

What a Woman Must Go Through

Embarrassing

By Karen Howze

I found out the hard way what it's like to be frisked and undressed at the Hall of Justice — in order to view a criminal trial.

Without showing my press credentials, I walked through the Bryant street entrance to the Hall ready to spend a morning in Judge Morton Colvin's courtroom where Ruchell Magee is on trial.

The year-old metal detection device at the door gave me no problem. I handed my purse and keys over to the deputy for inspection and passed through the machine, which is sensitive enough to register a piece of tin foil.

CARD

Safely through the arch, I headed toward the glass enclosed counter to get my court pass. I convinced the deputy I was over 14 years of age, produced two pieces of identification and received a small yellow card.

There were six armed police officers from the Tactical Squad, roped-in corridors and "Restricted, No Loitering" signs to greet me when I got off the elevator on the third floor.

I convinced myself I really wanted to go through the hassle so I could listen to the proceedings in which Magee is being tried for his alleged role in the August, 1970, Marin county Civic Center gun battle in which four persons died. The guns used in the bloody escape attempt were smuggled into the courtroom by a youthful spectator.

More details in story by Harold V. Streeter, SF Examiner, 23 Aug 72, filed San Quentin (Ruchell Magee)

Court Search

on the other side of it.

I walked behind the partition with that attitude, routinely went through a light body frisk and waited for one of the two matrons to hand over my purse.

"Shake out your bra," was the command — the first words uttered by the matron who was handling me. I put my hands under my blouse and shook. I straightened my clothing and started to move over to the exit end of the partition.

DISBELIEF

"Drop your pants." Completely embarrassed, I stood and stared at her a few seconds in disbelief. I had heard stories of matrons, hands covered with plastic gloves, probing in the vaginal areas of women being searched during the Soledad Brothers trial. I was afraid to think it might be happening to me on that sunny morning behind that plywood partition.

I unbuckled my belt, dropped my jeans and saw she was waiting for me to let go of my underpants.

I dropped them around my knees, she took a quick glance and I jerked my clothes back around my

FORTRESS

This incident prompted counties throughout the state to initiate stricter security in their courtrooms. San Francisco's third floor fortress has the tightest security.

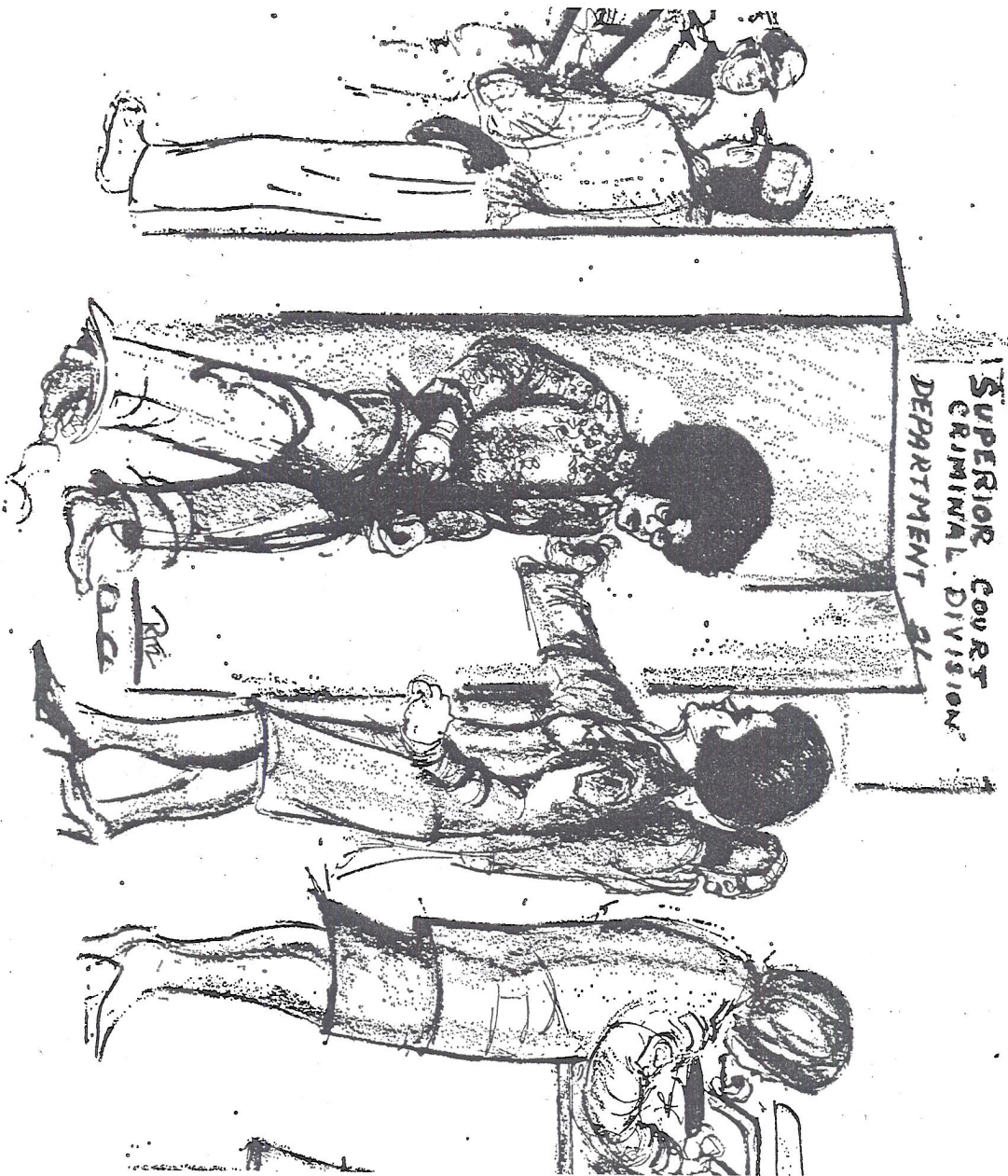
"Stand against the wall," a gruff voice ordered me. I jumped instantly against the marble wall and waited for the next command.

Bailiffs motioned me over to a small table, took my pass, marked it "photo" and handed me a pen and the ledger book — without speaking a word.

"Stand in the white square and look straight into the camera," the officer said while examining my signature. A camera man near the square put my number — 45 — on the wall and took a shot of my left profile.

PARTITION

The camera-officer pointed me over to an area to the right of a plywood partition. Male visitors were being searched through their clothing on the outside of the partition so I figured the same thing was going on



An artist sketched the search a Chronicle reporter was subjected to at the Ruchell Magee trial

waist — this time positive it was all over.

“Take off your shoes,” she said. I looked down at my sandaled feet, shrugged and obliged. She checked out my soles.

I began to feel nervous and seriously thought of leaving while I waited for the third search of my purse. It had been searched when I walked into the building and a second time when I signed the ledger book on the third floor.

Purse in hand, I was escorted by a deputy into the glass-enclosed gallery of the courtroom. The \$11,500 security-tight arena has numbered seats and three deputy sheriff bailiffs were on duty.

The judge and lawyers spoke into microphones that piped the proceedings into the gallery where the spectators sit.

I sat next to a man who scoffed at the length of security measures but said the men while given a body frisk from head to toe don't have to remove anything except the contents of their pockets.

Judge Morton Colvin, responsible for ordering the search procedures during the Magee trial, said he had no comment on the difference in treatment between male and female visitors. “What's being done in the search for both men and women is what I feel is reasonable to insure a fair and impartial trial.”