

which few prisoners could cope with, and halfway houses are recommended to extend the prison into the community so released prisoners will not feel as if they 'don't belong' when they are released (p 127). Apart from the issues I have excavated from the text, there is little to recommend in *Recapturing Freedom*.

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## REVIEWS

### *SERIAL SURVIVORS: Women's narratives of surviving rape*

Jan Jordan; The Federation Press, 246 pp, 2008; \$39.95 (paperback)

Jan Jordan's book is an intimate and compelling account of surviving rape. I picked it up with some trepidation expecting to find it confronting and likely upsetting. However, what I encountered instead were fifteen unique, powerful and very moving stories of courage, hope, faith, resilience and creativity, harnessed in the face of terrible violence and deep trauma. Confounding my expectations, *Serial Survivors* was not only easy to read but hard to put down. It documents the experiences of women who survived rape at the hands of New Zealand's most notorious serial rapist. The book is truly unique in providing a window into how the women felt, what they thought, and what they did to survive — literally, psychologically and spiritually. While previous research has captured women's responses to the legal system and their treatment, or aspects of the crime and its impact, to my knowledge, there is nothing that compares in giving women the space to tell their own stories about the entire experience — the crime, its aftermath, and the criminal process, from reporting right through to conviction and sentencing.

Length of the book is the power of women's voices and what we learn

from them. Jordan writes: 'I wanted to keep the authenticity of their voices and at the same time turn this into accessible writing for the reader' (p 207). She has succeeded in this. The author deftly draws out the themes and weaves them together in ways that maintain the complexity and uniqueness of the individual stories. She also places the women's stories in context by letting the reader know how they fit within broader patterns or understandings, how their experiences reflect or diverge from the existing knowledge and research, and how they might constructively inform policy and practice. One point that is underlined is that the group of women is in many ways not representative of the circumstances of women who are raped. Most women know the men who assault them. These women, raped in their own homes by a stranger, a serial rapist, were not subject to the disbelief that too often accompanies reporting and shadows any subsequent legal processes. Most of the women were articulate and middle class. This in no way undermines the book's significance.

While the phrase victim/survivor is familiar to all who are engaged in research, policy or service delivery in the area of sexual assault, the women's stories in this book give new insights into what this actually means. Survival used in the context of sexual assault is understood to be broader than literal survival, although rape victims (the term is apt here) are sometimes murdered, and frequently the fear and threat of death accompany rape. It is common to consider the attack as a time of victimisation, to think of women at the time of attack as victims, and to conceive of survival as a healing journey that takes place over time. What these women's stories make clear is that survival and the resistance that makes it possible is something that takes place right from the very start.

While the pain, shock and devastating impact of the attacks is not underplayed, what shines through is the myriad ways that the women struggle and succeed to find ways to maintain or regain control, even in the most challenging circumstances, whether being overcome through brute force or confronting the rigid structures of the criminal justice system. In each of

these circumstances women found ways — sometimes unlikely ways — to protect and assert themselves.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first is entitled simply 'The women'. After briefly being introduced to each through her own words, the reader is told simply 'This book tells the stories of their survival'. Each of the five subsequent chapters begins with the word 'surviving'. They cover 'the attack', 'police processes', 'the trial', 'others' (surviving them and them surviving), and 'moving on'. Discussion of the rapist, Malcolm Rewa, is consigned to an appendix. The decision to structure the book like this serves to emphasise that the book is about the women. It makes clear that part of surviving MR's crimes (he is referred to only by his initials throughout the text) is not to feel, perceive or think of him and his crimes as omnipresent and at the centre, but rather as small and peripheral. The decision to ostracise him to the back of the book and to give even his name as little space as possible continues this strategy.

For me, Chapter 2, 'Surviving the attack', was the most powerful and the most unexpected. Based on the accounts, Jordan summarises the resistance of the women as falling into the categories of 'physical resistance', 'talking to the offender', 'trying to alert others', and 'mental/inner resistance' (p 16). The following quote from Gabriel speaks to inner or mental resistance.

This guy had me strewn over a bed half naked, bound with blankets over my face, in position, just totally ready to rape me and he's going through the knife drawer, coming back into the room . . . I thought 'What can I do, what can I do to protect myself?'. So I closed my eyes really hard and I decided to just fill up the entire room with myself so that as much of that room had me in it, so that there was no room for him in there, and it was a really hard process because I didn't have much time. Then I started praying, which is bizarre because I don't pray very much at all, but anyway God sounded like a really good idea right about then (laughs). I just closed my eyes to try and think about me and how big I could possibly make myself in this room without moving. Bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger, and not focusing on what he is doing out there, and bigger and bigger and bigger. And he comes back in and tries to rape me and he can't . . . It really changed my

life because I started to believe that if I asked for help I would get it and it wouldn't be from people. I could do it myself (p 25-6).

The book is a very real and important contribution to understanding what it means to survive rape and deserves a wide audience amongst academics, psychologist, counselors, social workers, and partners and family of victim/survivors. It will also be a comfort and possibly even a guide for women who have gone through similar ordeals.

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## IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH

Written and directed by Paul Haggis, starring Tommy Lee Jones, Charlize Theron and Susan Sarandon; Warner Independent, 2007; 121 minutes

A young soldier is killed shortly after returning from active service in Iraq. His charred remains are discovered in the desert near a military base. He has been stabbed, dismembered and almost completely incinerated. Who would do such an act? His army buddies come under suspicion, and the soldier's father, an ex-military investigator, resolves to find the killers.

Ordinarily, finding those responsible for a murder would provide some closure. Here, it only raises more difficult questions. How do young men adjust to ordinary civilian life after the violence and brutality of active service in Iraq? Over there, they are trained to kill, ordered to kill, expected to kill. At home, killing is the highest crime. In places like the United States, the state can take your life for intentional killing. In war, the moral compass is bent out of shape, shattered.

*In the Valley of Elah* opens with fragmented, grainy images of the battle zone in Iraq. A soldier exclaims, and is ordered to 'Keep on driving. Don't stop'. We learn later that the driver is the soldier who was murdered. In accordance with standing orders, he is ordered to drive on when an innocent Iraqi goat-herder accidentally steps on to the road in front of the troop carrier. Disobeying orders, however, he stops the vehicle and photographs the

body on the road. He is young, fresh-faced. This is a key image in the film — a young man's loss of innocence. Soon after, we see him calling his father. Sand is blowing through the open military tent, and he is sobbing, 'Get me out of here'.

Not since Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* has a film so powerfully captured the violent insanity of war. We see broken images of armed soldiers bursting into a bomb-shattered building, and discovering inside the charred remains of an Iraqi family. A soldier defaces one of the corpses, the others laugh — to cope with the utter horror of it.

We discover also that the murdered soldier was given the name 'Doc' by his army buddies because he used to repeatedly prod injured prisoners and ask, 'Does this hurt?'. We learn not to blame the person, but to look at the circumstances in which they are placed.

Like Oliver Stone's *Platoon*, this film explores the ways soldiers deal with the horror of what they see in active service, and what they are ordered to do. Drug use is presented as commonplace but we are told that the army doesn't test soldiers on active service in Iraq. Why not?

The army recruitment process, and the lack of adequate psychological and criminal screening of applicants, is also highlighted in the film. The focus, however, is on what comes out the other end — the frighteningly high incidence of violence, especially suicide and murder, by recently returned soldiers. The story told in the film is based on the murder of Richard T. Davis in 2003, shortly after his return from active service in Iraq. Moreover, the story is based on extensive research into the problems faced by returned soldiers from Iraq.

*In the Valley of Elah* concludes with the father of the murdered soldier hoisting the American flag upside down — the international distress symbol. A former soldier and flag-waving patriot at the beginning of the story, he encouraged his son to go to Iraq. He comes to realise, however, the devastating, brutalising effect of war. In a rare glimpse of cross-cultural awareness, the father tells the story of

David and Goliath to a young boy, before mentioning 'It's in the Koran'. In the midst of death and destruction, the film brings us to realise we share so much — common hopes, common fears, a common humanity.

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## GURRUMUL

Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu; Skinnyfish/MGM, 2008; \$30.

In our technology-driven environment, we're surrounded by music — usually mindless and invasive — and any artistic inspiration is often lost to hard sell. That's what makes Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu such a living musical treasure. This — his solo debut album — is a powerful spiritual and emotional experience that almost defies dispassionate analysis. Gurrumul, originally from the Gumatj clan of north east Arnhem Land, is a multi-instrumentalist; he plays guitar left-handed (but conventionally tuned), drums, keyboards and didgeridoo. In the mid-80s, Gurrumul was part of the highly successful Yothu Yindi ensemble but left to form the Saltwater band on Elcho Island. His high, pure vocals are intense and utterly disarming. Sung in Galpu, Gumatj and Djambarrpuyu languages, and some English, Gurrumul's musical style is spare, acoustic folk. However the songs are all about his people, his land and tradition — from his ancestor mother ('Baywara') and father ('Bapa'), to the wonders of the natural world and coming to terms with blindness. Other instrumentals and voices appear, principally from producer and ex-Killjoys bassist Michael Hohnen, but this is Gurrumul's music and it is magical. The wonder is it took so long to reach us.

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