throat, they gag themselves with their fingers or by swallowing shampoo. Some inmates said they put a string on the balloon and tie it to a back tooth, then yank it back up later like a fishing line.

The visits also gave me an opportunity to see how these men and their women socialized. Most of the inmates were as well dressed as the women who came to see them--in some cases even better dressed. Some inmates wore designer jeans, sweaters and gold chains, occasionally even a suit. A few had on dark sunglasses. Most of the visitors and inmates are black. They are mothers and sons, wives and husbands, boyfriends and girlfriends, and a few gay men and their lovers.

There are no conjugal visits at Lorton. There also is no privacy in the visiting lounges. At the lounge in Central, also known as The Hill, which houses 1,086 inmates, men and women hugged and kissed; some put their hands in each other's genital areas as small children ran up and down the aisles that separate the rows of seats. Because of the crowds, some inmates there prefer to meet their women in the chapel or the classrooms in the prison school, where visits are not

closely watched and those who choose to can sometimes have sex with privacy.

One night I went to the school, which sits on a hill overlooking a running track. Only inmates and visitors involved in Lorton programs can meet in the school, which is about a two-minute ride on a corrections van from the checkpoint, past the dorms where the inmates live.

Some of the men get their women involved in the programs just so they can meet in the school. Two officers are stationed in the entrance hallway, where they check identification passes, but there are no guards in the classrooms. This makes it easier not only to have sex, but also to transfer drugs. After the visiting hours are over, the men escort their women outside to the waiting vans, and then return to their dorms without being strip-searched. At the visiting lounge, by contrast, the inmates are not allowed to go outside with their visitors and they are strip-searched after each visit.

The visiting hall in the maximum-security facility, known as The Wall because of the classic, towering brick walls that surround it, is set up in similar fashion to the one at Central, though it is much smaller and somewhat shabby. On one of my two visits there, I watched several women in the lounge take their small children outside to the pitch-dark prison yard to relieve themselves; the toilets were broken. One night a bearded man and his pregnant girlfriend spread the woman's coat across their laps and necked on the sofa while two officers discussed what to do about them. The guards ended up doing nothing.

At Youth Center 1, known as Baby Lorton, a sprawling campus of four dormitories for felons aged 17 to 26, visitors and their inmates sit at tables of twos and fours in a large room. A guard stands at a podium in the front of the room and checks the visitors and inmates as they arrive. It was at Youth Center 1 that, two days after last Christmas, 200 inmates went on a night-long burning and window-breaking rampage, sparked by unfounded rumors that a woman visitor had been strip-searched by an officer. Twenty-six inmates were transferred to federal prisons after the riot; 13 guards were injured.

A week after that disturbance, I caught a ride from The Avenue to Youth Center 1. I walked into the checkpoint, a small room that had a counter to the left of the door and a large-pane glass window to the right overlooking the parking lot. I took a form from a stack on the counter and completed it, giving my name, address and the name of the inmate I was there to see.

On the other side of the room, a female officer was waiting to search me. After carefully examining my pocketbook, wallet and hat, she asked me to bow my head so that she could run her fingers from the scalp to the ends of my hair, messing it up as she went along. Next I had to take off my leather jacket. I handed it to her and she slowly ran her fingers along the lapel, the edges of the coat, the quilted lining and the pockets. She then told me to extend my arms from my side. She placed her hands on the outside of my ribs and slowly patted down to my waist. She patted in the cleavage and pulled the back of my bra and let it go until it snapped me in the back. She patted down the outside of each leg and then the inside, stopping at the thighs.

It was the most thorough of the searches I had undergone during my visits to Lorton. I felt

violated, ashamed and angry, and wondered whether any of the other visitors felt similarly. But it seemed that the regulars had become accustomed to any kind of frisking, light or heavy; it was just part of the routine of getting inside.

After the search, I walked with two other women out a side door, past a wire gate that was opened by a tower watchman, and then through yet another gate and down the pavement 100 yards, finally reaching a large visiting room on the second story of a brick building. There, a young woman unzipped the front of her blue jeans, took something out, and passed it under a table to an inmate sitting in a chair beside her.

Next: Competition along The Avenue

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Threat of Violence Haunts Drivers THE AVENUE TO LORTON; Part 3

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Tony parked his camper in the usual spot, across the street from the Woodward & Lothrop department store, and stepped out into the freezing rain. It was 5:30 on Wednesday evening, four days before Christmas. There were 50 to 60 people along The Avenue. Some were boarding vans and campers, such as Tony's, that were bound for Lorton Reformatory, and others, holiday shoppers, were waiting for the next Metrobus to take them home.

His hands in his pockets, shoulders hunched against the sleet, Tony walked down to the corner to see another veteran driver, a paraplegic known on the street as Donald. They chatted for a few minutes, Donald up in the seat behind the steering wheel of his van parked near 11th and G, Tony leaning against the side window.

A third man appeared out of the darkness and confronted Tony in the roadway. They exchanged a few words. The man went into a boxer's crouch, clenched his fists, and punched Tony in the head, knocking him to the pavement, according to reports.

The blows were delivered with such swiftness that Tony never got his hands out of his pockets.

Donald, who could move only by wheelchair, was incapable of doing anything, and Tony was out cold on the icy street for perhaps seven minutes before anyone came to his aid. Another driver finally appeared and took Tony's hands out of his pockets. Someone else found a blanket and wrapped it around him. By the time the police arrived, Tony's assailant had fled, and so, too, had many of the possible witnesses, some by foot, some in cabs. Those who remained told the officers that they saw nothing. It was too dark, they said, or they were looking in another direction.

Much later, after Tony had slipped from coma to death on the day after Christmas, the police found two witnesses who were willing to talk. Michael D. Mack was arrested and charged with voluntary manslaughter. Mack, whose attorney said he denied striking Tony, was no stranger to 11th and G. For several months, he had been a driver for Ray Hammill, Tony's main competitor.

What happened to Tony did not appear to be drug-related, according to police. They did not link it directly to the narcotics bootlegging that is so prevalent on the buses that roost near 11th and G every night to make the 20-mile trip to Lorton. But within the subculture of The Avenue, his fatal injuries on the night of Dec. 21 had a profound resonance.

The drug-smuggling, for the most part, is of the low-level variety--women sneaking in marijuana, cocaine, and occasionally heroin, to their lonesome, bored, and perhaps addicted male friends and relatives behind bars. The competition among some of the drivers involved intimidation and higher stakes: violence and death.

There is one of many underground subcultures that thrive in Washington, unrecognized, if not unseen, by most residents. The drivers have been out on The Avenue for a decade now, most of them operating their shuttle buses to Lorton without public transportation licenses, which is against the law and punishable by fines and impoundments. The law is rarely enforced, however, and only occasionally, usually after an act of violence, do the police intrude into their world.

The Avenue has its own code, its own unwritten laws, adhered to by almost all the people who spend time there. One is that you don't snitch. If something illegal transpires, you didn't see it or hear it. Because the existence of this subculture is based on visits to friends and loved ones who were arrested and imprisoned by the authorities, the no-snitch rule is usually obvious and inherent. To reinforce the code, if necessary, there is the ever-present threat of violence.

In January 1983, nearly a year before Tony's death, another driver was killed along The Avenue. In that case, Ray Hammill's wife was charged with second degree murder after she pulled out a 9mm semiautomatic pistol and shot and killed another driver who had just bloodied Ray in a fight. "She was trying to protect me," Ray Hammill said later. "I was being beaten."

Deborah Hammill was convicted two weeks ago. In the year between her arrest and conviction, she was out on bond, helping her husband drive his vans and campers. One witness, whose statement helped lead to Deborah Hammill's arrest, was beaten up shortly after talking to police.

The case illustrates how many of the people along The Avenue seem to live double lives. Deborah Hammill was a woman of 28, a wife and mother, who lived in the Northern Virginia suburb of Vienna. In the mornings, she and Ray ran a van shuttle service from Vienna, carrying dozens of commuters to the workaday world of the nation's capital. At night they were at 11th and G with three vans and campers and several helpers, competing for passengers among the hundreds of poor, black women who pay \$4 each for rides to Lorton.

Despite the cutthroat atmosphere, most of those women would rather take the jitney buses than Metro--which makes the same run for half the price--because of the personal services the drivers provide.

They don't run on fixed schedules, so if you're running late, they will wait for you. If you're hungry, they will feed you. If you need a balloon to stuff drugs in, some of them will sell it to you. If you have something that you don't want to take inside Lorton, they will safeguard it. If you want to smoke some dope on the ride over, most of them won't hassle you.

No one gets too close--even the regulars are known only by first names or aliases--but that is the way everyone wants it.

One week before Tony's death, I started to get a firsthand sense of the violent undercurrents along The Avenue.

It was the night of Dec. 12, and I had gone to Lorton with Donald, the handicapped driver. Donald had his own group of regular passengers, most of whom said they were loyal to him and suspicious of Ray Hammill's group. As we boarded his van at 9:37 for the return trip to the city, Donald shifted the gears and started to roll out of the parking lot at Lorton's central facility. All of a sudden we heard a thump in the back. Donald looked in his side-view mirror.

"I can't believe it," he said. "I got a flat tire."

There were 11 of us in the van. We looked at Donald, then at each other. It was cold and raining, and the last thing we needed was a flat tire. The Metrobus had already left; Ray Hammill was the only other driver still around.

Donald grabbed the microphone to his CB and called Ray, who was inside his big Winnebago, waiting for his own passengers. Donald asked Ray if one of the two men who worked for him would change the tire. Ray said he would check.

Several minutes later, Ray walked over to Donald's van and said neither of his men wanted to change the tire. Some of the women I was sitting with cursed; they couldn't believe the men would not help a paraplegic.

Donald took his AAA card out of his wallet and asked one of his passengers to call for help. While we waited in the van, another passenger said she was tired of sitting around. She said she was going to catch a ride back to Washington with Ray. Swiftly and sternly, another woman talked her out of it. That is exactly what Ray wants, she said; Ray was just sitting over there waiting for us to leave Donald and come to him.

Soon a gap-toothed, broad-shouldered man who worked for Ray strutted over to the van, looked at the back tire, and told Donald he would fix it--if he got paid for the job. The man was Mike Mack. Donald said he would pay Mack to fix the tire. We all got off the van and walked about 50 feet to an old, drafty building outside the prison gate.

"Ladies," said one of the women, "look on the bright side of this thing. At least we are down here with our men."

That was little consolation, responded another, because the men were in their warm beds inside the prison and we were out in the cold. A third woman said we should ask if we could go inside to see our men. Everyone laughed.

Back at the van, Mack had removed the flat, but then left without putting on the spare, saying he could not get it off the back of the van without the proper tools. Donald, perplexed but physically unable to do anything, offered to give Ray \$2 for each of us who wanted to ride back in the

Winnebago while he waited for AAA. Seven women took the offer; four of us stayed behind with Donald.

About 20 minutes later, a tow truck operator arrived and quickly finished changing the tire. At about that time, Ray reappeared and told Donald that a gas station attendant was on the way.

Donald told Ray the tire was fixed. A woman sitting in Donald's wheelchair behind the front passenger seat told him to leave before the seven women who had abandoned him for Ray could get back on the van. "Let Ray take them," she said angrily.

As we headed back to Washington we did notice a service station truck driving up to the Lorton parking lot. Donald lamented that things had not been the same along The Avenue in recent months. In the old days, he said, the drivers coexisted peacefully; they helped out when someone got stranded or had a flat tire, and they didn't expect to get paid for it.

Two days later, I rode with Donald again. I asked him about the tire. He said getting it fixed was no problem. What troubled him was what to do about it. I asked him what he meant. He said the tire was not punctured by a nail or piece of glass in the parking lot. It had two holes in it, and he thought they were from an ice pick.

Ray Hammill later said that Donald never paid him for taking the seven women back to Washington and that he had no idea how Donald's tire got flattened. "It would be stupid for me to flatten his tire and then offer to help him," Hammill said.

At six o'clock on the evening of Jan. 4, the crowd started gathering for Tony's wake in the blue-carpeted chapel of Jarvis Funeral Home near the corner of 14th and U streets NW. There were more than 150 people there--middle-aged women in dark dresses, men in suits and ties, and a few young children, streaming past the open, flag-draped casket. They were family friends, childhood buddies, fellow parishioners from Tony's neighborhood and Catholic church in upper Northwest. From the subculture of 11th and G, there were only a half-dozen or so mourners: one other driver, a few women.

I went to the wake to learn more about this man, and my first discovery was perhaps the most revealing. I knew him as Tony. Here he was called Marshall. His name was Marshall Anthony Nelson. Few of the people seemed to know much about his other life as a van driver. They knew him as a builder, electrician, repairman, carpenter and former Navy man.

His sister, Wanda, knelt beside him and clasped his hand as she prayed. Friends offered condolences to his mother, his wife, his daughter and three sons, who were seated in folding chairs near the casket. They struggled, in the words of Father O'Hare from St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, with "the mystery of his death."

To one of the mourners, though, there was little mystery. Mark Coles had been working for Tony, driving one of his vans and keeping him on guard against the competition. Coles said he had urged Tony not to drive down to 11th and G that Wednesday night in late December, which

was his normal night off. But Tony insisted on going, Coles said, because he thought some of his regular riders, wanting to see their men before Christmas, would be depending on him. He went down there alone, and stood in the freezing rain, and got killed because he temporarily ignored the advice he had given so often to Coles and his other friends along The Avenue.

"Be careful," he had told them. "And watch my back." Tomorrow: How officials deal with Lorton's drug problem.

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Officials Differ On Depth of Prison Drug Problem THE AVENUE TO LORTON: Conclusion

By Athelia Knight
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Four months ago, before I ventured down to The Avenue to find out how visitors smuggled contraband into Lorton reformatory, several judges said that drugs were so accessible at Lorton they sometimes thought they should send felons with drug problems elsewhere.

On Feb. 22, D.C. Superior Court Judge Henry Greene did precisely that.

Robert S. Carter stood before the judge that day, waiting to be sentenced for selling heroin. Carter had been a drug user for 10 years and had gotten into trouble several times because of his dependence on narcotics.

In handing down the sentence, Greene made it clear that he did not want Carter serving his time at Lorton, the prison where most felons convicted in the District of Columbia are sent.

"I am going to impose a sentence in this case of two to six years and recommend a federal designation so that he won't be at Lorton," said Greene. "So that he won't have the drugs that are possibly available to people so freely down there and available to him."

Greene's unusual action underscored the concern several judges and law enforcement officials have about the availability of drugs at Lorton, the city's prison located in the Northern Virginia suburbs. At least one investigation is now being conducted into the bootlegging of contraband by corrections officers as well as visitors to the prison, according to sources.

"Obviously drugs are going in and out of Lorton like it's on 14th Street," said one top local law enforcement official. "Until they crack down on the introduction of contraband, they are going to have this problem."

That view is not shared by James F. Palmer, the corrections chief for the District of Columbia, who is responsible for both Lorton and the city jail. "We don't have drugs running wild down there," Palmer said in a recent interview. "I think that the idea that there is an epidemic is not founded."

Both opinions are somewhat subjective, however, because there are few hard statistics on the extent of drug use by Lorton's 3,400 inmates. What is known is:

* A review of random drug-testing urine samples taken during the past year at Youth Center II, one of Lorton's six facilities, revealed that a significant number of inmates were engaging in drug use, according to a study released last month by the federal Bureau of Prisons. But the study criticized Lorton for not implementing a consistent drug surveillance program, saying the present efforts are "inconsistent throughout the Lorton facilities, ranging from monthly random drug surveillance at one facility to virtually none at another."

* Nearly half of 238 Lorton inmates interviewed in a Washington Post poll two years ago said they smoked marijuana during their term. Half of the group said they smoked it frequently. Nearly half of the men interviewed said they were using drugs other than marijuana before they went to Lorton, and one of five said they were still using them.

* D.C. police find they are arresting large numbers of repeat offenders recently released from Lorton and already supporting large drug habits. "If a guy's been clean for two years, he wouldn't have that large a habit immediately when he got out," said Capt. Edward J. Spurlock, head of the repeat offenders unit.

* Lorton has no drug treatment program for its inmates other than an alcohol and drug counseling program run by a private firm, Stepping Stones. J. Russell Horton, who runs the program, said 400 of the 600 inmates enrolled in it have drug problems. "We're only scratching the surface," he said.

Among the people who work at Lorton, there is considerable disagreement about the extent of drug use. While Palmer and his top assistants say it is not a significant problem, many corrections officers, who have the most day-to-day contact with prisoners, tell a different story.

They argue that the administration tolerates drug use out of fear that a crackdown would result in an inmate rebellion.

"They don't want to stop it," said J.W.B. Richardson, head of the corrections officers' union. "It's pacification. As long as they allow drugs to enter the institution, it curtails the possibility of open disturbances. Inmates are basically content. If they are content, they will not cause problems. They have allowed this to go on so long that they are afraid if there is an effort to curtail it, there will be an outright riot. They have allowed it to go on for so long that inmates see it as a privilege. To try to stop it would be taking away a privilege."

Richardson and other officers cited several cases in which they claimed they were not supported by the administration when they attempted to stem the flow of drugs into Lorton.

One officer told of a case last year in which 80 to 90 percent of the female visitors who attended a dance at Youth Center II claimed they were on their periods. The officers began checking the women's stories and ended up confiscating enough drugs "to half-fill a Safeway bag."

Among the drugs seized were balloons containing marijuana, small envelopes with white powder and "Lovely," a popular mixture of PCP and marijuana sold on the street.

Some inmates complained about the search procedures. Before the next dance at the youth center, officers were told they should not conduct such thorough searches of the women visitors. One officer said the message she got was, "They were telling us to do our job, but don't do it too well."

Leroy Anderson, the corrections department spokesman, said his office was not aware of the incident. He said there were five dances at Youth Center II last year.

In 1981, half of the 1,200 inmates at Central, the medium-security facility, refused to work or attend classes for several days in protest of increased security searches of visitors. As a result of that protest, some officers stopped making aggressive searches.

Recently some inmates at the minimum-security facility sent a letter to Palmer complaining about a female officer who had been especially aggressive in finding contraband on visitors. The inmates, who did not sign their names, threatened to harm the officer. "We the residents of minimum security don't want anymore trouble down here than we already have but we also want it to be known that if she isn't stopped that we will none other than take matters in our own hands and burn checkpoint down with her in it. This is no threat, it's a promise. . . . We want her out of checkpoint and away from our visitors or she will get hurt for all of her wrongdoings."

The officer was moved to another assignment. But the move, according to Lorton officials, was because she had "personality problems" with some of the visitors, not because of the threatening letter. "We do not react to threats," said Anderson.

Palmer said he supports corrections officers who pursue drugs aggressively. He said his administration does not "condone drugs to keep a lid on the place." He said he wants to run a safe and secure institution, and stopping drugs from coming inside is one of his main concerns. "Our society is set up that we have rules and regulations. We cannot be intimidated."

In my eight trips to Lorton on the shuttle buses that carry scores of women there each day from The Avenue in downtown Washington, I witnessed several drug transactions between visitors and inmates, and corrections officers and inmates told me they see signs of drugs almost every day. Officers said they have found marijuana joints, packets of heroin and hundreds of illegal pills that were being smuggled into the prison in a multitude of ways: in underwear, baby bottles and diapers, the waistband of pants, pocketbooks, shoes, hats and wigs. The drugs, after confiscation, are tested by officials and later destroyed.

Some inmates and corrections officers said the surest sign of who has drugs in Lorton is the beeline that inmates make to a certain dorm after visiting hours. Inmates said it is not unusual to walk into the dorms and smell marijuana. Several prisoners said dope is smoked in the dorms all the time, though they said use of hard drugs is less frequent. One inmate said he routinely smokes marijuana and occasionally uses a little cocaine. He said he has known other inmates to walk around high on PCP all day.

One officer said she was in the infirmary once when an inmate came in and said he was sick from smoking PCP three times a day. The doctors asked when he had last smoked PCP and the inmate replied he had smoked it twice the day before.

Lorton officials said they have no way of estimating the extent of drug smuggling at the prison. By their count, 48 visitors were caught trying to sneak drugs in during the past year. But according to records I examined, at least 104 persons were caught taking drugs into the institution during that period. All were sent letters notifying them that they were barred from visiting Lorton for certain periods of time, ranging from 30 days to indefinitely.

Most of the suspensions were for marijuana. Among them were a four-month suspension for a woman who was trying to enter the maximum-security facility with nine marijuana cigarettes in a match box in her purse; a 12-month suspension for a woman visiting Occoquan with a balloon filled with suspected marijuana; an indefinite suspension for a woman going to Youth Center I with a green balloon with a white powdered substance; and a permanent suspension for a man caught with seven foil-wrapped packets of marijuana at Youth Center I.

Corrections officers told me they have been concerned that the suspensions are not consistent. They said some visitors have managed to get back inside the prison by appealing to an administrator or using fake identification.

For example, one officer said she discovered a marijuana cigarette in a woman's wallet during a search and the woman claimed she did not realize it was there. The woman was barred from going inside Lorton that day, but complained to the officer's supervisor. A week later, she was allowed to resume her visits. "You know how that made me feel," the officer said. "Like what did I find it for?"

Palmer said that for security reasons he could not discuss what kind of searches are conducted. Asked if each person who comes into Lorton is asked to take off his hat or coat or underwear, Palmer said: "We have a right to make everyone go through the same type of search." He said his corrections officers are trained to look for certain things about visitors that will alert them to possible contraband. The searches are conducted in a variety of ways, Palmer said, to keep the visitors off guard.

"If people are going to be deliberate about bringing in drugs, I have to be just as deliberate," said Palmer. "It's very simple. I have to be just as intent on stopping them. . . . It's a privilege to go in to visit."

Palmer, in his second year as the city's corrections chief, said he recently issued a new directive stating that visitors caught smuggling drugs inside the prison will be barred permanently from visiting inmates at Lorton.

He said that is the most his office can do. Corrections officers, Palmer explained, do not have arrest powers. If they discover drugs--or even a gun--on a visitor, they can only refer the matter to the FBI or the U.S. attorney's office.

"We maintain very tight security measures. When we search and find people with drugs, we bar them from coming into the institution," said Palmer. "We have signs posted. We certainly explain to people not to come into the institution with drugs. I can't put them in jail."

Over the years, about a dozen cases of visitors smuggling drugs into Lorton have been prosecuted by the U.S. attorney's office in Alexandria, which has jurisdiction over all of the Lorton facilities, except Youth Center I, which is handled by the Fairfax County prosecutor. Most of the cases involved small amounts of marijuana and were handled as misdemeanors. The visitors generally were placed on probation and barred from visiting Lorton for a year.

Alexandria U.S. Attorney Elsie Munsell said her office does not handle many cases of visitors smuggling in small amounts of drugs. She said the information she has received from Lorton officials leads her to believe that there is no systematic drug network on the part of visitors, but periodic cases of women taking small amounts of drugs to their boyfriends.

She said her office has prosecuted a few corrections officers who were caught taking in drugs. One officer was acquitted by a jury. Another was convicted and is now serving a five-year term in federal prison. Munsell said her office has prosecuted few cases of inmates who have been found with drugs inside the prison.

Perhaps the most notorious case related to drugs at Lorton occurred in May 1980 when four armed gunmen stormed the minimum-security facility and killed an inmate in what police described as a drug-related assassination connected to the breakup of a Washington drug ring.

Munsell said she has told Palmer that her office is interested in any information his corrections staff can provide them on drug smuggling by corrections staff or visitors.

"Unfortunately what's a serious problem for the institution on a one-time basis doesn't strike the court system as a serious matter," Munsell said in a recent interview. "Federal courts tend not to address small amounts of marijuana."

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