

# Something has hit home

*While the mediaworld appears increasingly beset with the imageries of horror and revenge, every day many live with trauma beyond any reckoning. Can a person find a way to accept personal trauma, wherever it comes from, and turn it back towards life?*

## **Marian Partington's sister, Lucy, disappeared in 1973**

and was unearthed in 1994 as one of the 12 'West victims'<sup>1</sup> who were raped and murdered by the Wests in Gloucester. Here she writes about the subsequent odyssey of her journey into compassion and her engagement with a unique prison community. There, a 'culture of enquiry' underscores humane approaches to beginning to resolve some of our culture's most taboo crimes

---

**M**y friend Chloe and I arrived at Her Majesty's Prison Grendon and Springhill, one of the UK's three therapeutic prisons, in April 2001. The uniforms began. The prison officers seemed quite friendly when we asked where to park. The prison wall made us crane our necks upwards. It was crested with the inevitable coiled barbed wire spikes of no man's land. Which was the way in? We took a wrong turn again, finding ourselves walking towards polytunnels and compost heaps. Maybe we were avoiding something, delaying the moment when we too would be locked in. But only for a day. Visitors' day.

We returned to the paved route that curved around the edge of the wall. There they were: the fortress gates with the pedestrian door, the door within a door with the barred grill. Over the threshold, keys clicked and jangled, medieval style, and doors locked, blotting out the green hedges. We were asked for identification. Driving licence or passport. No mobile phones or cameras. No escape. No communication with the outside

world. We were treated with professional suspicion, 'to make the event a safe and secure one for us all'. I moved away from our small group towards the notice board:

*'Her Majesty's Prison Service serves the public by keeping in custody those committed by the courts. Our duty is to look after them with humanity and provide constructive regimes to enable them to live law-abiding lives in custody and after release.'*

The next portal was before us (a metal detector), the frisking (prison service rub-down search) a nonchalant sniff from the passive drug detection dog. Into the canteen, being ticked off the list and told who was 'looking after us for the day'. Chloe and I were on different wings. 'Tom' approached me. He asked me if I would like a coffee. He seemed distracted, shy. A few moments later he returned with a polystyrene beaker full. We all milled around. Chloe and I found ourselves with a visiting Justice of the Peace. I observed Tom greeting someone else from our group (there were six altogether). I began to taste the anxiety in his mouth. He told me later that Visitors' day is part of the therapy. It was part of mine too, I was soon to realise.

The conference hall felt professional with its presentation technology on stage, curved purple seating below. We were asked to spread out and mix together. Tom sat on one side and a tall, broad man in his early thirties wearing a white nylon shirt on the other. Their badges marked them out as residents. There was a restless, pacing tension as if something was trapped inside. I sat in the middle, strangely at ease and uncurious (it struck me later) about the crimes. Or was it denial? Where was Chloe?