

Ex-cons struggle on the outside after a life in prison

In her new book "Among Murderers," Sabine Heinlein explores what it is like for a convicted murderer who has spent decades behind bars to suddenly taste freedom. The following is an excerpt from Chapter 6, "Dinner with Bruce."

BOOK EXCERPT

One of the first things I heard about Bruce was that he had a way with cheesecake. Rumor had it that it was celebrated in all of the prisons in upstate New York. Aazim called Bruce "The Institutional Junior," referring to the Brooklyn restaurant famous for its cheesecake. In prison Bruce would bake cheesecakes most weekends, particularly during football season. He used a regular pan and the little stove in his cell. He put a lifter on the stove to keep the cheesecake from burning and let it sit there for about an hour and a half. Sometimes he added a can of mashed-up sweet potatoes "to turn the color."

"I used to do it for therapy," he explained.

Bruce's therapy consisted of six ounces of cream cheese, eight ounces of sour cream, one tablespoon of vanilla extract, one can of condensed milk, and two cups of sugar. For the crust Bruce crushed plenty of graham crackers and mixed them with butter. Bruce perfected his recipe through a "trial and error process." After he moved from prison into the Castle, he was nervous about the outcome of his cheesecakes. After all, he wasn't accustomed to using a regular oven.

To make his first cheesecake in the free world, one August morning in 2007 Bruce got up at five o'clock and sneaked down into the deserted Castle kitchen. He was relieved when the cheesecake turned out well and other residents asked for more. Once he saved me a piece. While I ate it, he stared intensely at me, as if trying to determine what grade I would give his cheesecake by the way I chewed and by my facial

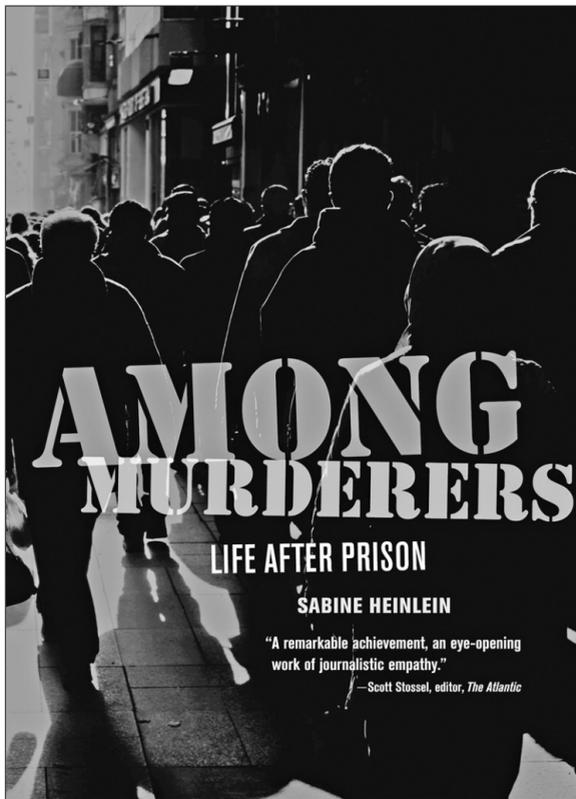
expressions. Without exaggeration, on a scale from one to ten, I would give it a ten.

Preparing a meal in the free world was a lot different from cooking in prison. To prepare a typical prison dinner, Bruce would put rice, calamari, octopus, and beans in a trash bag and drop the bag in a heavy-duty bucket filled with water. Then he would put a "stinger" — a spiral, water-heating device — into the bucket and go out into the yard for an hour. When he came back the "stew" would be done. This was much better than mess hall food.

To be sure, there were certain foods in the mess hall that were okay — baked chicken, for example. But this was served only once every two weeks. Baked, ground, or fried, any type of chicken was better than Beef Yakisoba or Rice Diablo. No one with a little bit of money and a palate would go to the mess hall for dishes in which the ingredients were unrecognizable and, whatever they were, tasted awful.

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Bruce's decisions pertaining to food became a bit of a problem on the outside. It took him a while to realize that he didn't have to eat calamari, octopus, and tuna anymore. At first he stocked up on tuna, peanut butter, and jelly — the staples of his prison cell "pantry." When he came out he bought twenty cans of tuna but then barely touched them. Once he bought some chicken without bones. It sat in the fridge for a week because he didn't have a sharp knife to cut it.



He kept asking himself, "Why did I buy it?" He didn't know how to prepare whole chicken breasts, and he seemed unable to figure out where he could have them sliced.

It wasn't that Bruce was disappointed like Angel, who had envisioned "free food" so much tastier than it ended up being and who, as if searching for the ultimate meal, couldn't get enough of trying new dishes. For Bruce it was more a matter of choices and of shedding his jail attitude. Although the rules Angel and Adam had determined for him helped somewhat, he still had to

decide what he wanted to eat. If not octopus and calamari in a bucket, if not tuna or peanut butter and jelly — then what?

Angel tried to make suggestions, but these suggestions didn't always work. One time that summer the three of us had gone on a tour of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Adam had read in prison that the hip neighborhood was the new East Village, and, remembering the East Village's heyday, he was curious. We walked south on Bedford Avenue toward South Williamsburg, one of Brooklyn's Hasidic neighborhoods.

While Adam trotted along, mouth agape, and Angel cheerfully chattered and marveled at everything he saw, Bruce seemed uncomfortable. He didn't say a word. Not only did the heavy iron bars in front of the Hasids' windows remind him of prison, but the people's stares also really bothered him. To have coffee and cake at one of the Hasidic bakeries on Lee Avenue was out of the question, so I decided to take the men to a bagel cafe back in North Williamsburg. But Bruce was overwhelmed by the many different types of spreads and bagels. He rubbed his forehead as if suffering from a headache. Eventually, he followed Angel's example (who had smoothly followed my example) and ordered a bagel with scallion cream cheese. But he was appalled when he discovered that scallions were onions and not seafood. Unable (or unwilling) to see Bruce's struggle, his shame and desperation, Angel snapped when Bruce threw his bagel into the trash.

This episode notwithstanding, Bruce clearly appreciates food. His cheesecake and his stories about cooking and baking in prison made me trust him. The preparation of food requires appetite, focus, and intuition, qualities Bruce and I share (even if I can't keep up with his baking skills). When I ran into Bruce at the Castle and sat down with him in the cafeteria, he remained reserved. But outside of the Castle, over tea and cupcakes, Mexican food, or a barbecue dinner, Bruce opened up.

He hadn't really talked about his crime for years. But he knew that if he wanted to establish real connections in the free world, he had to tell people that twenty-four years ago he had shot and killed another human being. His deeply ingrained feelings of guilt and shame made Bruce uncomfortable. Who could or should he talk to? The people he used to hang out with were either dead or locked up, or they belonged to a drug-ridden past with which he didn't want to reconnect. Bruce felt all right among the people at the

Castle, "the criminal element," but the Castle was just a living arrangement based on a shared past. He would need to establish new social connections outside of the Castle. But what would that be like? How did it work, and what could he talk about? Bruce had spent the last twenty-four years in prison because he killed another man. He couldn't get out of his shell. Who was he without this experience? He was no longer the drug-addicted, empathy-lacking young man who acted on impulse, but he also didn't want to be just the ex-con. Something had happened in between, and he was free now. He was the result of the last fifty-two years. But how could he explain, and where should he begin? What would be a good moment? It wasn't easy to find the right words, let alone that most people didn't want to listen.

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Sabine Heinlein's writing has appeared in the Iowa Review, the Brooklyn Rail, City Limits, Tablet Magazine, Die Zeit, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, and other publications.



SABINE HEINLEIN
Author

Judge: Aggregator of Associated Press news can't have free ride

By Larry Neumeister
Associated Press

NEW YORK — A company that relays excerpts of Internet news articles to its customers violates copyright laws, a judge said Thursday in a decision that gave The Associated Press a victory in its attempts to protect its online news content.

U.S. District Judge Denise Cote rejected claims by Meltwater U.S. Holdings Inc. and its Meltwater News Service that its use of Web stories plucked from a scan of 162,000 news websites from more than 190 countries is a fair use of copyright-protected material.

"Investigating and writing about newsworthy events occurring around the globe is an expensive undertaking and enforcement of the copyright laws permits AP to earn the revenue that underwrites that work," Cote wrote in a decision released Thursday. "Permitting Meltwater to take the fruit of AP's labor for its own profit, without compensating AP, injures AP's ability to perform this essential function of democracy."

In a statement, Meltwater said it was disappointed and will appeal. It called the ruling "at odds with a variety of pri-

or decisions that have paved the way for today's Internet."

The judge noted that commercial Internet news clipping services like Meltwater perform an important function for their customers, but that "does not outweigh the strong public interest in the enforcement of the copyright laws or justify allowing Meltwater to free ride on the costly news gathering and coverage work performed by other organizations. Moreover, permitting Meltwater to avoid paying licensing fees gives it an unwarranted advantage over its competitors who do pay licensing fees."

Meltwater is a 12-year-old electronic news clipping service that helps its clients monitor how they are covered in the press. In its lawsuit, the AP alleged that Meltwater News had been pilfering current and past material from the AP and other news providers without paying licensing fees.

AP CEO Gary Pruitt said: "We are thrilled. This is first and foremost a victory for the public and for democracy."

The judge rejected Meltwater's claims that it operates like a search engine.

"Meltwater News is an expensive subscription service that markets itself as a news clipping service, not as a publicly available tool to improve access to content across the Internet," she said. "Instead of driving subscribers to

third-party websites, Meltwater News acts as a substitute for news sites operated or licensed by AP."

Cote praised the operation of legitimate search engines. "These interests are complementary. The Internet would be far poorer if it were bereft of the reporting done by news organizations and both are enhanced by the accessibility the Internet provides to news gathered and delivered by news organizations," Cote said.

Meltwater said it believes Cote misapplied the fair use doctrine.

"Meltwater is especially troubled by the implications of this decision for other search engines and services that have long relied on the fair use principles for which Meltwater is fighting," the company said.

Jorn Lyseggen, Meltwater's founder and chief executive, said the company was considering options and looked forward to appealing to the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Lyseggen said he was confident the appeals court "will see the case a different way."

Pruitt said the ruling was important for the AP and "others in the news business who work so hard to provide high-quality original news reports on which the public relies."

"For years all of us have been hearing that if it is free on

the Internet, it is free for the taking. The judge in this case just rejected that argument," he said.

Earlier this year, The New York Times, USA Today publisher Gannett Co. Inc., the McClatchy Co. and Advance Publications Inc. said in court papers that their businesses would be jeopardized if Meltwater was permitted to continue as it had.

The publishers said the ability of companies to distribute their content without paying licensing fees jeopardized their websites and other digital businesses that generate revenue through advertising, subscriptions and licensing fees.

One of Meltwater's competitors, BurrellesLuce, joined in a friend-of-the-court brief to say that it operates at a disadvantage because it pays to license content that Meltwater takes for free.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation and Public Knowledge supported Meltwater in a court brief.

Meltwater was founded in 2001 in Oslo, Norway. According to the company's website, it has more than 800 employees working in 55 offices around the world.

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House passes plan to avert federal shutdown

By Jonathan Weisman
New York Times

WASHINGTON — The House gave final approval Thursday to legislation to avert a federal shutdown and keep the government funded through September, and it passed a Republican budget blueprint that enshrined the party's vision of a balanced budget that would substantially shrink government, privatize Medicare and rewrite the tax code to make it simpler and flatter.

With a final flurry, Republican leaders sent the House home before noon Thursday for a two-week recess, confident that they had outmaneuvered President Barack Obama and the Democrats in the running fiscal fight from the last redoubt of Republican control in Washington.

The funding plan for the rest of the fiscal year, which passed by a vote of 318-109, locks in across-the-board spending cuts that will usher in the most austere government outlook in decades. It underfunds key elements of the president's health care law, as the administration builds up health insurance purchasing exchanges. And it makes permanent four formerly temporary gun-rights provisions just as Senate Democrats prepare a final push on gun control legislation.

Four months after Obama was re-elected, the separate House budget plan — the third drafted by Rep. Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin, the House Budget Committee chairman and former vice-presidential nominee — reaffirms the blueprint for governance the president ran against. It would convert Medicare into a system of private insurance plans financed by federal vouchers and roll back many of Obama's signature legislative accomplishments, repealing the health care overhaul of 2009, eliminating the subsidized insurance exchanges and Medicaid expansion that make up the core of the law. It would undo

the Wall Street regulatory law passed in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and cut spending by \$4.6 trillion through 2023, the year the plan purports to bring the budget into balance.

It passed 221-207, with all Democrats and 10 Republicans voting no.

That balance, however, rests on some significant assumptions. To make spending align with revenues, the plan assumes the current level of taxes will continue, even as it repeals the tax increases in the president's health care law and eliminates the alternative minimum tax. The plan directs the tax writers on the House Ways and Means Committee to overhaul the tax code, leaving only two tax brackets, 25 percent and 10 percent, as well as a 25 percent corporate tax rate, down from 35 percent.

But the budget does not detail the tax deductions, credits and loopholes that would need to be eliminated or cut back to finance such deep tax-rate reductions, effectively leaving tax writers a \$6 trillion hole to fill — one that Democrats say is mathematically impossible without raising the tax burden of the middle class.

Still, as a political document, the budget makes an uncompromising statement in the wake of the Republicans' electoral losses. Unlike his first two budgets, this one ends with a small federal surplus — a crucial talking point for Republicans, especially because the Senate Democratic version does not come close to balance.

"The president has an opportunity during this critical debate to come forward and make this part of his legacy," Speaker John A. Boehner of Ohio said of that final year with a balanced budget. "We can't continue to spend money we don't have. It's as simple as that."

Ryan said his budget and the Democratic version likely to pass the Senate by Saturday "clarifies the divide between us."

"We want to balance the budget. They don't,"

he said Thursday. "We want to restrain spending. They want to spend more."

"We offer modernization, reform, growth and opportunity," he continued. "They want to cling to the status quo, more taxing, more spending, more borrowing."

Rep. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, the ranking Democrat on the Budget Committee, called the document "an uncompromising, ideological approach to our budget issues."

"We've just been through a major national campaign where both candidates, Mitt Romney and Barack Obama, agreed on one thing: The people of this country faced a fundamental choice in the direction we were going to take," Van Hollen said. "The American people voted, and they resoundingly rejected the direction this budget has taken for the third year in a row."

Still, for the first time in three years, passage of the spending bill and House budget could begin an orderly process toward a bipartisan deficit reduction deal. With a week to spare, Congress had averted a government shutdown, a small victory after nearly three years lurching from budget deadline to budget deadline.

Once the Senate blueprint is passed, lawmakers will return from their spring recess in April and try to resolve the vastly different visions of taxing and spending that the House and Senate will have enacted.

If they can, the two chambers appropriations and tax-writing committees will go to work on the legislation needed to turn those broad blueprints into legislative reality. If they can't, the House and Senate may slide back toward more budget brinkmanship, first in July when Congress must raise the government's statutory borrowing limit, then in September, when lawmakers must come together on a spending plan for the next fiscal year.