



*7 on 10*: The sentence of a woman in prison for a crime she can't remember and the story of how an ex-drug dealer and a basketball court save her life.

# 7 on 10

*Minimum seven, maximum ten-year sentence.*

## SYNOPSIS

The film is co-written by a formerly incarcerated woman who served three years in state prison. While it's not her story it draws from some of the struggles she had overcoming addiction and the relationships she formed by maneuvering her way into the mostly African American game of prison basketball. The protagonist is a teacher and high school basketball coach who kills a woman with her car while driving in an alcoholic blackout. We follow the teacher through her sentence, as we watch her struggle with the idea of her alcoholism and a crime she doesn't remember. Batting prison politics and racism, Mary fights her way onto the basketball court as a way to escape her brutal prison reality; but the maneuvering and the game itself, become a catalyst for her to see the truth about herself and the crime she committed. She shares a cell with Nussy, a former drug addict and major player in the prison who is now focused on doing whatever it takes to get parole. She and Mary bond but eventually a dangerous inmate from Nussy's old life returns to prison and Mary finds herself caught in Nussy's complicated, violent history. In the end, Nussy paroled and Mary is left to face the demons she came in with alone. At its core the film about the relationships between these women and their reliance on each other to survive a system that treats the symptom and not the problem of addiction. It's also about freedom and how even inside, someone can truly come to possess it.



## **THE BACKSTORY**

“7 on 10” is a project whose evolution is as interesting and poignant as the story itself. I am a filmmaker, most recently working as an assistant director on CSI New York. I’ve written several scripts, directed award winning shorts and music videos and have always looked at my assistant directing as a means to developing my craft as a director and writer. On the course of this path I had to take a hiatus to get sober. I had no idea that what I had perceived as a detour had really been gift in more ways than I can count.

“7 on 10” started when friend of mine asked me to drive a woman who was just returning from prison to a doctor's appointment for her annual post cancer screening. She was clean and sober and struggling after just coming back from a relapse on heroin. I wasn't sure how committed she was at the time to remaining clean, but having been where she was in my struggle with alcohol, I decided to pick her up.

While Lydia "Pony" Ortiz was in my car she told me she had an idea for a story loosely based on her struggles with addiction in prison and how a powerful ex-drug dealer and a basketball court saved her life. When I asked why she was so hell bent on playing a game in which she wasn't initially welcome (it's primarily considered a “black” sport in prison) she said, "Because for one hour a day, I felt free." The story touched me as I was still struggling to make peace with the idea that pursuing my coveted career for what really were only selfish outcomes at the time was proving to be the least satisfying part of the journey. From there we wrote a treatment together on which I built a screenplay that is not about one woman's struggle but also the incredibly diverse and upside down world of prison and the impact addiction plays on almost every inmate's destiny.

During the writing of the script, Pony had a relapse. We were actually supposed to get together to write that day but she went missing and I had a horrible feeling in my gut. I ended up driving to her house and calling paramedics to break in only to find her on the floor of her apartment after having a stroke from a heroin overdose. It took her a year to recover her walking and relative health before we could begin writing again. But she wanted to and we did. A year later we'd completed the script, Pony had over two years of solid sobriety and I had four. More importantly, we got on a path and built a friendship that goes well beyond the written page.

Pony is a former inmate with two strikes. If she commits one more crime no matter how petty she would do a minimum ten years. She is also brilliant, compassionate, funny and when sober is no more a criminal than I am. This is statistically true of many female inmates but the criminal justice system doesn't adequately address this issue inside or when they get out.



### **WHAT IT'S REALLY ABOUT**

This film is simply a realistic depiction of the impact addiction and alcoholism has on so many incarcerated women and how they must turn to one another to find their way out. This also mirrors the bigger struggle women have to be seen and recognized in our society and again how women must help one another to rise up and reach their fullest potential. I'm excited to tell a story that showcases a diverse group of women in strong, layered roles representing a wide range of colors and ages; something mostly absent in mainstream film.

In keeping with our themes of overcoming addiction and women helping other women to find a bridge back to freedom, we have partnered with a non-profit organization called "A New Way of Life." The founder, a formerly incarcerated woman named Susan Burton, was honored as a CNN Hero in 2010 for her work.

A New Way of Life Reentry Project provides housing and support services to formerly incarcerated women in South Central Los Angeles, facilitating a successful transition back to community life. As a community advocate, A New Way Of Life works to restore the civil rights of people with criminal records including access to housing, employment, public benefits and the right to vote.



The image is a screenshot of a magazine feature from Ebony, dated May 2013. It features a portrait of Susan Burton, founder of A New Way of Life Reentry Project. The text describes her personal history, including the loss of her son and her time in prison, and how she founded the organization to help other women. The page number 90 and the website VISIT EBONY.COM are visible at the bottom.

**SUSAN BURTON**  
FOUNDER OF A NEW WAY OF LIFE REENTRY PROJECT | LOS ANGELES

OFFERING A NEW WAY OF LIFE FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED WOMEN

After her 5-year-old son was accidentally hit and killed by a car in 1981, Burton was so devastated by the experience, she sought solace by drinking and doing drugs. Her illegal drug use escalated, and she was eventually sent to prison for her usage. "I spent nearly 20 years cycling in and out of prison, trapped in a revolving door until

someone helped me," says Burton. "After receiving assistance in 1997, I realized there was another way to address grief, alcoholism and drug addiction. While in and out of prison, I encountered so many women just like me who needed a safe place to go and heal from life experiences and trauma." So in 1998, she founded

A New Way of Life Re-entry Project, a nonprofit organization that helps women and girls break the cycle of entrapment in the criminal justice system. Burton has helped more than 650 women and has helped more than 150 children be reunited with their mothers while living in one of her four re-entry homes.

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We plan to create visibility for their program in all our promotion of the film and by employing women involved in their jobs program as paid "extras" in the film. This will give them a short-term way to earn money but also a crucial first job on their post prison resume. We will offer qualified women internships in various departments from pre through post-production to help them gain job skills and training.

## **VISION ON SCREEN**

In bringing this story to life, the least self-conscious of acting styles is required. The film will live or die in the casting choices and the realism and depth of the acting. Having a theater background I have a true love of actors and feel confident in the process of working with them to create nuanced, dynamic performances. The most important character here is not any individual, but the collective world in which they must live and find a way to transcend. As a director I intend to create a world of prison that is truly the sum of its parts; that shifts visually and emotionally every time someone enters or leaves its walls.

Mary, the main character, ironically doesn't even remember her crime, which was committed in an alcoholic blackout, and at first tries hard to blend in and make no waves; do her time invisibly. But she soon finds out that this can't be done if she wants to leave prison a different person than the one who walked in.

Prison is crowded, chaotic and intentionally impersonal; so that when I shoot the film the audience needs to feel the struggle to maintain individuality in each character and the many ways, good and bad, these women choose to do this. Shots will be dirty, overlapping, with movement that is subtle but never allows for a quiet moment of settling down. Colors are muted and limited. Later, when Mary is in her 5<sup>th</sup> year, there will be more shots in isolation, less motion but still crowded as she goes through her reflective period that leads her to drink again after years dry. In the end, when Mary starts to recover and come out of herself, shots will loosen up, be wider, more expansive and open while maintaining the ever-present crowdedness of the prison. Color tones will shift as if Mary is just seeing new ones for the first time.

## **PRACTICALITIES**

The budget is set at just under \$1,000,000 and is an 18-day shoot. The entire film takes place in one location, in and around prison, which helps to keep costs down somewhat. However "background actors" are key to set the tone of the world and will require significant numbers as well as food, costuming and make up costs. The basketball fights and play must feel as real as possible and that will take some gifted stunt players, stunt coordinator and additional cameras. In addition we plan to attach at least two "names" to the film to give it the best chance possible to get the broadest distribution. We will be under SAG's Modified Low Budget Agreement coupled with its Diversity Initiative which we qualify for due to our number of roles for women of color, women over sixty five and physically challenged actors.

## **FINANCING AND DISTRIBUTION**

We are about to launch an Indiegogo campaign to raise between \$20,000 and \$30,000 for development and some pre-production costs. This money will be used to pay for a casting director, printed materials, cost to attend markets, artwork, website, scouting costs, public relations, competition and grant application fees, Fiscal Sponsor management costs, LLC cost, line producer and legal fees. We will take the film to AFM, a major film market where we will meet with potential production companies, sales agents and distributors with the goal of securing at least one of these. At that point we will work towards raising \$250,000 in private equity while we simultaneously attach cast and submit to production companies that might be interested in partially financing the project and partnering with us. Our production attorney will set up our LLC. Once we reach our initial goal of raising 25% of our budget, we have several places to go to complete the budget. Obtaining “first money” is always the most challenging part of fundraising, but we feel confident we have the network and resources to do that successfully. Once we reach 25-30% of our budget we have reached out to a couple of executive producers with contacts and track records who would like to come on board and use their relationships to raise the remainder by way of investors and gap financing.

Our target audiences are: women, basketball fans, people affected by drug addiction and or alcoholism and people impacted by the prison system. We are and will be reaching out to these audiences from the development stage. We do this by engaging in all social media, becoming involved in various groups and blogs (IE: Women in Film, Sober Living Community of L.A., etc.) and plan to broaden our reach during our Indiegogo campaign.

On completion of the film we will first seek to place in a top tier festival and sell it to a distributor who will get it released theatrically thereby increasing the ancillary market potential. If that doesn't happen we are looking at the new “Vimeo on Demand” release model. Essentially it means a limited theatrical run through the Laemmle Theater's distribution program and releasing the film simultaneously on “Vimeo on Demand.” With Vimeo the filmmakers keep 90 percent of the profits and it is projected to be a very profitable platform and viable alternative for independent feature films.

## **WHY ARE APPLYING FOR THIS GRANT?**

First of all, anything we can do to offset our budget means more money toward what we put on the screen. It also means we can employ and train more former inmates from our non-profit partner *A NEW WAY OF LIFE*. In addition we would welcome the expertise and experience your organization bring in terms of fiscal sponsorship, non-profit fundraising, crowd funding and marketing to our target audiences. We also know that films supported by this grant have gone on to great success and build strong relationships with your sponsors. It would be an honor to be affiliated with the Roy Dean Film Grant and From the Heart Productions and we would also hope it would bring attention to the

important themes of our film.

## **THE PLAYERS**

### **Producer/Writer/Director... SAMANTHA LAVIN**

Samantha Lavin is an award winning writer and DGA director who has worked on over 30 film and television projects including *CSI NY*, *Law and Order-SVU* and *Scrubs* as an assistant director. Her film *In Memory of Me* has screened at over 40 festivals world wide, taking awards including Best Performance, Best Female Director, Best Short Film and Panavision's New Filmmaker Grant. She has also written and directed several other films, promos and music videos. Most recently she directed a music video for the band *Me of Kind* and a promo for Earl Slick (David Bowie's guitar player), which helped secure sponsorship for his upcoming tour. She created a hybrid scripted/reality show called *Out of the Frying Pan*, which was optioned by Comcast Productions. Samantha won a national competition for a PSA she wrote and directed on Marriage Equality during the height of the Proposition 8 battle. Highlighted and shown on NBC L.A.; it was also a featured video on Funny or Die. Her writing, which includes several feature film and television scripts, has won recognition at competitions including Outfest, Moondance, Scriptapalooza and American Accolades. She was also a writer on the TV show Cinematherapy and has produced international promos for E! Entertainment and the Style Networks. Samantha graduated from Purchase College with a degree in Theater. From there she founded the first gay and lesbian theater company in Westchester, NY and went on to direct and perform in its improvisational comedy group and main stage productions.



**Writer... LYDIA "PONY" ORTIZ**

Lydia "Pony" Ortiz is a natural storyteller. From the time she was a teenager bouncing in and out of homes as a ward of the state to a difficult life on the streets and in prison battling heroin addiction, she has always entertained the masses with tales from her colorful life. Whether it was about what it's like to be one of a dying breed of the "butch" lesbian culture in San Francisco or working for bands from *X* to *The Go Go's*, Pony's got a story to tell. *7 on 10* marks the first time she got one on paper and she is very excited to continue the process.



**Prod. Counsel/Producer... JENNIFER KENNEDY**

Jennifer Kennedy is a Los Angeles-based entertainment attorney and artist manager. While maintaining a busy litigation practice, her transactional work focuses on independent filmmakers and musicians, most recently as production counsel for *The Punk Singer*, the Kathleen Hanna documentary debuting at SXSW this year. She also represents author Melissa Febos and was instrumental in connecting her with the Robert Evans Company and in the sale of the rights to her novel, *Whip Smart* to which Catherine Hardwicke is now attached to direct the film adaptation. Her current artist management roster includes David Bowie's longtime guitarist, Earl Slick; members of Brit-pop band *The Wedding Present*; and the band currently on world tour with them, Los Angeles based, *Me Of A Kind*.

**Producer... KRISTINA KONDRATH**

Kristina Marie Kondrath is a California native who attended USC, where she received a BS in Business Administration and a minor in Cinema-Television. After graduating, she co-founded ReKon Productions and has produced a variety of projects including commercials, trailers, films, web series, and music videos. Kristina produced a reality show sizzle reel for Comcast in addition to projects for Doritos, EA Games, BET, and Epson. Her last project, *Ending Up* (starring Jenica Bergere from the independent film *Safety Not Guaranteed* and Matt Letscher of *The Carrie Diaries*), is currently on the festival circuit. Presently Kristina is producing two web series; *Callbacks* (written by and starring Toks Olagundoye of ABC's *The Neighbors*) and *Milk and Honey* (starring Debbie Allen with Idris Elba from *The Wire*).

**Music... EARL SLICK**

From the spacey sounds of seventies *Bowie* to the gritty resurgence of punk pioneers the *New York Dolls*, Earl Slick has had two hands in shaping the sounds that have come to define great rock 'n' roll legends. Slick brought his now signature guitar sounds to Bowie albums *Station to Station* and *Young Americans*. John Lennon asked him to play on his albums *Double Fantasy*, and *Milk and Honey*. He has continued to be one of the most recognized and respected guitarists in the world. He was recently featured on the cover of *Guitar Magazine* and *Rolling Stone* promoting his upcoming solo tour and his contribution to David Bowie's latest album *The Next Day*. Slick has committed to composing some of the original music for the film.

