

## *Wild Poppies*

*Marilyn Buck*

I remember red poppies, wild behind the school house  
I didn't want to be there, but I loved to watch the poppies

I used to sit in the window of my room, sketching charcoal trees  
what happened to those magnolia trees, to that girl?

I went off to college, escaped my father's thunderstorms  
Berkeley. Rebellion. Exhilaration!

the Vietnam war, Black Power, Che took me to Chicago  
midnight lights under Wacker Dr. Uptown. South Side. Slapped  
by self-determination for taking Freedom Wall photos  
without asking

on to California, driving at 3:00 in the morning in the mountains,  
I got it: what self-determination means  
A daunting task for a young white woman, I was humbled

practice is concrete ... harder than crystal-dream concepts

San Francisco, on the front steps at Fulton St.  
smoking reefer, drinking "bitterdog" with Black Panthers and white  
hippie radicals, talking about when the revolution comes

the revolution did not come. Fred Bennett was missing  
we learned he'd been found: ashes, bones, a wedding ring  
but later there was Assata's freedom smile

then I was captured, locked into a cell of sewer water  
spirit deflated. I survived, carried on, glad to be  
like a weed, a wild red poppy,  
rooted in life

*Libation*

Mama Ayanna Mashama

*Welcome*

Judy Siff and Donna Willmott

Linda Evans and Susan Rosenberg

Yuri Kochiyama

Melanie DeMore, vocal / slides of Marilyn

Maisha Quint

Alicia Rodriguez

Miranda Bergman

Gemma Mirkinson

Hamdiya Cooks and Ida McCray

David Meltzer

Music by Finesse

Video of Marilyn

*Eulogy*

Soffiyah Elijah

Message from Assata Shakur

Marilyn's family

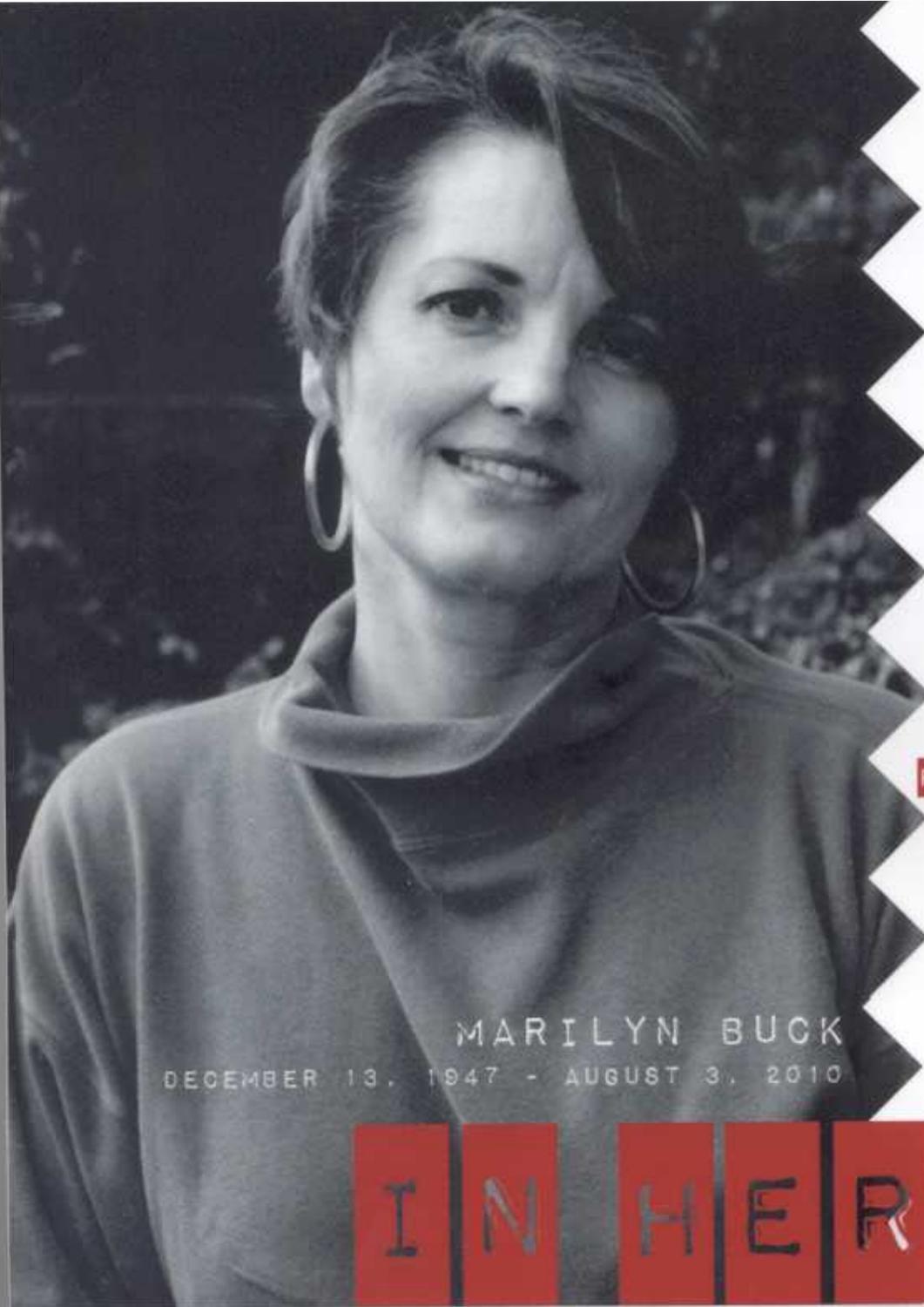
San Francisco 8

Graciela Trevisan: statement from Cristina Peri Rossi

Maria Poblet

*Recessional*

Las Bomberas de la Bahia—Afro Puerto Rican Bomba



MARILYN BUCK  
DECEMBER 13, 1947 - AUGUST 3, 2010

I N H E R

S P I R I T

A commemorative solidarity booklet to benefit the six  
political prisoners in New York State.



HERMAN BELL



DAVID GILBERT



ROBERT SETH HAYES



ABDUL MAJID



JALIL MUNTAGIM



SEKOU ODINGA

# Malcolm X Grassroots Movement



In memory and tribute to the life and legacy of Marilyn Buck,



The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement is proud to salute

**SEKOU ODINGA  
JALIL MUNTAQIM  
ABDUL MAJID  
ROBERT SETH HAYES  
HERMAN BELL  
DAVID GILBERT**

for their contributions in the Black Liberation Movement in the pursuit of a better world. We will continue to work for the freedom of these and all Political Prisoners in the US

**SELF RESPECT  
SELF DEFENSE  
SELF DETERMINATION**

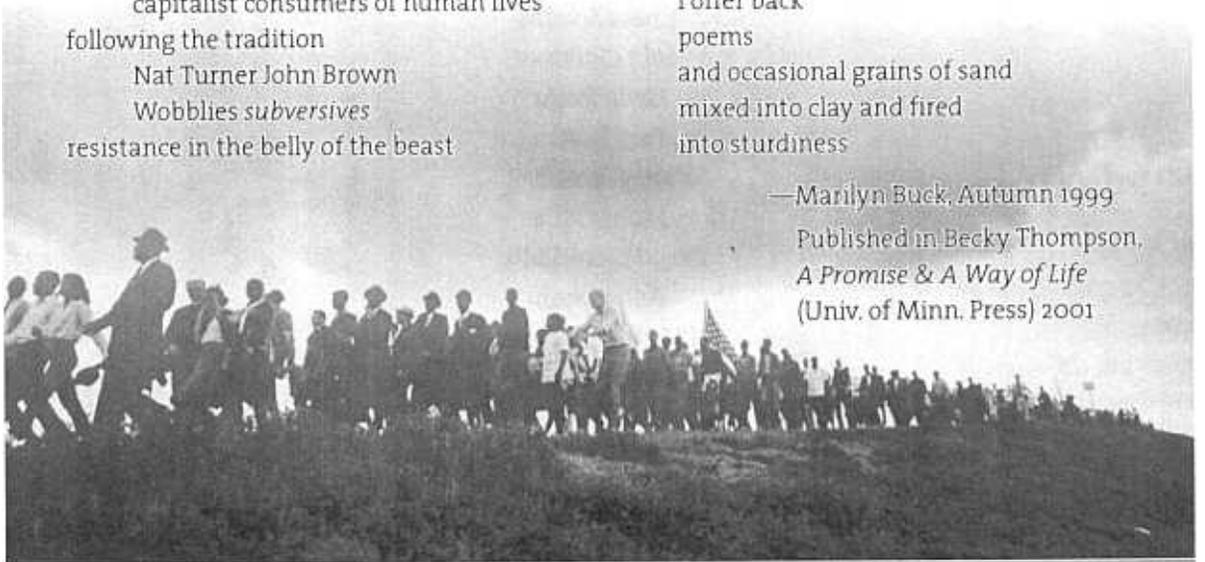
[www.mxgm.org](http://www.mxgm.org)

## Autobiographi

Post-war 1947  
 born on the white  
 side of the tracks  
 Texas segregation  
 civil rights preacher's child  
 fled Texas with honor's diploma  
 for UC Berkeley and free speech  
 though I did not know then  
 that's why I left  
  
 Vietnam war 1965  
 what war  
 are you fighting for  
 make love not war  
 college books tossed into a trunk in some room  
 I've never seen since  
 fires of internationalism called me  
 a girl  
 to enlist  
 in the anti-war  
 war against Amerikka  
 my own women's liberation on the line  
  
 war in Amerikka  
 war against the warmakers  
     white-skinned haters  
     capitalist consumers of human lives  
 following the tradition  
     Nat Turner John Brown  
     Wobblies *subversives*  
 resistance in the belly of the beast

clandestine war 1973  
 captured by the killers  
 spirit killers nationkillers  
 a political prisoner  
*enemy of the state*  
*terrorist and traitor*  
 white woman dangerous  
 to white Amerika  
 condemned to years  
 and years of absence  
 a lifetime  
  
 warmakers  
 wait for its prisoners to die  
 or go crazy  
 or simply wither away into insignificance  
  
 I rest, a grain of sand  
 significant on the beach head that  
     meets the sea  
 to face the storm  
 I wage resistance  
 to stay alive  
 I learn to search out freedom in the breath  
 my cells send out dendrites  
 to absorb the world and its offerings  
 I offer back  
 poems  
 and occasional grains of sand  
 mixed into clay and fired  
 into sturdiness

—Marilyn Buck, Autumn 1999  
 Published in Becky Thompson,  
*A Promise & A Way of Life*  
 (Univ. of Minn. Press) 2001



## Marilyn Jean Buck

December 13, 1947–August 3, 2010

MARILYN BUCK DEFIED CATEGORIZATION. In fact, she worked hard at that, challenging the assumptions and easy answers that might have defined her life. Rejecting sexism, white supremacy and racism, she broke through boundaries both internal and external—and in so doing, left a rich legacy.

Marilyn was born in Temple, Texas, to Virginia, a nurse, and Louis, an Episcopal minister. She was “Big Sister” to three younger brothers – Louis, Bill and David. During her early years her father was assigned to minister at a Black church in town. Never interested in mythologizing her own story, Marilyn often recounted how she resented having to share her dinner table and parents’ attention with families from that church. As a child, she had little interest in the Civil Rights movement gathering speed around her. Marilyn’s politics of solidarity were created consciously, fought for, built of her spirit, heart, and mind. Years of study and concrete experiences were responsible for her political astuteness and activism. There was nothing spontaneous about her politics.



After the Buck family moved to Austin, Marilyn, as a teenager, began to become involved in antiracist activism. From her experience as a young white woman in segregated Texas she had developed a piercing sense of the role of white supremacy and racism in sustaining injustice. Marilyn’s growing sense of the need for justice led her to protest the war in Vietnam and join the Students for a Democratic Society, where she famously helped lead the organization’s first workshop on women’s liberation. She later attended college at UC Berkeley and then transferred to the University of Texas at Austin.

In Chicago during the late 1960s Marilyn co-edited the SDS newspaper *New Left Notes* and began developing a more sophisticated and activist relationship to national liberation movements inside the U.S. as well as internationally. At a prison celebration of Kwanzaa<sup>1</sup> years later, Marilyn talked at the program honoring one of the Seven Principles, Kujichagulia (self-determination). She told of going into the South Side of Chicago to photograph, for *New Left Notes*, the “Wall of Respect,” a mural painted in the Black community by Black artists. As she snapped away, a young Black man questioned her, asking why she thought she could come into his community and take photographs without explaining her intent or asking the community’s permission. The incident, Marilyn said, confronted her with the right of a community to control its own culture, shook her confidence in her own viewpoint, and opened her

<sup>1</sup> Kwanzaa, which means first fruits of the harvest, is a holiday that takes place from December 26 to January 1 and consists of a celebration and acknowledgement of Seven Principles or Nguzo Saba. On each of the seven days of Kwanzaa a different principle is acknowledged. Kwanzaa has been widely celebrated in the African Diaspora since its founding in 1966.



The Buck family



Teenage Marilyn

eyes to the ways a white perspective can be distorted, even harmful. She applied that lesson as she became more involved in the militant struggles for justice that arose in those years.

### **SOLIDARITY—THE NEXT LEVEL**

In 1968, shortly before the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Marilyn returned to the Bay Area to work with an alternative newspaper and Third World Newsreel. As the Black liberation struggle grew in power and determination, Marilyn's political work focused increasingly on solidarity with that movement. In 1973, when Marilyn was 26, she was arrested for procuring firearms for the Black Liberation Army and sentenced to 10 years in prison for buying legal ammunition with false ID. At the time, that was the longest sentence ever given for such an offense.

Marilyn served four years of the sentence at the federal women's prison in Alderson, West Virginia, where she was initially housed in one of the first high security isolation units for women. At Alderson, both in the control unit and later in general population, she met another woman political prisoner, the Puerto Rican heroine Lolita Lebron. During those years, Marilyn began to create what would become a lifetime identification and connection with other political prisoners and their

supporters outside. Yuri Kochiyama and Rafael Cancel Miranda both trace their long correspondence and friendship with Marilyn to her days in Alderson. Over the decades she would end up spending in prison, Marilyn built a deep comradeship with prisoners from every national grouping in the U.S., especially those from the Puerto Rican Independence Movement.

Despite being a model prisoner, Marilyn was repeatedly denied parole. In later years numerous political prisoners were repeatedly denied parole despite being model prisoners. Eventually, in 1977, she was granted two furloughs from FCI Alderson to New York City. After the second furlough, instead of returning to prison, she went underground to rejoin the militant radical movement. She was charged and later convicted of escape.

She spent the next eight years—years of intense government repression, particularly against the Black Liberation and Puerto Rican movements—working in clandestinity. In 1979, Assata Shakur was liberated from prison, and Marilyn was identified as a suspect in that action. Assata's liberation is considered one of the great victories of the Black Liberation struggle. After the unsuccessful expropriation of a Brinks armored truck in 1981, an action claimed by a group of Black revolutionaries and white allies, Marilyn was placed on the FBI's most wanted list and hunted with a shoot-to-kill order.

## YEARS AS A POLITICAL PRISONER

In May of 1985 Marilyn was captured in Dobbs Ferry, a northern suburb of New York City. In the following five years she faced four separate trials and was moved to three separate jails and prisons. These were grueling experiences.

After two trials on lesser offenses (including the Alderson escape), she was tried and convicted, along with codefendant Mutulu Shakur, of a RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) conspiracy to liberate Assata and commit several bank robberies, or expropriations, to fund the Black Liberation struggle. Preparing for their trial, the two created legal arguments in their assertion of a political offense exception that now stand as models of how to pose the position of U.S. political prisoners in the context of international law.

On the day in 1988 when sentence was pronounced in her RICO case, the government indicted Marilyn, along with Alan Berkman, Linda Evans, Laura Whitehorn, Susan Rosenberg, and Tim Blunk, for what became known as the Resistance Conspiracy Case, whose charges included "conspiracy to protest, oppose and change policies and practices of the U.S. government in domestic and international matters using violent and illegal means." The central charge in the case involved the 1983 bombing of the Capitol building in response to the U.S. invasion of Grenada and shelling of Lebanon. Marilyn, along with Laura and Linda, later pled guilty, in exchange for the government's dropping the charges and getting critical medical care for Alan Berkman, who was battling life-threatening cancer.

Marilyn's aggregate sentence from these cases was 80 years. Near the end of 1990 Marilyn began serving her sentence at the high security control unit for women in Marianna, Florida.

Reflecting on this period, Marilyn later wrote:

*The trials, those years of intense repression and US government denunciations of my humanity had beat me up rather badly. Whatever my voice had been, it was left frayed. I could scarcely speak."*

In Marianna, finished with trials at last, Marilyn began to heal her voice and her spirit. Adept at math and a voracious reader from an early age (her brother Bill remembers her reading during their childhood in her room for long hours), Marilyn loved questions and avoided pat answers.

Possessed of a curious mind, when she noticed her own reactions to the confines of prison, she set out to understand the psychology of women prisoners, and later, after her transfer to Dublin, California in 1993, turned her searching into a bachelor's degree in psychology from the New College. Refusing to succumb to the damage of trials and incarceration, Marilyn wrote.

*For prisoners, writing is a life raft to save one from drowning in a prison swamp. I could not write a diary or a journal; I was a political prisoner. Everything I had was subject to investigation, invasion and confiscation. I was a censored person. In defiance, I turned to poetry, an art of speaking sparingly, but flagrantly."*

And she continued to write: poems, articles, letters, statements, interviews. She became more and more disciplined about her craft, getting her Master's of Fine Arts in Poetics and publishing scores of poems in journals and anthologies. She embraced and was embraced by a network of poets, including the two dozen



Police surveillance shot of Marilyn at an anti-war rally in Austin in the '60s—later divulged to alternative newspaper, "The Rag."

contributors to her poetry CD *Wild Poppies*. She wrote articles for *Critical Resistance* and women's studies texts, among others. She contributed a regular column to *Prison Legal News*, writing in one piece,

*Women are subject to censorship in a very distinct way from men prisoners. There is a disapproval of who we are as women and as human beings. We are viewed as having challenged gender definitions and sex roles of passivity and obedience. We have transgressed much more than the written laws. We are judged even before trial as immoral and contemptible, fallen women.*



**With codefendant Mutulu Shakur at MCC-NY, 1987**



**AIDSwalk at FCI Marianna, 1993**

*The repression and control over a prisoner's life is harsh and cruel. Imagination and creativity have led me into a new, clandestine, and still subversive world. I'm unable to do photography, but there is always the word. That cannot be taken away. And there is the earth. The clay that calls my hands, challenges me to be sensual and to create vision, hope, liberation; to scream defiance and vibrance.*

While incarcerated, Marilyn witnessed the devastation of the HIV/AIDS crisis and worked with other prisoners to support women affected by it. She participated in activities that strengthened the community of incarcerated women, like Black history month and Kwanzaa. Marilyn was a loyal participant in the Poetry for the People workshops at FCI Dublin, which deeply influenced a new generation of poets.

Marilyn always promoted solidarity with political prisoners around the world. With other U.S. political prisoners, she worked on the "Art Against the Death Penalty" exhibit, which toured internationally in support of Mumia Abu Jamal, and she contributed to the book *In Defense of Mumia* and political prisoner anthologies *Can't Jail the Spirit*, *Hauling Up the Morning*, and *Let Freedom Ring*, among others. With her miniscule prisoner's income she still tithed, sending donations to those with even less.

She also discovered a talent and love for creating pottery and ceramics, contributing pieces to art shows on the outside, and sending her creations to friends, family and supporters for their homes. And even with the very limited culinary options available in prison, Marilyn—always a wonderful and creative cook—made some memorable meals.

In whatever prison she was in, Marilyn taught. Her comrades inside remember seeing her arise at 5:00 a.m. or earlier in order to tutor women who did not want to be seen, during daylight hours, being taught basic math and writing skills. She continually translated for Spanish-speaking women who needed help communicating with the prison authorities or with non-Spanish speaking prisoners. If she ever felt tired of being asked to fill these roles, she did not show it.

Marilyn corresponded with hundreds of people all over the world, in a vast network of intellectual and

political give-and-take. She wrote countless letters, even though she recognized, as she told Franco Sincich, Brigade Rosse prisoner in Italy, that with any letter, "its ashes may lie / inside an incinerator / greedy to gobble up voices."

Marilyn was an accomplished translator of literature as well as spoken language. In 2008, City Lights published her acclaimed translation of *State of Exile*, a volume of poetry by Cristina Peri Rossi, the radical writer who fled the Uruguayan military dictatorship in the 1970s. In her introduction Marilyn identifies herself as a "translator in exile of a translator of exile" and reminds us that, "either the exile is frustrated and lives with rose-colored longing for what is gone, or she finds a reason and a passion to live in her present condition."

### THE END OF EXILE?

In 2008 it seemed as if Marilyn's internal exile was coming to an end when she was granted a parole date in February 2011, then won an advance to August 8, 2010. In the midst of making plans for coming home, and with less than twelve months left to serve, Marilyn was diagnosed with a rare and very aggressive uterine cancer. Despite surgery and chemotherapy, treatment came too late to save her life.

Thanks to the determined efforts of her longtime friend and attorney Soffiyah Elijah, Marilyn was granted an early release on July 15. She paroled to Brooklyn, New York, where for the next 20 days she savored every moment of her freedom, getting a glimpse of life in the free world and, in her words, struggling to stay alive. Despite the nearly unimaginable irony of being released within days of her death, she said she considered herself one of the most fortunate women alive. During the months before her release from prison, she told friends she was set on throwing a post-release party to thank the many people who had supported her so effectively throughout her incarceration. In her last days, though too weak to see very many people, she was able to enjoy visits with her three brothers and sisters-in-law. She passed peacefully at home in the company of loving friends on August 3, 2010.

Marilyn lived most of her adult life in controlled, restrictive spaces: from clandestinity, to prisons, to control units within prisons. Yet within those spaces, she developed a richly imaginative, expansive view of human liberation, and built a bridge to a world we hunger for but have yet to create. Through her writings, her relationships and by the way she lived her life, Marilyn has left us a rare inheritance. Our greatest gift in return will be to join her in being "militants for life."



With her mother (right) and aunt at FCI Marianna



With friend/comrade/attorney Soffiyah Elijah