

OLIVIA HAMILTON, ROBIN LEVI, AYELET WALDMAN



An Oral History of Olivia Hamilton

FROM *Inside This Place, Not of It: Narratives from Women's Prisons*

AGE 25, FORMERLY IMPRISONED

Olivia lives with her husband and three sons in an apartment that FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) provided for her family because they evacuated New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. We sit at a table in her breakfast nook as she shares her story: abandonment by her mother, teenage pregnancy, forced evacuation from her city, and imprisonment. Olivia gave birth to her youngest son while she was in prison serving a six-month sentence for embezzling money to pay her bills. During the birth, she was chained to an operating table and given a forced and medically unnecessary cesarean section. Olivia gave birth to another child in July 2011, but because of Olivia's c-section in prison, her local hospital was unwilling to allow her to try for a vaginal birth and she was forced to have another c-section. The son she birthed while imprisoned, now three years old, bounds around the apartment wearing only a diaper, occasionally interrupting our interview to squeeze his mother's leg. During the interview, Olivia describes her distrust of both the prison and the healthcare system, and describes her precarious journey toward reestablishing her life post-incarceration.

And Then the Hurricane Hit

My grandma tells a story about when I was a little girl, that one day I got a broom and started beating my doll with it, saying, "That's what my mom does." After that, my mom sent me to live with my