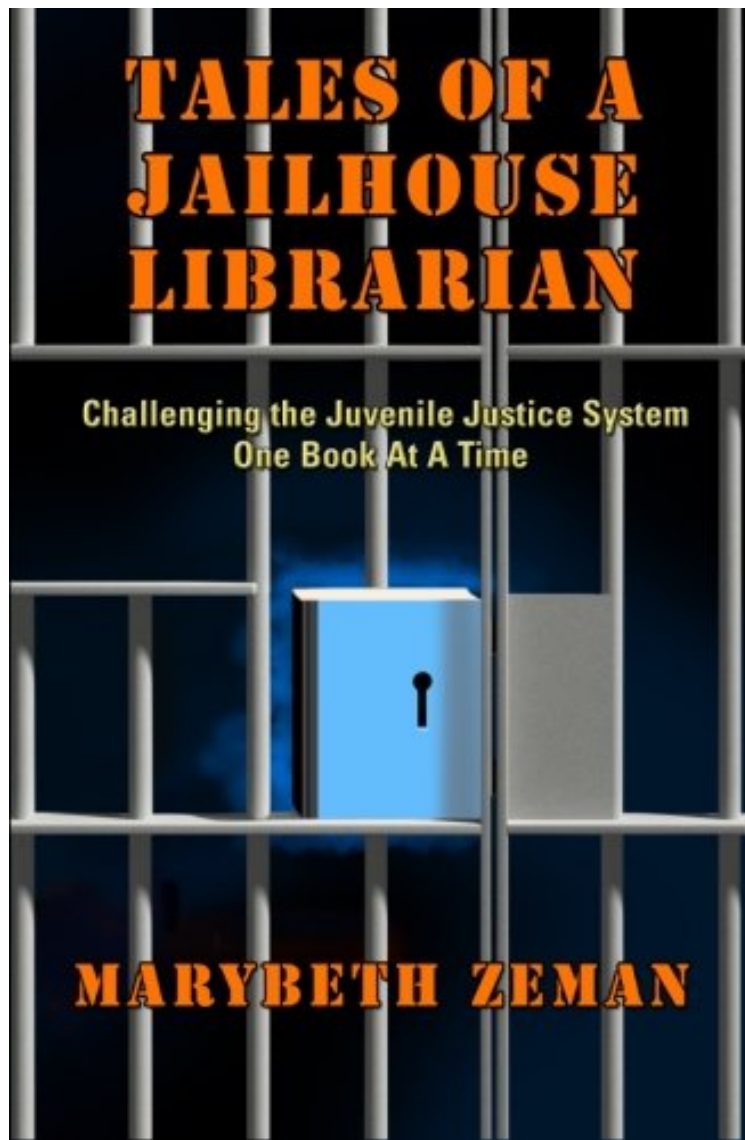


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Tales of A Jailhouse Librarian: Challenging the Juvenile Justice System One Book At A Time

Marybeth Zeman

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Marybeth Zeman : Tales of A Jailhouse Librarian: Challenging the Juvenile Justice System One Book At A Time before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tales of A Jailhouse Librarian: Challenging the Juvenile Justice System One Book At A Time:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Challenging the Juvenile Justice System One Book At A Time...By JaniceI am writing this review not in an effort to add more well-deserved praise to Ms. Zeman's eloquent book, but to ask WHAT does it take to elicit change? The truth, which is very evident after reading, *Tales of a Jailhouse Librarian*, is that it takes the "little stuff" . These are the things that we as educators, counselors, and/or jail staff, CAN control. These are the ideas that suddenly materialize when we emotionally connect to the chaos around us and become compelled to take a stand. The saga of Marybeth Zeman is a prime example of the right person in the right place. She is by nature and life circumstances, a compassionate, seasoned care-giver. She is also an educator and book-lover. These are her resources and she puts them into service. Like a true crusader, she doesn't deviate from her mission and works within the constraints given. She doesn't complain or throw up her hands over societal ills--she simply perseveres. She also does what few in such positions do--she uses negativity and adversity as motivators. Ms. Zeman's observations about "the system" are more statistical or calmly observational rather than confrontational. This does not make them any less horrifying to the reader, in-fact, maybe far more so. I believe Ms. Zeman's book best demonstrates the desperate need for educational programming within incarceration settings. It is not simply a humanitarian need but one which makes economic sense and produces a safer society for all. In the end, I hope that those in political power positions within the field of incarceration finally pay heed to what those in the trenches are saying. With freshly published books like, Ms. Zeman's, *Tales of a Jailhouse Librarian*, *Crosswinds: Memoirs of a Jail Teacher* (D.H Goddard) and *I Don't Wish Nobody to have a Life Like Mine* (David Chura) I believe the sub-title of Ms. Zeman's book "Challenging the Juvenile System One Book at a Time" takes on new meaning...0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Christine M. FilardiThis is an insightful book - a world that most of us, thankfully, will never know about.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Very Worthwhile ReadBy Ann StanmoreTALES OF A JAILHOUSE LIBRARIAN BY MARYBETH ZEMANPrepare to be angry, sad, frustrated, pleased, helpless and yes, even joy at times. This is a remarkable book by a dedicated, generous-natured teacher of nearly thirty years who voluntarily worked in a jailhouse for young offenders of sixteen, seventeen and eighteen as a transitional counsellor/librarian. Reading the prologue sets the scene, immediately drawing you in to the atmosphere. The author who is known by the boys as Mrs Z has private troubles to deal with as well as the troubles of the offenders. This book opens your eyes to how the prison system works. Some of these young lads really have no chance. How can they change when even if they are determined to do so, there are so many obstacles in the way. In the main, officers in the prison service do their best to help but they are too often handicapped by rules. Marybeth Zeman has gathered together a series of stories of some of her time working in a young offenders jail, where she tries to help them cope with acclimatising to conditions and to overcome their fears for the future. We get to hear about Diquan - the heartbreak and sadness when he couldn't get to say goodbye to his dead brother because of a technicality. There is Hector - who was relieved to just get a life sentence (with no parole) instead of a lethal injection. I could go on with names, there are many. In fact there are many tales in this book that will shock and/or surprise you. Marybeth Zeman with her trolley full of books and her big heart and listening ears reaches out to help so many of the troubled youngsters. Ignorance and poverty pose steep hills to climb. It takes a wonderful lady to take on such challenges. This is a thought provoking book which also includes some interesting facts. It will open many peoples eyes and maybe give new understanding to a very real problem. Very definitely deserves five stars

In a large suburban county jail, a rolling library book cart connects boys with their new counselor, a veteran schoolteacher. Faced with their unquenchable thirst for reading to help ease the unremitting boredom of everyday life, "Mrs. Z", now, "the book-lady," gives them the opportunity to share their hopes, their disappointments, their disillusionment and most of all, their anger at a system that is crushing their spirit and dreams for the future. What Frederick Douglass advised us about education rings true today--"It's easier to build strong children than repair broken men." *Tales of a Jailhouse Librarian* skillfully captures the sights, sensations and rhythms of jail life. Zeman mixes journalism, memoir and character sketches with facts about the juvenile justice system, describes the various agencies, provides relevant statistics, and specific court cases that become so palatable they are easily digested. Never a "slog". Interesting and engaging. She makes a strong argument that these boys need education, not jail time. We have to recognize that we have a very narrow window of opportunity left to re-direct incarcerated youth toward education and living productive lives. Jail isn't always the best solution. One million dollars invested in incarceration reduces 350 crimes; one million dollars invested in education reduces 600 crimes. It's difficult to slap the word, criminal, onto a juvenilesomeone who is 16 or 17 or 18, someone who has the rest of their lives ahead of them and is just as likely as you or I were at that age to change." Not a screed or an expose. These are real stories about real kids in prison, stories so real and so raw they become our own.

From Kirkus sIn this debut memoir, a woman aims to cultivate learning in youths who, for whatever reason, have ended up behind bars. In this series of vignettelike reflections, Zeman, a prison librarian, moves skillfully among a handful of literary modes, mixing journalism and memoir and weaving together character sketches and sociological facts with ease. Her look at imprisoned young adults is as much a paean to the power of the written word as it is a

testament to the sorry state of juvenile incarceration in the United States. It contrasts the starkness of the legal system with the blurred, bruised lives of the young inmates; for many of them, the books on Zemans cart become a solace in their suffocating cells; at one point, an inmate tells her, I try to read something that helps me escape. Piece by piece, an engaging narrative with a veritable cast of characters emerges; the episodes moments of insight eventually create a panoramic picture of what the prison system looks like to young people. The book details their attempts to study for their GEDs and shows how they absorb the redemptive qualities of literary culture along the way. The author, who admits to her own optimism and Pollyanna enthusiasm in the face of pessimists, tells the stories with a well-paced combination of reportage, confession, meditation and social critique. She looks at her characters resilience from multiple perspectives, exploring the psychologies of the imprisoned as well as the people who administer corrective facilities. The book also contains well-chosen quotes from such authors as Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot and Jhumpa Lahiri, along with a list of sources. A sensitive, compassionate and smart retelling of prison stories so real, so starkly real, so brutally honest, they seem like our own. This is a compelling, realistic look at life in a typical juvenile detention facility. Ms. Zeman doesnt employ the clichés found so often in prison tales; she skillfully captures the sights, sensations and rhythms of jail life that have become part of her life. This book is a must read for everyone in the law enforcement community who deals with felony juvenile offenders. -- John Gallagher, Commissioner (ret.) Suffolk County NY Police Department FBI National Executive Institute

Marybeth Zeman has given us a touching and powerful view of a society we try to put out of mind and out of sight: the young and incarcerated. As a Counselor for juveniles in jail and looking to find a way to connect with her charges she falls back on her training as a librarian and love of learning to use books to fill their time and, in many cases, give them a new perspective on life and its possibilities. This work not only inspires, it educates us about the juvenile justice system and reminds us that books and learning can bring light into darkness. I highly recommend this for both Young Adult and Adult non-Fiction readers. -- Jerry Nichols, Director, Palmer Institute for Public Library Organization and Management

Tales of a Jailhouse Librarian is a transformative book. It educates, awakens, inspires. It causes readers to rethink what they always thought was true about this nations incarcerated young people. --Sheila Rule, Think Outside the Cell Foundation Former Managing Editor, The New York Times

This little treasure of a book tells big stories of young men trapped, seeking and sometimes finding a way out or at least another way to look, through books. -- Michaela Angela Davis CNN Commentator/Writer/Image Activist

An insightful and captivating read about the world of incarcerated youth that stays with you even after turning the last page. A must-read! --Donna Rosenblu

About the Author

Marybeth Zeman has been a teacher on the elementary, high school and college level for more than thirty years and, since 2010, has served as transitional counselor for a school program for incarcerated youth at the Nassau County Correctional Center. In 2009, she was awarded a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Scholarship from St. Johns University where she earned a masters degree in Library Science and Information Services. Zeman has been a high school ESL teacher at W.T. Clarke High School, and an adjunct professor at Queensborough Community College, Nassau Community College and St. Josephs College. Zeman is involved with the juvenile justice community and is a champion for the rights of the incarcerated and the formerly incarcerated. She is a member of advocacy groups Think Outside the Cell and the Education from the Inside Out. She has been an active participant in the Juvenile Justice Exchange Group formed on LinkedIn. Zeman is a member of the American Library Association and its sub-committees operating under the ASCLA American Special Collection Library Association and OLOS Office of Library Outreach Services, Library Services to Incarcerated Individuals and via ALA Connect, and is a member of the Prison Librarians Group. Most recently, she has become a member of the Library Services to Youth in Custody Group. Zeman contributes regularly as a blog writer for the Public Libraries Online magazine. Recent blog articles: Being a Librarian Its a Wonderful Life <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2013/12/being-a-librarian-its-a-wonderful-life/> Juvenile Ex-Offenders Need Libraries, Too <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2013/11/juvenile-ex-offenders-need-libraries-too/>