

Good morning. I'm Wally Lamb, a novelist, a teacher, and an eight-year volunteer facilitator of a writing program at Niantic's York Prison. I'm also the editor of two collections of our incarcerated students' personal essays, *Couldn't Keep It To Myself* and *I'll Fly Away*.

For the past several months, you've been hearing a lot of impassioned rhetoric from both sides of the crime and punishment argument, and you've seen a lot of statistics: numbers of inmates convicted of violent and non-violent offenses, the number of dollars needed to build more human warehouses that will, no doubt, be called "correctional facilities" although little is apt to be corrected there. Inside the Connecticut prisons for which we're all responsible, despair and dysfunction reign, suicides occur more often than they should, and recidivism is the norm, rehabilitation the exception. Now, as our state, in its well-intentioned but misguided overreaction to the tragedy in Cheshire, readies itself to abandon the kinds of supervised reintegration programs that work and, instead, throw more money and lives into the black hole of a punishment model that has proven, over and over again, not work, allow me, if you will, to put a human face on some of those statistics you've been studying.

Sixty year old **Bonnie Foreshaw** is a soft-spoken woman of strong faith and dignified bearing. Incarcerated since 1986, she was neglected and sexually abused as a child and savagely beaten by two husbands, one of whom cracked her skull with a baseball bat. When that husband began stalking her and making

threats on her life, Ms. Foreshaw made the crucial error of buying a gun for self-protection and hiding it in her bra. Following the accidental shooting death of a bystander during an altercation with a man who was frightening and harassing her, Ms. Foreshaw was convicted of first-degree homicide, though legal experts concur that the charge for this unpremeditated act should have been manslaughter, that her prosecutor played the race card for all it was worth, and that her public defender failed to reach a minimum level of competency. Ms. Foreshaw's judge sentenced her to forty-five years at Niantic. She has been imprisoned longer than any other woman serving time at York.

Before her incarceration, Bonnie Foreshaw was a homeowner in Bloomfield, a machinist who served as her union's shop steward, and a Jaycees president. At York, she has served as a big sister and surrogate mother and grandmother to generations of inmates, and she was one of the first graduates of York's hospice program. Long-term incarceration is hard on the body as well as the soul and DOC medical care is hit-or-miss. Ms. Foreshaw suffers from a diabetic condition, macular degeneration, and a painful arthritis of the spine. She puts on a brave face, but her hope dwindles in the face of what's now being planned by those who would lump her with the likes of Stephen Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky, the alleged murderers of Jennifer Hawke-Pettit and her daughters.

And so I come here today to implore you, on behalf of Bonnie
Foreshaw and hundreds of other warehoused inmates who pose no threat to
public safety, to be the architects of a prison reform package that is nuanced,
wise, and above all else, merciful.