

Front page June 16, 1990

A feminist at odds with Esquire gets thrown out of jail

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P-I Reporter

BELLINGHAM — Women's rights activist Nikki Craft has been thrown out of a lot of places over the years. Yesterday she was even thrown out of jail.

Craft, who had been in the Whatcom County Jail since May 23 for allegedly ripping up four copies of Esquire magazine's June issue in a local bookstore, was ordered to leave by Court Commissioner Charles Snyder.

She had chosen to remain behind bars. When offered a chance to be released without bail, Craft refused to sign the routine form, which includes a promise to obey all the laws of the land.

Snyder said yesterday he was acting on a request from the Whatcom County prosecutor to release Craft. He said the prosecutor did not care if Craft signed the form, which also contains a promise to appear for her July 16 court date.

So she didn't sign, but she did walk.

"I was ready to settle in for the



Nikki Craft is defiant. 'I will not be rehabilitated. I will not stop. . . .'

summer," Craft said last night. "But at least I was able to leave on my own terms."

Earlier this week, while on a 24-hour work release granted by Snyder, Craft led a public workshop on civil disobedience. She appeared unshaken by 22 nights behind bars.

"I will not be rehabilitated. I will not stop what I'm doing. I will not stop telling other women to do the same," the 40-year-old activist told a roomful of people Thursday at a workshop sponsored by the

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Craft: She often targets pornography

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Women's Center at Western Washington University.

For much of her adult life Craft has sought public forums to state her beliefs that women are demeaned and threatened by many of the magazines, movies and laws that are part of daily life. She lives in Sacramento, Calif., editing "Iconoclast," an anti-pornography feminist newsletter.

In the past 20 years she has picketed everything from Playboy Clubs, where she chained herself to a door and removed her shirt; to movie theaters showing films in which women are brutally killed.

At the entrance to Craft's workshop and slide show on Thursday, audience members walked over torn remnants of the June issue of Esquire magazine, which included a section, "Your Wife, an Owner's Manual."

Unlike most of her nearly 50 arrests, the May 23 Esquire incident was not part of a planned action, Craft said. While at WWU to participate in a conference, she stopped to browse in Village Books in the Fairhaven district of Bellingham.

When she saw the magazines, she couldn't believe her eyes, Craft said. After the incident, she patiently waited for local police to arrest and charge her, she said.

Speaking to about 60 listeners at the workshop, Craft said she once tried working within the law to make changes. But letters to newspaper editors and calm complaints to corporations didn't seem to work, she said.

"It's very difficult to persuade people with rational discourse, one at a time," she said.

Sneaking into the headquarters of Rockwell International to protest the corporation's role in the B-1 bomber was more to her liking. She and her fellow protesters handed bloody dolls to the surprised members of the board of directors.

"That's what we thought of their bomber," she said.

When the stunt landed her on the front page of the Wall Street Journal, Craft decided that she would opt for "creative civil disobedience" over circulating anti-weapon petitions outside shopping malls.

Her projects have varied. In the 1970s, after attending a "speak out" session for women who had been raped, she worked with a group called Women Armed for Self Protection. She organized full-page ads in Dallas County, Texas, newspapers listing the names of men charged as sex offenders.

Frequently, opposition comes from civil libertarians who say Craft is denying others their First Amendment rights. She calls her accusers "First Amendment fundamentalists."

"I oppose violent pornography, not nudity," she said. "It's amazing to me that the men who publish these magazines are considered some sort of social rebels in our society. They are vicious and they are my enemy," she said.

Craft's anger over the Esquire issue has been echoed by the National Organization for Women, which has launched a national boycott of the magazine's advertisers who will not repudiate the June issue.

"NOW views this June issue of Esquire as hate against women, and recognizes that the women of this nation are tired of hate crimes being dismissed as comedy," said a statement from NOW's Los Angeles headquarters.

Esquire Editor-in-chief Lee Eisenberg released a statement after the NOW letter was made public. "It is very regrettable to me and my staff that the issue has been perceived by some as an assault on women," Eisenberg wrote. "Esquire has a long-standing reputation for quality journalism, together with a tradition of humor and irreverence."

Eisenberg is not granting any interviews on the subject of the June issue, according to Tony Freund, an editorial assistant at the magazine's New York City headquarters. Esquire is published by the Hearst Corp., the parent company of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

Craft's response after hearing Eisenberg's statement was brief. "He's not forgiven," she said.