

About the Carole Pope Oral History Project

An Introduction to Our Mission

Carole Pope was a powerful social innovator and activist who created Our New Beginnings (ONB), a home base to help women transition from the criminal justice system back into the community. Based in Portland, Oregon from 1980-1992, ONB proved that given assistance, tools, and support, women released or diverted from prison can create successful, meaningful lives and avoid reentering the system.

Carole passed away in 2013 after a long illness. However, the needs she addressed through ONB are even more urgent and widespread today. The Carole Pope Oral History Project seeks to help carry on Carole's commitment. In an interview in 2000, Carole stated, "Every time that someone talks about Our New Beginnings and passes on the core belief that values the women whom this program served, the program never dies, never goes away. "

The purpose of this project is to pay homage to Carole Pope's life and the legacy of her work on behalf of women in the criminal justice system. By preserving and sharing the voices of the people touched by Our New Beginnings we intend to reinforce the belief that all people matter, regardless of where the circumstances of life land them.

Through a series of oral histories, this project will highlight the first-person perspectives necessary to fully understand the impact of the program on the women it served, the criminal justice system, and the greater Portland community. These interviews will also help capture a more complete historical record of Carole's work and the functions, practices, and outcomes of Our New Beginnings.

Carole's papers were saved and donated to Portland State University Library Special Collections by Sharon Franklin, Sharon's friend and colleague. However, these materials reflect only a part of the important details surrounding Carole's life and the program she founded. When complete, the Carole Pope Oral History Project will more fully represent the program's successes and challenges. The archives will stand as an important resource for researchers, government officials, community activists, philanthropists, nonprofit organizations, students, and others working to help incarcerated women and their children.

Carole's hope was that the idea and inspiration of Our New Beginnings would not die with her, that people would see the importance of fighting passionately for people often seen as "throwaways" in our society and work to create strong community-based programs that can help women transition successfully back into society in ways that incarceration can never achieve. She understood that women have unique caretaking and stabilizing roles in society. Incarcerating women can have a devastating effect, not only on the women themselves, but also on their children, families, and communities.

When asked what the lasting legacy of Our New Beginnings was twelve years after its closing, Carole responded without hesitation, “The women who went through the program and its impact on them.” She continued, “They are my absolute heroes and I am in awe of their accomplishments. They walked through fire and made something out of their lives. They have done something that is quite amazing in spite of insurmountable odds.” This project will allow many of these women to play an active part in carrying on Carole’s legacy by helping another generation of women facing similar circumstances.

Project Goals

With the growing need for community-based programs in mind and with a commitment to sustaining Carole’s legacy at heart, this project will do the following:

Phase One

1. Transfer original videotape footage of Carole and ONB to a digital format to ensure preservation and facilitate access. These videos will be made available online as appropriate.
2. Conduct video interviews with key individuals associated with Our New Beginnings, including judges, public defenders, prison officials, politicians, agency heads, and former clients, as well as some of the children, now grown, who were born at ONB. Complete transcriptions, as well as the audio and video of the interviews when possible, will be posted online and openly available to the public.
3. Gather additional documents, photographs, and other materials related to Carole Pope’s work with ONB to incorporate into the collection.
4. Create an outreach plan, including research guides and tools, to facilitate use of the collection by a broad range of researchers. Coordinate with Portland State University’s Walk of the Heroines' celebration of extraordinary women that includes Carole Pope.

Phase Two

1. Create a documentary film of Carole’s life and her work with Our New Beginnings to further share her story and raise awareness of the challenges facing women in the criminal justice system.
2. Establish and fund an endowment to offer annual financial support to a formerly incarcerated woman or the child of an incarcerated woman pursuing a degree at Portland State University.

Why Her Legacy Matters

Looking back at her time with Our New Beginnings, Carole Pope knew the problem was far from solved. The following statistics underscore the importance of keeping the legacy of Carole's work alive.

- In 1999, Amnesty International reported that 85% of the children of incarcerated mothers will offend as juveniles and end up in prison themselves.¹
- The percentage of women behind bars exploded 757% between 1977 and 2004, a number nearly twice that of the incarcerated male population during the same period.²
- Statistically, African American and Hispanic women are overrepresented in the prison population, constituting 60% of all incarcerated women. Their arrests most often stem from circumstances related to addiction, a condition aggravated by a lack of social support and resources in economically distressed communities.²
- From 1991 to 2007, the number of children with a mother in prison more than doubled, up 131%. In state prisons, women were more likely than men to be a parent (63% to 51%). In addition, mothers in prison were more likely than fathers (77% to 26%) to be the main daily care provider for their child.²
- Mental health issues often constitute the reason women enter prison in the first place, and left untreated, the problem contributes to their recidivism. Prisons substitute as mental health facilities for many low-income people. The lack of treatment within prison walls only increases the likelihood that women will return to prison once released.²
- From a taxpayer's perspective, the price of incarcerating women is not limited to the cost of the prison cell and three meals a day. Locking up women also means paying the tab for putting their children in foster care, treating physical and mental health conditions exacerbated by their incarceration, and providing public assistance and shelter for those who are homeless and destitute upon release.²

1 Amnesty International. Profile of Women in Prisons and Jails. AI Index: AMR 51/001/1999. (<http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/women/report2.html>), 1 March 1999.

2 Frost, N., J. Greene, and K. Pranis. Hard Hit: The Growth in the Imprisonment of Women, 1977-2004. New York: Institute on Women & Criminal Justice, Women's Prison Association, 2006.

How You Can Help

- Contribute to project funding. Phase 1 will fully complete the oral history project and make the resulting resources available to the public. The estimated budget for Phase 1 is \$12,000 to \$15,000, based on the number of interviews to be completed. We have already raised \$3,000 towards this funding goal, but we need to reach at least \$12,000 to fully complete the project. Phase 2 will include additional fundraising to support the creation of a documentary film of Carole's life and work and to establish an endowment to provide an annual Portland State scholarship to a formerly incarcerated woman or the child of an incarcerated woman.
- Loan, share, or donate original documents, photographs, and other materials related to Carole Pope and to Our New Beginnings.
- Share your own ONB story, including your recollections of Carole or your own experiences working with ONB to be added to the archives.

You can donate online to the Carole Pope Oral History Project fund through the Portland State University Foundation at <http://tinyurl.com/CarolePope>
Scroll down to see the Carole Pope Oral History Project box in the fund list.

You can also donate with a check made payable to the "PSU Foundation" with a note, "Carole Pope Fund." Mail checks to:
Special Collections
Portland State University Library
PO Box 1151
Portland, OR 97207

For project information:

Cristine Paschild, project manager
Head of Special Collections
Portland State University Library
paschild@pdx.edu
503.206.7481

Sharon Franklin, project advisor
sharonfranklin01@gmail.com
541.343.0555

For fundraising information:

Lauren Clark
Development Officer, Scholarships
and Campaigns
Portland State University Foundation
Lauren.Clark@pdx.edu
503.725.2675

Carole Pope: Walk of the Heroines Biography

Carole Pope said that when she went to prison, she found her voice. She also found the purpose for her life—helping women coming out of prison transition back into society.

Carole was born June 18, 1944, in Alameda, California, the daughter of violent and abusive alcoholic parents. She was identified as a prodigy on the piano at a young age. The San Francisco Ballet hired her as rehearsal pianist at age sixteen, and she once sat at the piano bench with Arthur Rubenstein—one of her treasured memories. She dreamed of becoming a concert pianist, but in those days women generally had to move to Europe to pursue such a career, something her father wouldn't allow. Amid escalating abuse, she emancipated herself at sixteen, left home, and went to work. She attended college, earning Masters degrees in music and German literature. She got a job preparing Masters piano candidates at a music conservatory in Kansas City, Missouri, and eventually moved to Portland.

Her former life as a “quiet, unobtrusive little music teacher” ended forever when she went to prison for theft and forgery in 1977. She turned herself in a day later; the recommended sentence was probation and restitution, but the judge found her guilty on two felony counts, each carrying a five-year sentence to run consecutively. In reaching his verdict, he said she was “college educated and should have known better.”

Carole stopped drinking the day she entered prison and was extremely proud of her 35 years of sobriety. She also found her true calling in life. While in prison she began to talk to the women about their lives. She learned that most of them were there due to problems related to drugs, alcohol, prostitution, abuse, and for killing their abusers. After gaining permission to use the law library in the men's prison, she discovered that creating a law library for the women's prison was required by law but had been ignored. In 1978 she sued the prison on behalf of the women, argued the case in court in prison garb against the State's attorneys, and won. The prison was fined \$3000 a day until they set up a law library in the women's prison. She went on to become the first female inmate paralegal in the State of Oregon.

By 1981, Carole was terrified she had already become institutionalized and would be unable to survive outside of prison. She forced herself to take parole. By then the plan for a program to help women offenders was brainstormed and in place, and in many ways she considered herself the test case. Upon her release she got a job as investigator for a Portland law firm and used the money and the rest of her time to start Our New Beginnings (ONB). Carole wrote grants and eventually purchased a house in NW Portland that opened in 1984 and continued over the next 14 years as a residential and non-residential center for 3,000 women. About 100 babies were born at ONB to whom Carole became “Nana.”

Carole was a fierce advocate for the women in ONB. The program provided a stable, supportive place to live as they began the difficult job of reintegrating back into society. The women obtained mental health, drug, alcohol, incest, and prostitution counseling; parenting classes; job, financial literacy, and other life skills training; and medical and dental treatment. She took them places many of them had never been—to the circus, ball games, and concerts—all occasions to “give them a childhood many of them never had,” explaining that such experiences also helped them learn how to parent their own children. Many women went on to college; several earned advanced degrees.

The program's 85% success rate matched the prison's recidivism rate, and over time she earned the respect of many skeptics in the community, including lawyers, judges, and others in the legal, criminal justice, and social service areas who came to acknowledge her passion in fighting for what was right, her fearlessness in the face of power, her keen knowledge of the law, her fierce determination to level the playing field for women in prison, and the success of ONB. The program closed its doors in 1993 due to a breach of contract from the State of Oregon as more prisons were built and prison beds had to be filled.

Carole won many awards over the years. She was honored with "Heroes of Humanity" recognition and was given the Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Award for Uplifting Human Values at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2007; the Ruby Isom Award, Oregon Criminal Justice Association (2006); the International Heroes of Humanity Silver Jubilee Award (2006); the Coffee Creek Volunteer of the Year Award (2005); the Civil Liberties Award, Oregon Chapter (1991); *Family Circle's* Women Who Make a Difference Award (1990); *Newsweek* Magazine's Unsung Heroes Award (1988); the Claire Argow Award for Outstanding Adult Program Providing Services to Special Needs Population, sponsored by the Oregon Council on Crime and Delinquency (1987); and the Mayor's "Spirit of Portland" Award (1985). Gene Reynolds, producer of M*A*S*H, came to Oregon to interview Carole after reading about her in *Newsweek*. He wrote the script for a TV movie of her life that was cast twice but never filmed due to two writers' strikes.

As Carole's health declined during the last 15 years of her life, she continued to answer hundreds of letters from incarcerated women (and men) asking for her help, usually regarding their children. In 2003 she co-wrote *A Resource Guide for Parents Incarcerated in Oregon* to help incarcerated parents with the emotional, financial, and legal issues regarding their children that arise as a result of their incarceration.

Carole understood that women have unique caretaking and stabilizing roles in society. Incarcerating women can have a devastating effect, not only on the women themselves, but also on their children, families, and communities. In 1999, Amnesty International reported that 85% of the children of incarcerated mothers will offend as juveniles and end up in prison themselves. The percentage of women behind bars exploded 757% between 1977 and 2004, a number nearly twice that of the incarcerated male population during the same period (Frost, N., Greene, J., & Pranis, K. (2006). *Hard Hit: The Growth in the Imprisonment of Women, 1977-2004*. New York: Institute on Women & Criminal Justice, Women's Prison Association.

Carole Pope passed away on January 6, 2013, after a long illness. Her hope was that the idea and inspiration of Our New Beginnings would not die with her, that people would see the importance of fighting passionately for people often seen as "throwaways" in our society and fight for the creation of strong community-based programs that can help women transition successfully back into society in ways that incarceration can never achieve.

For more information on Carole Pope and Our New Beginnings, contact the Portland State University Library Archives and Special Collections, Portland, OR.

BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF MULTNOMAH COUNTY

In the Matter of Proclaiming)
Appreciation to Carole Pope,) PROCLAMATION
Founder and Executive Director) 92-227
of Our New Beginnings)

WHEREAS, Our New Beginnings, a nationally recognized and exemplary program which was the first of its kind for women in the State of Oregon to function as a sentencing alternative for female offenders, an option for women upon release from prison, and a condition of probation, was created by Carole Pope who has served as Executive Director for twelve years; and

WHEREAS, Our New Beginnings has added to the existing data about female ex-offenders and their special needs while helping hundreds of women turn their lives around by providing structure, consistency, love, and support in a safe and nurturing environment; and

WHEREAS, Our New Beginnings has served as a home to many children - some newly born and some who were born drug addicted, giving them special care and attention while their mothers in the program received guidance, professional counseling and learned skills to help them transit into society in a non-criminal manner; and

WHEREAS, Carol Pope's total commitment and outstanding work has been accomplished at a tremendous personal sacrifice, as she has focused on the day to day operations of the program, advocated for the needs of female ex-offenders, educated the public to understand and recognize the value of this population, and strived to make the system more responsive and responsible.

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS PROCLAIMED, that the Board of County Commissioners sincerely appreciates the service rendered to our community by Carole Pope and Our New Beginnings; and

IT IS FURTHER PROCLAIMED, that the Board of County Commissioners wishes Carole the best of luck in pursuing future endeavors in a manner which is mutually satisfying to herself and the people she chooses to serve, as she continues her efforts to enhance the quality of life for others.

ADOPTED this 17th day of December. 1992.

MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON

By Gladys McCoy
Gladys McCoy, County Chair



Starting over. Carole Pope knew what prison and its aftermath were like; she started a halfway house to give other women a chance to rebuild their lives

By Ellen Steese, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor July 16, 1987
<http://www.csmonitor.com/1987/0716/hpope.html>

Portland, Ore.

THE pretty Victorian house that is home to Our New Beginnings is technically a prison. Women offenders come here instead of, or after release from, the penitentiary. But it doesn't feel like a prison; it feels more like a refuge. It's tidy and quiet and homey: comfy saggy chairs, a rug here and a toy there, gauzy curtains, inexpensive furniture. Everything is a little worn, but clean.

“We let them have as much of their own stuff as possible; I don't want it to look like a jail,” says Carole Pope. “For some of these women, this is the only home they've ever had.”

Ms. Pope founded Our New Beginnings while she was serving four years in Salem Penitentiary for theft and forgery, and when she left in 1981 she brought it out with her. It started as a “wish list” of what would be needed to really reintegrate offenders into society.

Pope says she started the program because she was angry at the system.

“I deserved to be punished for what I did,” she says precisely. “I did not deserve the emotional damage that I received. It created in me an anger that I never felt before.

“I have people who reoffend in 24 hours, when nobody has bothered to fix their problem. Nobody has taught them to read or write. They have to pay living expenses, restitution, court costs, supervision fees - they can't even get a job as a hotel maid because they can't read the cleaning supply cans. They reoffend faster than the parole office can get the paper work done. It would be better if they just handed you a needle and a bag of dope,” she says, some of that anger showing.

In the beginning, Pope helped women who were just released with money for bus fares and telephone calls. It was a struggle at first to get judges and potential benefactors to believe that “an ex-con,” as she refers to herself, was trying to do something positive, that this wasn't just another scam. Even now, with a permanent home and the support of the prison system behind her, it's still a struggle to survive financially.

The organization's annual budget of about \$175,000 comes from contracts for services with the county and from foundation grants. This allows it, each year, to serve 200 to 300 women, referred to Pope by courts, public defenders, district attorneys, and probation and parole officers. Its founder describes Our New Beginnings as a “sentencing alternative for a judge to use instead of a state penitentiary, or instead of local jail time for people who are not stable enough to be just on probation.”

It is no different from a halfway house in its efforts to ease people back into society through counseling, tutoring, and employment help, she points out. But it is the only comprehensive program in the state focused specifically on the needs of women, an area that tends to be grossly neglected and underfunded, she says.

But Carole Pope is a fighter, and the constant effort to garner support for her program only bolsters her resolve. A chunky woman, with a rough bowl haircut, wearing jeans and purple velour top, she lounges behind her desk, talking with tremendous compassion - and toughness - in her deep, gruff voice. A word she uses often is "appropriate"; she always says it with a little hesitation and emphasis. She wants Our New Beginnings participants "to learn how to live appropriately in the world. And the skills they don't have, we teach them."

Sheila, a young nurse who has been here since April, says: "It's like living with your mother; she keeps you in line."

Since Our New Beginnings started five years ago, Carole Pope has helped some 1,200 women, many of whom have histories of drug addiction, theft, and prostitution. Her success rate, she says, is between 68 and 72 percent.

According to Michael Schrunk, district attorney of Multnomah County, "If [Our New Beginnings] has any fault, it's that there's only one of Carole Pope. Too bad we can't clone her."

Kicking the drug habit and dealing with the lack of trust and self-esteem that are a result of past hurts - about 95 percent of her clients have been incest victims, for instance - are first steps at Our New Beginnings.

One client was a drug addict for 32 years. "This is the longest she's been clean in her whole life," says Pope. "It's like starting all over again, like being born." Helping to bring about such results is a staff that includes a varying number of ex-offenders, plus a professional core of two mental health counselors and a drug counselor.

It's crucial for clients to get an apartment and a job - the latter a tough proposition in Portland's depressed economy. Certain jobs would be unwise choices for participants - "too much stress," Pope says.

"You can't put someone who's been a junkie in a drugstore," she explains. "You can't put someone who's committed theft behind a cash register. You can't put someone who has a history of prostitution on the hostess roll at a motel. I can't put them in a position where they would be victimized or victimize."

Good avenue are highway construction, being a nurse's aide, or getting a college education. "And they are ideally suited to being drug counselors." Pope herself take a direct hand is getting her clients "job ready." She works with jobs programs conducted by the state's department of employment, which has a special staff that works solely with ex-offenders.

All the women at Our New Beginnings are quietly dressed in suits and skirts; one woman, Rose, always refers to the other women as "ladies." It feels awkward to ask people about their past when they are trying so plainly to put it behind them.

It's a hedged-in world; you have to get permission to leave, to go on errands or go off for the weekend, and there are limits to the times you can use the phone. On the other hand, there is a lot of support and comfort here. Sheila talks about the pleasures of waking up to homemade cinnamon rolls.

Role modeling is an important part of the program, and all the women who work at Our New Beginnings are former offenders. Donna, now a counselor involved in screening women coming into the program, had been a heroin addict for 12 years. She is wearing a smart white suit and chic red earrings. A round-faced blond girl asks her for permission to go to Narcotics Anonymous, in the wheedling tone of any young girl wanting an outing. "Run and ask Carole real quick if you can go, honey," says Donna kindly.

"It's real hard, changing," Donna says. "I almost said 'forget it.' It's like being reborn again - first you crawl and then you walk. You don't have any of the same friends, any of the same social life. It almost broke me, but I hung in there. I'm still running and asking for help."

It is true that some program participants "come in here kicking and screaming," says Pope. Patience is called for. "We deal with them over, and over - until they get it right."

[← Back to Original Article](#)

Salvaging Society's 'Throwaways' : Rehabilitation: Carole Pope was almost a victim of the corrections system. But she devised an alternative to jail to help other women like herself.

March 08, 1991 | KIRSTEN A. CONOVER | THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

PORTLAND, Ore. — Carole Pope has a knack for disrupting people's comfort zones. You might say that's in her job description.

Pope is founder and executive director of Our New Beginnings, a sentencing alternative for female ex-offenders here. Making people aware of—and often uncomfortable about—society's so-called "throwaways" has helped her gain respect and support for the program, celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

"We've lopped off a third of our society: gays, homeless, HIVs (people who carry the AIDS virus), junkies, prostitutes—all the people who mirror the cancer in our society," Pope says in an interview. "Society doesn't want to own them. (But) they're responsible for it."

Our New Beginnings takes responsibility. Instead of going to prison, women may be sentenced here: The program provides the tools and the place for women to make the transition to living in a non-criminal way.

The "clients," as they are called, live in a large Victorian house (technically a jail), and receive professional guidance and support. They may learn how to kick addictions, land a job, find a place to live, take care of their children. Many non-residents also receive counseling.

"Just to get to 10 years was imperative," says Pope, sitting in the living room of her small houseboat. "At first, people didn't give me 10 minutes, let alone 10 years," she says, referring to the initial skepticism from the courts and correction systems.

On Nov. 13, 1989—eight years to the day after she was released from prison—Pope signed a contract with Oregon State Corrections.

The idea for the nonprofit Our New Beginnings Inc. surfaced when Pope was serving time for theft and forgery. Hatred for the system, she says, drove her and several other inmates to create a program that would prevent other women from going through what they had.

"I went into prison Carole Pope, 35, and was labeled 39960. . . . In one hour's time they dehumanized me," she recalls.

" *Corrections* is a misnomer," Pope continues in her gravelly voice. "Prison taught me nothing. It stopped the momentum of my own destruction," she says, speaking of her alcohol addiction.

At a turning point, Pope realized her life "was not what it appeared to be. I wasn't the only one. I was surrounded by hundreds of women exactly like me," women with histories of incest and abuse, she says. She saw her "sisters" get out of prison only to come back--some within 24 hours. These women didn't need a cage, they needed help, she reckoned, and the prison system was not giving it.

According to Pope, 98% of the 300 to 400 women who go through Our New Beginnings every year are victims of incest. About 90% have been substance abusers for 11 years or more.

"There are far too many women on the waiting list," says Pope, whose clients are referred to her by judges, parole officers, district attorneys, private attorneys, parole boards, prisons or other programs. Sometimes women find it on their own. The program runs on grants, county and city funds and sometimes Pope's own money.

A large part of the program consists of counseling to dispel feelings of worthlessness. "Society validates their feelings--feelings of being valueless, worthless. Corrections enhances and exacerbates that," Pope says.

The women take responsibility for their actions, but they learn what led them to crime, drugs and destructive relationships. They come to grips with their past. "It's like disconnecting one big switchboard," Pope says.

The program also serves as a major treatment center that includes medical help and counseling for drug, alcohol and mental health problems.

"Our New Beginnings is a program whose time has definitely come," says Barbara Fleisher, a circuit judge in Tampa, Fla.: "Carole works with a very difficult population."

Tampa recently launched a residential women's program modeled after Pope's. "It's going very well," Fleisher said during a telephone interview. "We need to adjust the program, tighten up some things. . . . If it works in one part of the country, there's no reason in the world it couldn't work in other parts of the country." For many, Carole Pope *is* Our New Beginnings. During the interview, Pope refers to the program as her "child" and "the physical manifestation of my spirit."

"Some people say I'm obsessed with this," she admits.

Clients and staff describe Pope as tough and tender, compassionate, a fighter, a believer. "She's a caring, loving person, but she's not into playing games. It's tough love," says Brenda, a three-time resident there. "You have to be willing to take steps."

"I'm an unabashed fan about what she does," says Michael Schrunk, Multnomah (Ore.) County's district attorney, who has seen Our New Beginnings rise from the ground. "This has one of the options that has been a raging success," he says, adding that Our New Beginnings' recidivism rate is much lower than rates of normal probation or parole programs. (Pope estimates the rate at between 30% and 35%; she herself has sent women back to jail.)

What does it take to make a program like this work? "It takes the flesh and bones, the human spirit to do it--that's what's unique about Carole," Schrunk says. "My hope is there would be people to come in and be her assistants for a while and go out and start similar programs."

"What I do isn't unique and special," Pope says. "That's a sad comment on society."

Recently, Pope has directed some of her seemingly endless energy into making Our New Beginnings a program that can stand on its own. The staff of 17--five of whom are former clients--is very protective of her. ("We try to keep her away on weekends," one staffer says.)

"It doesn't take a 'Carole clone' to make it work," Pope says. It takes willingness and understanding to recognize the value in these human beings, she says.

Pope refers to rehabilitation as " 'inner child' work. I parent my women the way I wish I had been parented. I spoil them rotten but hold them accountable and punish them. But I never turn my back on them."

Showing several photos of clients and their children, Pope says, "I am a mother to these women, nanna to these children. I don't want Amy coming back like her mother," she says about one. Most of the 300 children who have accompanied their mothers through Our New Beginnings have been drug-addicted.

"It is a cycle," she says, raising her voice as if addressing an audience. "If you interrupt it, it can be stopped."

But in order for such programs to work, society can't expect 90-day wonders or Band-Aid solutions, Pope says. "There has to be willingness to know what you get back will be a generation of healthy people," she says. "It is cost-effective."

Despite the 10-year haul, Pope says her vision for Our New Beginnings is only half complete. She would like to have more housing and resources for clients--"provide them with a place long enough so they can heal." Ideally, she would have a home in the country for them. "Some cannot live in the world. They need to go to camp. Some need a place to grow old."

When will she be satisfied? "Success is when I have no more clients," Pope says, adding flatly: "That's not a reality."

"Society as a whole fails to demand change . . . until it's your kid. We are all each other's kids."



Steve Duin: The enduring legacy of Carole Pope

Steve Duin | sduin@oregonian.com By Steve Duin | sduin@oregonian.com

[Email the author](#) | [Follow on Twitter](#)

on January 21, 2013 at 5:23 PM, updated January 21, 2013 at 5:24 PM

When she arrived at the Doll House -- the **Oregon Women's Correctional Center** -- in 1977, Carole Ann Pope once said, "I stopped being Carole Pope. I became 39960, which was my booking number. I became my crime. I ceased being a human being with any dignity, who warranted any respect."

39960 was a "quiet, unobtrusive little music teacher," she said, with an "H" -- for homosexual -- on her prison jacket. The daughter of abusive, alcoholic parents, she was suddenly in the company of 52 other inmates, 17 of whom were lifers, many of them battered women who'd killed their abusers.

Those women had little in the way of medical care, education programs, drug and alcohol counseling, or legal protection. They had even less girding them for what was waiting outside if and when they were released.

"That's where New Beginnings started," 39960 said.

That's when Carole Pope was reborn: "I was not this quiet little person anymore. I was a raving maniac."

That maniac weighed 79 pounds when **she died** in her 12th floor apartment at **Rose Schnitzer Tower** on Jan. 6, her voice strained by smoke, her heart frayed by systemic lupus.

Her legacy? I suspect it outweighs us all.

Women behind bars in Oregon -- the bars of incest, addiction and self-destruction-- never had an advocate to match Pope. From 1981 through 1992, Our New Beginnings was post-prison sanctuary for thousands of women who had little reason to believe anyone but the local pimp cared whether they lived or died.

Pope knew the feeling, growing up in California. After she made her escape from home at 16, she picked up graduate degrees in music and German literature and made a living as a jazz pianist.

She was teaching music at the **Dougy Center** in 1976 when, drunk and angry, she lifted several silver ingots from a friend's safe deposit box and was sentenced to 10 years at the Doll House.

"I was so damaged. I was just gone," Pope said in a 2000 interview for the **Oregon Historical Society**. Incest and alcohol were but two of the demons at her throat.

"So, I suppose going to prison saved my life, 'cause I slammed right into the wall."

On the rebound, Pope reached this conclusion: "Corrections doesn't correct a thing," not in the lives of the incarcerated.

She emerged from prison, at 37, and went to work for a law firm, English and Metcalf.

"The best investigator I ever had," Katharine English wrote in an email. "Fiercely committed, tenacious and fair. One deadbeat dad claimed he couldn't pay child support. Carole drove near his rural home, pretended car breakdown, and the man towed her to his garage, where he made bundles of money on auto repair.

"She was like that, taking huge risks to effect justice."

New Beginnings -- Pope rarely employed the "Our" -- was the epicenter of her fury and her fearlessness. Pope negotiated with pimps to keep their distance -- "If (the girls) want to come to New Beginnings, they're off-limits; I won't mess with your money, you don't mess with mine" -- and had no qualms about funneling women back to prison if they couldn't live by the rules.

"There was a big, defiant thing about Carole. She was very charismatic, but I was a little scared of her, too," said Laurie Ellett, who followed a forgery charge to New Beginnings in 1985 and has spent the last 27 years working in social services.

"She had the ability to engage you and confront you if you were squirreling around. Because we were all squirreling around."

"She had no fear," said Sharon Franklin, who teamed with Pope in 2003 to write a resource guide for incarcerated parents. "There was a bounty out on her life once. It was, like, \$50. She wasn't afraid of it; she was offended.

"She thought she was worth a lot more than that."

Armed with grants from the Fred Meyer Charitable Trust and Omark Industries, Pope eventually bought the 9,000-square-foot house on Northwest Hoyt that provided living quarters for 39 recovering inmates and counseling for many, many more.

She nursed their drug-addicted babies. Counseled judges on what it was like to grow up with no family support. Identified the women's bodies when the prostitutes crossed paths with Dayton Leroy Rogers.

"Of the seven women he killed," Pope said, "the first four were mine."

She earned the mayor's "Spirit of Portland" award in 1985 and was named one of Newsweek magazine's "Unsung Heroes" in 1988. She restructured New Beginnings so that the halfway house could serve as a sentencing alternative.

And she was totally unprepared when the phone rang in 1990 and Pope was told that the state of Oregon was pulling out of its 18-month contract because it had beds to fill at the new **Columbia River Correctional Institution**.

"They neglected to tell us that the only reason they used us -- and I mean a big 'used' us -- was that prison were overcrowded," Pope said in 2000.

"I never, ever, ever expected that New Beginnings would be destroyed by the Department of Corrections."

Those eye-witnesses in the governor's office, the mayor's office and the Legislature? "Nobody lifted a finger," Pope said.

Unable to deal with the loss of state revenue, New Beginnings closed in 1993.

Pope eventually moved from her Sellwood Bridge houseboat to the former Clay Tower with her cigarettes, her files, those piano melodies ... and, for the women who barely have a chance, her enduring sense of wrong and righteousness.

"My level of rage," she said a dozen years ago, "is the same as it was in 1977."

That is cause for celebration. And it will be, in a memorial service at 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 3, at Rose Schnitzer Tower.

--**Steve Duin** on **Twitter** --

© 2014 OregonLive.com. All rights reserved.