

A fun look at life on the phones.



75 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WORKING IN A CALL CENTER

BY MARSHA MARIE



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75 Things You Should Know About Working in a Call Center

75 Things No One Ever Told You About Working in a Call Center
A Fun Look at Life in on the Phones

By Marsha Marie

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Published by Y. K. ‘Marsha Marie’, Arizona
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This is a work of nonfiction, with *just a dash* of exaggeration.

Edited by Marsha Marie.

Book cover by Marsha Marie.

This book is dedicated to all of those unsung heroes that work on the phones for a living.

On the telephone line, I am any height

I am any age I want to be

I could be a caped crusader, or Space invader

And you would know the difference

Or would you?

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Introduction:

Hi Everyone,

I have worked for several call centers around the world---literally. I have worked in centers here in America, a couple of them in Pakistan, and even in Dubai, UAE. During these times, I have worked as a customer service agent, HR assistant, soft-skill and American accent trainer, and script writer. I have laughed a lot and I have cried a hell-of-a-lot. In this book, I want to take on a journey inside the glass doors of the call center industry. I'm offering up an in-depth, humorous look at life in the call center. I'm positive that any of you whom has ever worked in call centers will be able to relate to these insane and factual topics. My goal? Just to have some fun and get you to laugh with me as I share some of my own stories and perhaps some of those that I have heard about.

Office politics, sex and crazy callers! The call center world is an insane one; that is for sure. I hope you enjoy this not-so-politically correct insight into working on the phones for a living. It's a must for anyone thinking of joining in on the fun, and it's a must if you already do. Either way, here we go with 75 things you should know about working in a call center. (I wanted the title of this book to be *So You Really Want to be a Phone-Prostitute?*, but, my family said, "No way!" I'm still debating it.)

1. The initial interview is really a piece of cake.

Let's face it; you never see lines of people waiting outside to take an ungrateful job like being a customer service representative on the phone. Answering call-after-call with bad attitudes and testosterone shooting out the earpiece, is not the dream job that most are looking for. Sure once in a while you may get the occasional caller who is pleasant and actually has nice things to say, but that is one far and in-between, I say. So seriously, no need to sweat the initial interview. All you basically need to do is show up, speak the desired language and show them that you are confident enough to say *hello* on cue--and you are sure hire! Sort of.

I remember my very first call center job, I was only 17 years old. It was here in Phoenix, but I have no idea where. I think all I had to do was fill out a piece of paper, show my social security card, and say my name. That was it. I don't even remember an interview at all.

After writing in my name and social security number, this young pimple-faced guy led me over to a small cubicle desk like you would find in the library. There was nothing on it but a phone, a notepad and a pen. The carrel was gray and very dull. The center itself probably only seated about 20 people, so it was very quiet. He handed me two pieces of paper; one was a list of phone numbers, and the other a script. Honestly, I cannot remember one word of the script. But honestly, I had no idea what I was doing then either. Job training that day was wrapped up in a single sentence. "Call the number, read the script, and if they say yes, write down their name."

"Um, okay." I mumble. *Confusion* was my middle name at this point. I hadn't a clue.

The only thing I remember after the instructions was calling the numbers one-by-one and getting hung up on each time before I could even finish the script.

That lasted only a half an hour and I broke out in tears. I grabbed my bag and walked out past the young pimply man, and mumbled, "I can't do this." And so ended my first phone job on the same day as my first phone job interview.

It's true these days, things are done a bit different. Now there are online testing, long applications to fill out, and panel interviews. But still, the bottom line is just to show confidence, smile, speak the language and convince them that you will *never* be absent---and you will have the job in the bag.

2. Long trainings and frustrating testing will make you want to commit suicide in some cases. Make sure to have a fallback plan.

True, my first training session at my first job was a bust; but not all of them are like that. With each new center I join I get a great sense of pride and adventure. I love taking that first tour around the office. My heart leaps at the opportunity of making a new home for myself and new friends.

It seems as time and jobs went on, my training sessions got progressively got longer and longer; and the methods varied according to the positions. The longest training I've had to endure to date, was two months long. I seriously wanted to kill myself after the first four weeks. I fell into such a deep depression. I became sad and started writing some really morbid poems about death. What caused the depression? Well, I think it was just that the training was so bloody dense, that I felt I would never grasp all of the information—even in two months' time.

To share my feelings in the open, I decided to write a blog about how I survived this tumultuous time in my life. It went like this.

Hi All,

Lately, I have had a difficult time just getting thru my days at work. Honestly, it seems as if each workday is somehow gaining an extra ten minutes tacked on; it just keeps getting longer and longer. You may be wondering: How do I survive? Well, like this.

I.....

1. **Ignore everyone around me.** Sometimes I just fall into a trance; you know, pretend that I am not really there. Like I am off to the Bahamas or something.
2. **Bully others.** I wander around the office and butt into people's conversation, and just take over. The extra confidence actually seems to make the clock go faster.
3. **Cry.** Yes, I am not proud of it, but I sometimes I go to the toilet stall and cry like a girl. (As shocking as it is to some of my friends, I am still female.)
4. **Eat all day.** I keep my bag full of munchies and just keep my mouth chomping. Somehow the movement of my mouth makes it seem like my job is too far away from me to care anything about it.
5. **Sleep.** Not proud of it, but I have fallen asleep on the commode lots of times. (Hasn't everyone?)
6. **Pretend I am invisible.** This is an obvious one; if I am invisible, no one can see me, and that means I am not really there. (Not to be mistaken for ignoring people around you.)
7. **Leave early.** Leaving early--by definition--means the day goes by faster. Woohoo!
8. **Lie to myself.** Yea, I told myself lots of times that I was happy, and this is what I wanted in life. (Wait, am I talking about my crappy job, or my marriage. I'm confused all of a sudden.)

9. ***Act like I am smarter than others around me.*** (*Hey, I was a teacher for many years, so I am used to acting like that.*)
10. ***Quit.****No... just kidding, I didn't. I'm still hanging in there. But if you come down to my office and don't see me at my desk.....well, I am probably in the bathroom stall again. (As they say in Punjabi: Buss, gulzada (I'm just getting by with what I have),*

And just for fun, let's read one of my death poems shall we?

Have mercy puppet master
Give me a lifeline
Awaken me from this endless nightmare
The pit of tar I'm in today
I go deeper the more I struggle
My screams muffled by bloody stubs
Lost from scratching for survival

.....and so on and so forth; anyway, you get the picture. The poem was three times longer, but I wanted to spare you from all of the vulgar death scenes.

Yep, that period of my life was pretty dark; training was brutal. I got thru it, but not unscarred; it turned out to be one of the shittiest jobs I ever had. (Mental note: Marsha, I am starting to see a correlation between the length of the training and the complexity of a job. *Just saying.*)

In contrast thought, the most *fun* I ever had in training was at my favorite call center in Pakistan. I was hired to conduct American accent training to all of these young college kids that were hired to call Americans and sell them mortgages. It was fucking awesome. I sat around for eight hours, just yapping. It was great. I hardly had to think at all. I was the only white woman surrounded by gorgeous young dark men; and they were eating it up. Yea, you guys here in American must have been suffering by their calls, but I was having the time of my life. Truly one of the greatest jobs I ever had. There were some days, I wasn't sure if I was training or flirting... "*Hmm. Should I fantasize about having sex with him, or with him?*" Aww yea....the good ole days! Now why can't we have training like that here in Phoenix?

3. The training manual makes a better monitor stand than anything else.

You will notice that some companies provide you with overly-thick training manuals in these large white three-ring binders. Trust me, most of it is pure fluff. They are mostly nothing but wasted reams of paper. You will notice that once you hit the floor, you will not even remember where to find anything in them. Now keep in mind, this book you're reading today is full of truths. I'm going to give it to you straight up. These manuals are much better used for an ergonomic use later---e.g. lifting the monitor. Because more than likely, your monitor is going to be too short, causing you to slump over, so just go ahead and use the training book to elevate it. And then later when you feel more comfortable, take a stroll down the alleys of the call center and notice how many others are doing that very same thing. (You will thank me later. Umm. Your welcome!!!!)

And just so you know, they are also good for using as foot rests too. I would take two training manuals that I had found orphaned in some corner somewhere and put them together and made a great foot rest for myself.

Once our team was forced into using a small training room as desks because they felt we were not important enough to be on the floor with the rest of the center (my interpretation you might have guessed); I had to share a desk with an 80-something year-old sweetie name Joan. I used two training manuals to create a wall of privacy for the both of us. I clipped them together with huge black office clips and it worked like a dream. Thankfully Joan appreciated my creativity.

So the bottom line is, if you need something stiff (you know what I mean), try a training manual--at least you will get some good out of them anyway. Look around any office and you are sure to find a manual graveyard in some corner—every call center has one.

4. Postie notes are life-savers.

Yea, they are. Make sure when you start any call center job, that you have caboodles of them in your desk; they are much more useful than the bloody training manuals we just talked about.... That is for sure. Whenever I have a question, I scan my posties first.

They are also great for passing sweet love notes to your buddies and reminders for self-affirmations. I love them! And for god's sake, get a roll of scotch tape at Walmart and keep it in your desk, too. They are cheap and they will keep your posties right where you need them.

5. The first call will make you pee your pants.

No matter what I say here, it will not prepare you for that first call you take on your new job. You will not remember what you said, or what you did. The only real advice I can give you here, is to just make sure that you wear a thin adult diaper that day. You will need it.

6. Customers are more diverse than the dialects in the northern hemisphere.

I guess the best thing to say here, is to just be prepared—you will get calls from all nationalities and all dialects. Beware! Be quick to hit the mute button if you feel a giggle coming on. This could get you into big trouble; what *you* think is funny, may not be so funny to the other person on the line. (Once again, I learned this one the hard way.)

Customer can be fun, flirty, angry, untrusting, stoned or childish. Here are some of the different types of callers that I have noticed: (Dialogues are from actual call I have had personally.)

- **The apologizer:** “I am sorry to bother you, but can you help me?”
- **The bully:** “Just take care of it. I don’t want to have to call you again.”
- **The abuser:** “You are such a fucking idiot. All of you are fucking idiots at that company. None of you know what you are doing. I am so tired of calling you.”
- **The hesitator:** “Um. Okay. I guess. Um.”
- **The attorney lover:** “I am going get a lawyer and I am going to sue the hell out of you and your company. You just watch me. You have no idea who I am. You should Google me and you will see what I am capable of doing.”
- **The flirt:** “You have an amazing voice; you should be on the radio. I don’t care that this call is being recorded, I know you see my email address and phone number in the system. I am single, and if you’re single, I would love to talk to you again. Contact me.”
- **The supervisor lover:** “Can I speak to a supervisor, right now. I do not want to talk to you---only a supervisor. Right now.”
- **The non-filter:** “Um yea. I have blood backing up in my toilet because I flushed my tampons. Whatever you do, don’t flush tampons. They say that they are flushable but they aren’t”
- **The prankster:** “I don’t have my address; it burnt up in the house fire.Are you a white girl?”

- **The grandma:** “Can you give me a minute; I need to get up off the floor.” (I then said to her, “Ma’m, is this one of those *help I’ve fallen and I can’t get up* situations? Should I call for help?”)
- **The foreigner:** “Yes. No. Come. Call. No. Yes.” (Thankfully I understand these types of one-worded sentences---thanks to the many years of teaching English as a second language. I can actually read their minds now. I *should* get differential pay for it, but I don’t.)
- **The over-cleaner:** “Oh hi. I’m in the shower right now. It took you guys so long to answer the phone, I couldn’t wait. So anyway, here is my problem...”

7. Customers honestly believe that we go faster when they yell at us.

Yes, that is true; but there are ways to get around it. As time goes you will gain experience and know how to handle a pissy customer on the other end. My favorite method is manipulating the customer.

I guess I learned this skill when I was a teenager. My girlfriends and I played a game called *Screwdriver*. Whenever we would go to a party, or church gathering, we would pick a secret word. The rules of the game were that we had to sit the rest of the evening with whichever boy would say that code word first. So in order to not get stuck with some idiot loser, I learned to manipulate conversations really quickly; in fact, I became a master at it—sort of. Sometimes it worked; sometimes it didn’t. But it was a skill that I still use to this day---especially on the phones. I choose my sentences carefully, create unreal choices and add the logical one that I want them to pick, and let the customer think that they are making the decision and that they are in control. So you’re probably wondering then, “Marsha, is it okay to lie and manipulate customer?”

Well, yea! Of course!

8. Customers are not really yelling at you; they are yelling at the situation.

Yea, try to tell my therapist that one. Although I’m great at manipulating conversations, I still cannot take it when people yell at me at all. I cry like a baby and get my feelings hurt so bad. My friends and supervisors have tried to counsel me many times about this.

“They are not angry at you; they are angry at the company or the situation,” they tell me over and over again. Just when I think I have my emotions intact, I answer another call that says this: “You are an idiot and I am suing your company. You better get your house in order lady, I am coming down to your office!” And then there I go, crying again.

Some of my friends love the adrenalin flow that comes with screaming customers, but I cower. Yep. I’m a coward. I admit it. This job is not for the weak in heart—keep that in mind. I have cried so much at work, that there is actually a support group for my supervisors on Facebook, called *So You Got Stuck with Marsha Too*. They have weekly online meetings reminiscing all of the times that they had to talk me off the ledge, and sharing tips with my most current supervisor, on how to survive my crying fits. The good news is, that I’ve had some great feedback from the group. They say that I am not crying as much these days. I’m sure that this is just due to my older age; one always gets to the point where they just don’t give a shit anymore; plus, I have taken the advice of my son to just turn the volume down on screaming customers. This seems to really work well.

9. Customers are idiots.

Yes, they are. Some of them are just fucking idiots. There is no getting around it. You just never know what type of personality you will be dealing with. Once day I heard one of my colleagues say, “I just wish I had a button that I could push that would make a hand come out of their phone, and slap them across the face.” I agree.

10. Tag-team customers are even bigger idiots.

Oh god, yes they are. It’s not bad enough to have to deal with one pissed-off customer, but then you get a team of them. They actually take turns yelling at you. I could just see them fighting with each other. “Hey, it’s my turn to look like an idiot. Give me the phone!”

And then you have the ones that are on speaker phones.....the worst! They are both screaming and you can’t get a word in edgewise.

<long sigh> Yep. It sucks sometimes.

11. Don't worry. The higher your salary, the higher your tolerance level with customers.

It really does---you would be surprised. Again, I go back to the forsaken name of the book, phone-prostitutes. Customers sometimes act as if they are our *johns*. "Look. I pay your company every month! You will take care of my needs right now!" (Seriously, I was told this just last week by a customer. I was his phone-prostitute---metaphorically speaking.)

12. Never be surprised by any call. It only gets weirder as you go along in your career.

You will hear all kinds of things, reasoning, and ideologies when you work on the phones. The public is a strange creature. And when they call, you never know what will come out of their mouth. Just be sure to keep an open heart and mind, and never be surprised. Some of the strangest calls I have heard about are people talking like they are strung out on something, talking while they are actually on the toilet, and yes, those who are actually in bed, moaning. Oh yea..... like I said, never be surprised.

I have had my share of the toilet calls in life, but the most disturbing call I encountered came from one of the technicians from our company. He called in and said that he could hear a man beating his wife while he was standing at the door of their home in California. I was in Arizona at the time and I asked him, "Why you are calling me? Call the police!"

"I don't want to get involved. It's not my job."

Electric waves shocked me thru my body. How callused can a man be to hear such things and not step in. What a fucking idiot! Since I had the victim's address up on the screens I hung up on him immediately, and called 911. It took me awhile before I was able to get an emergency number a state away but I finally did. (By the way, you can't use 911 for another state. Just letting everyone know.)

One of the funniest calls that I remember was with a man who was trapped on his basement staircase by two snakes. It was a crazy call. I stayed on the line with him as long as I could, and I was eventually able to get someone out to help him. I called him the next day to see how he was; he was in good spirits laughing about the whole ordeal.

A few weeks back, I answered the phone and this guy was in the shower. I asked him if he wanted me to let him finish and put him back on hold. He said “No,” and continued the call like everything was normal. And then later in the call proceeded to give me an update on his progress. “Okay. I have conditioner in my hair now” (Just what I needed to know right?)

Lucky for me, that call was more amusing than anything else. But I recently found out that it is not so humorous for other agents. I was chatting with a colleague at work about this book and how I have snarkily dubbed us as *phone-prostitutes*. We both giggled, but my smile quickly turned to disgust when she related her story to me. She was previously working the phones for an international bank, in the credit card department. On the surface it was a typical call center; but there were some pretty disturbing practices going on, and sadly the management knew all about it. Agents in that department had daily sales quotas and in order to reach these goals they had to *play the game*, as they say. Apparently, whenever a customer would sign-up for a credit card, the agent had to read a 3-page disclaimer to the customer. She told me that several times she had male callers that openly admitted the only reason they called in was to sit and listen to the women speak. Once the caller agreed to sign-up for the credit card, the lengthy reading would begin, and then the men would proceed *pleasuring themselves* during the call. The agents could actually hear them doing this, but because they needed to make the quota for that day they would continue the call. This story is so disturbing to me on so many levels. I had no idea that some agents were in fact having to play phone-prostitutes for real.

13.The customer is always right---unless your phone is muted.

You have heard this saying all of your life: the customer is always right. Well, that may be so when you are on the phone talking with them, but you should hear some of the things happening with the mute button is on. I had a colleague who was in the habit of putting the customer on speaker and let everyone listen whenever they were going off on him. He literally made love to the mute button. He would hit the mute button, and laugh and say all kinds of snide remarks, and in a heartbeat, unmute the customer and continue being as professional and as sweet as pie. It was amazing to watch. Now that is a skill to envy my friend.

14.The rumor is true. Using the word *fuck* during a call, will automatically unmute your phone system....so beware!!!

I think I have only dropped the f-bomb one time in all of my years on the phone. Best advice is to just pretend that there is no mute button on your system at all. One day you will thank me for it. (I heard of the woman who had called her customer an *asshole* after he had already disconnected the line, but the recorder was still active. Unfortunately, she *was* fired for it. Just thought that I would add that in.)

15. Customers are human too. I think we forget that sometimes.

More than once I had to talk people thru some hard times during a call. I have literally cried with my customers. Some of the most distraught customers were those suffering from bed bugs. You would be surprised how much bed bugs will turn a person's life upside-down. (Again, I learned the hard way.)

I had one mother who had gone into her baby's nursery and found the baby covered in bed bugs. You can just imagine how hysterical she was. She was in the process of throwing all of the furniture out the window when her call came thru to me.

Another woman simply lost it over having to leave her home for some pest control work. She began crying and saying that she couldn't take it anymore and that she wanted to kill herself. I took her words seriously and decided to take the time to listen to her. The real issue turned out to be that she was exhausted from taking care of her elderly crippled father. The pressure had just gotten to be too much. Since then, I have gotten some training on how to speak to those who are contemplating suicide. I would advise this type of training for everyone—not just call center agents. (If you are interested to learn more about suicide prevention please look into SAFETalk.)

It is easy for us to think of the other person on the line as just a faceless asshole that is just trying to make us miserable, but some of them are really hurting. We must learn to keep it in mind that they are human too. Compassion must have a place in the call center.

A colleague once shared a story with me about one of her first days in a bank call center. My friend was taking calls with her trainer sitting behind her—wired-in and guiding her along. An elderly gentleman called in distraught over his recently predicament. Apparently, the man had been recently diagnosed with cancer, but instead of the wife supporting him, she decided to leave and cleaned out all of the accounts—leaving him destitute. The man was asking for an extension on a payment that was due. The trainer instructed my friend to refuse the man. The man started crying. He begged her several more times, but my friend had no choice, she had to refuse him the

extension. Suddenly, the man pulled out a gun and shot himself. My friend quit her job after that call. I really don't blame her. I would have done the same thing.

And since we are on the subject, now would be a great time to recognize all of agents that work on 911, 112, 118, 119, 000, 110, 08, and 999 emergency calls around the world. It takes a special type of person to be able to handle back-to-back calls of real-life emergency situations. I cannot even imagine some of the calls that they have to deal with. I think whatever these guys get paid is just not enough.

(Okay. I will get off of my soapbox now. Thank you for listening.)

16. Laughter can also be part of the job.

Sadly, I'm a bit of a prude at work and everyone knows it, like for instance, I never want my desk to be decorated for my birthday, nor do I want any that holiday crap to creep on my side of the cubicle. I keep strict boundaries and my colleagues respect it for the most part, but lucky for everyone else, most call centers do not follow my suit. They like to have a great time and think of many ways to ease up the pressure of the job. Lots of food and games. Hey, we need it after being yelled at all day right?

Customers can also be a great source of fun. I remember one call I answered, and I thought the man said his name was David Spade. For a second, I was confused because he sure didn't sound like David Spade. I saw his name on the computer screen and started laughing.

"Oh," I said. "I thought you said that your name was David Spade. And I was kind of excited for a split second."

Then the man said, "No. I'm not him, but I *am* Norman Bates' brother."

I thought for a second and then we both started laughing. It was hilarious. I love it when customers have a great sense of humor. (Here's a hint just in case you didn't get it: Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, watch it.)

17. Holidays suck!

Yes, you heard me right. Remember, I am a prude at work. Even though working holidays is great money, everything else important is closed, and customers are even more pissy than usual. Not to mention that the bloody hell decorations on my neighbor's desk gives me allergies every year.

Personally, I believe holidays are for at home with family, not work. (Prude-ville right here people and I admit it!)

18. Average Call Handling Time sucks!

Whoever created this term should have bamboo shoots crammed up their fingernails. I mean, really, why are we even tracking how long it takes to speak to customers anyway. I thought it was customer service? Listen, it wasn't *my* fault that the guy was being held hostage by two snakes. Damn!

19. Oh contraire, it's perfectly okay to put a pissy caller back in queue.

They will tell you all about *call avoidance* in training and fun different ways to do or *not* to do it; but just ignore everything. I am here to tell you, if you have a customer that is being a flat out jerk on the phone, go ahead and put him back into queue.

And since we are on the subject, my personal rule of thumb is to re-route them only if there is a queue of 100 or more; otherwise you risk the chance of the idiot coming back to you. So I usually take an extra break to the bathroom when I do it, just to make sure I don't get him back.

Sneaky? I know. Not fair to others? I know. But hey, it's a jungle out there, and after all, it *is* survival of the fittest. And by the way, don't tell them that I told you to do it, okay? I have a reputation to protect. A great solution to this problem would be to have a number like, *1-800-pissy-customers-go-here*, that we could just re-route pissy customers to. Then, there would be a recording letting the customer know that they had been transferred to this number for being *uncompliant* with the agents, and to please try to do better next time they call in. *Hmm. I wonder if it exists already?*

20. Sometimes it's fun to be a fly on the wall—or this case, on the line.

I have accidentally overheard some very interesting comments that were not meant for me to hear. Maybe the customer doesn't know that I have answered the phone yet, or may have thought they had already hung up the phone but hadn't. When this happens, I always feel like I am eaves-

dropping, so I try to hang up as soon as I can from the customer. Of all the comments that I have accidentally heard, my favorite was when a customer thought I had disconnected the call and they proceeded to call *me* an idiot to the person that was with them in the car. I was like, “Really? Well, I didn’t like you much either lady!”

21.Sometimes your systems will go down, but the customer will never believe you.

I really hate that when I have to tell the customer, “I’m sorry sir, my system is down at the moment.”

And he says, “Oh! Because I need something, your system is down. Right?!” (Oh man, where is that slap button when you need it?)

22.Having false teeth are murder on the phone. Make sure they are glued in properly.

Okay, just a word from experience here for the older readers: If you have false teeth, make sure those babies are glued tight. You do not want to be right in the middle of saying something profound and then all of sudden they pop off and you just sound like blubbering idiot. A little extra glue will go a long way.

23.Sometimes you just have to go for a walk.

If you are on the verge of snapping after a bad call, please, don’t be afraid to just get up and go for a walk. The call queue will never go away; but one slip of an angry tongue could make you go away--for good. Take the walk instead.

24.Confidence in yourself is great, but it won’t always be with your company.

Talking for hours on the phone will give you confidence in your own skills no doubt, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you will develop confidence in the company that you are working for; and that's okay. We have all worked for a company that we thought sucked. Especially me, it seems like I am drawn to them. But I want to be the first to tell you that you do not need to be in love with your company to be a great employee. Sure it would be nice, and it would really help your day go by a bit faster, but it just doesn't always happen that way. There is not life-long employment any more, only life-long employability.

25.All calls are recorded.....yes, even the one to your dentist.

Beware! I've heard that all calls—whether you are in the dialer system or not—are recorded and become property of the company. So be careful. Whether you are calling your mom or your drug dealer, go outside and do it on your cell phone. You don't want to be pulled into HR and have the results of your dad's colonoscopy to be played back to you in high definition audio.

26.The quality assurance people are just sociopaths looking for revenge.

I don't care what they say, all QA associates have been recruited in to their department solely because they have been tested as having sociopathic tendencies, and have proven to upper management that they harbor uncontrollable grudges towards others within the company. I have fallen victim to them several times. One time, I was ambushed under the pretense of a team-meeting, only to find out that it was a *work-avoidance-intervention* with two levels of management present. They were kind and loving as they gazed over the desk at me. It turns out that face-down on the desk they had a week's worth of my calls printed out and highlighted in yellow. The highest in the evil empire turned the papers over and said in a yoga master voice, "We are here to help you young one. We know what you have been doing." (*Dam! Stalking much!*)

27.All supervisors are miniature Hitlers.

Now you know I am kidding right, but damn, I have worked in many call centers, and I have had both great and not-so-great supervisors---yea, I would say some of them have been Hitler-ish. So I still stand by my first statement.

The best way to stay safe at your call center job, is to keep the headsets on your head until your ears bleed, wear adult diapers (so you can cut out all bathroom breaks), and feed yourself *intravenously*. (I bet you didn't even know that was a word.) You see, as long as the system sees you *talking mode*, you will stay off of their radar, and avoid that dreaded one-on-one coaching session. I know it sounds sexy, but it's not. Trust me. This is definitely some one-on-one action you want to pass on.

28. Sup-calls can be fun if you get the right person to play along.

We have the word one-call-resolution pounded into our head the first day of training; but sometimes it just is impossible. The customer will be impossible, and you will just need to get your dictating supervisor to come to your desk and take a sup-call for you. You listen in and you can hear all of the lies the customer is trying to shovel about you. Usually, these calls are very boring and end up in favor of the customer anyway. So don't be surprised if the very thing that you were denying the customer is suddenly handed to them on a silver platter---only because they wanted to escalate the call.

But then there are times--when fate would have it--that you are *vindicated*. You have a sup-call, but your regular supervisor/dictator is out trying to conquer new territory elsewhere and you are left without anyone to take a sup-call. Suddenly a friend of agrees to step in and take over. Now this is when the fun really begins. Not only does your colleague/friend get to practice his acting skills, but they have the freedom to fabricate anything that you want to tell the customer. I am almost positive that this how Johnny Depp sharpened his acting skills during his call center job---by taking fake sup-calls. Makes perfect sense. (Johnny, feel free to email otherwise.)

And yes, I am guilty too. I have said on more than one occasion, "Hey guys. Anyone wanna take a sup-call?"

29. One-sided headsets should be banned.

Is it just me, or does anyone else have trouble hearing out of those one-sided headsets? What the hell do we have two ears for anyway? Duh. To hear with. Then why do they even make one-sided headsets? Listen. My name is not Van Gogh!

30. Your headset cord can be a noose, so learn to control it.

The cord on your headset (whether one earpiece or two) is going to drive you insane. It gets hooked on everything and just gets in the way. I have finally figured a way to get mine to be somewhat controllable. I use my fricken training manual as a base (yet another great use for the manual) and clip a huge black file clip on the spine of it. I then string my wire thru the clip prongs, pull it over to my right side, and scotch tape it to the desk. This method allows the slack to be taken up, but will allow me to pull it when I need more wire.But, now that I think about it, I guess you have to see my method to really understand it, so never mind. Just be careful with it. That is all I am saying.

31. The headset is also your umbilical cord.

Sometimes it feels like I am tied down like a circus animal; but for those of you that only understand Avatar talk, it is like linking into the *Tree of Souls* on *Pandora*. Truthfully, it's more like hooking up with the *Tree of Weirdos*. The cord---a necessary evil in the call center business. Just once I wish that they would make Bluetooth call center headsets. *OMG! That's it! I need to patent this idea right now.*

32. Freedom is a thing of the past.

Your every minute at work will be accounted for. How long you talk, how long you have break, how long you put the customer on hold. When you accept any call center job, you already know that you are now a statistic---that is it. You will be told what to do down to the way you intonate on the word hello.

One day, I went into one of the new bathrooms that was put in just off the floor. I went to wash my hands, and the motion detecting faucet came on two times with a wave of my hand, then

refused to come on again for a third wave. I belted out, “Damn. They even tell us how much water to use to wash our hands.”

33. Follow-up lists are like bags of cement and mess up your call handling matrix numbers.

As I was so nicely told by a support line agent one day, “Choose your battles carefully.” Good advice I suppose. Sometimes my follow-up lists become so long, that it takes me two hours each morning to get thru them. Be careful of this. Customers have a tendency to become dependent on you, and what was once a kind gesture on your part, somehow changes to becoming a chore. So I will have to agree with her on this one. My friends, choose your battles carefully.

34. Occupancy has a more complex equation than the Einstein’s *Theory of Relativity*.

Each call center has its own catch phrases or call-handling terminology. For example, the acronym *AHT* shows your average call handling time. *Adherence* shows how well you stayed with your scheduled timing for being on the phone and your breaks (which has never made sense to me anyway, because we are always late because we are talking on the phones, duh.). But only recently was I introduced to the term *occupancy*. The email that I received trying to explain the *occupancy* matrix was three pages long. When I asked other agents for further explanation of this 3-page mess, I was met by glazed-over eyes and voices of surrender. “I don’t understand it either. All I know is I have to look at the final box in the chart.”

Why would management create something so difficult that no one on the floor could possibly understand it? My guess: This has Illuminati written all over it. They don’t want us to understand; they just want us to just stay on the phones *t-a-l-k-i-n-g*, that’s it. Their motto: The way to control the people is to keep them confused into submission. *Wake up people!*

35. Numbers on daily reports don’t lie. (That’s what we are brain-washed in believing anyway.)

Illuminati again people!! These fabricated numbers are like getting traffic tickets; only without a court room to plead our innocence. Sorry, but it seems that I am the only one who has the courage to speak the truth about this subject. My life just might be in danger as we speak.

36.Note-taking during calls is a two-edged sword; but can save your life.

Document. Document. Document. A lesson for all agents to learn. But here is the problem for me. If I notate the account while the customer is still yapping on the phone, I will absolutely get confused. If I start writing, it is like someone inside has flipped the listening switch and I can no longer hear what they are saying to me. Then when this happens I ask them to repeat what they just said, or, I begin to sounding all fake and cheesy because I have to fall back on memorized condescending phrasing like, "Okay. Now you have a wonderful day. Okay?" *God, I hate that sentence!* But it always happens. So what I end up doing is closing the call and writing my notes while I am in *wrap up* mode---which in turn fucks up my *occupancy*---somehow---which I still don't bloody hell understand. <cough> Illuminati.

To appease the gods, I have found yet another trick in getting around this whole *occupancy* thing. I finish talking with the customer, I tell them I'm going to put them on hold for moments, lay the headsets down on my desk, and immediately cover them with my sweater. The customer thinks that they are on hold, the system thinks I am talking, and I get to finish my notes in peace. *Rockin it Marsha!*

37.There is a fine line between customer service and corporate service.

Absolutely!! We are told that we are doing customer service, but keep in mind, it is *customer service* only if it keeps *corporate service* first. Yea, I said it. Again; my life just might be in danger right now. Moving on.

38.Your bathroom break will never be long enough.....so pee in spurts and keep an extra pair of underwear in your pants.

Bathroom breaks can be really intense in call centers. At least it is in the woman's side of the bathrooms. It's very common to hear women on their phones, barking out orders to their kids or husbands, *while* they're on the toilet peeing. You really can't blame them; they're working moms and pee breaks are the only time they have to call home and make sure that the house hasn't caught on fire. I, too, am guilty of making calls in the bathroom or in the hall way outside the floor. One time, I called home and began cursing like a sailor at the top of my lungs. A supervisor stepped out and said, "We can all hear you." I just gave her a growl of a look and she turn around and went back in. Listen guys, sometimes you just have to scream on the phone---even when you are at work. We all do it.

Now at this point, you just might be wondering why I advised keeping an extra pair of underwear with you. Well, as in all things in my life, I have a learned reasoning. One day, while in a Pakistani call center, I was in the bathroom and one of the girls had started her period, but she didn't have any underwear on (Please. Stay focused here. Not wearing underwear in that part of the world is actually common and very freeing. Don't knock it till you've tried it.) Anyway, she was panicking and asking everyone that walked in to give her their underwear. I kid you not, this really happened. Finally, one lady was nice enough to give up her panties for her colleague, but warned her that she had already been wearing them for the last two days.

Since that day in 2006, I swear to God, I have kept an extra pair of underwear in my purse. If you do not believe me, stop me next time you see me, and I will show you my panties. (Wow, that just sounded so inappropriate, didn't it?)

It seems like bathroom dramas follow me wherever I go in this world. One time, in the same bathroom with the panty-lady, I somehow got locked in. Luckily I had my phone with me, and texted my supervisor. "Can you come and unlock the door of the woman's bathroom? I'm stuck in here." At first he thought I was kidding, but finally came over and let me out. We had a pretty good laugh about it.

More recently however, we had an incident at work that wasn't so funny. I had accepted a position in a brand-spanking-new call center. The center was simply lovely. It had new desks, new carpet and a brand new huge and very modern kitchen just off the floor. To give you an idea of the size of the kitchen, it had four large fridges and four microwaves, three TVs and a lovely dining area. Absolutely top class stuff. My desk just happened to be in the area right next to this lovely kitchen. One day there was an awful smell coming straight at us; it was a sewage smell. Suddenly the supervisors were running to and fro looking frantic. It turned out that sewage was backing up into the kitchen coming from under the brand new fridges. It was horrible. The sewage gas was so

horrible they had to move us to the other side of the center to work. What a disaster. My head was hurting pretty bad that day.

39. Sick days and FMLA are blessing.

Yea, they are. Gone are the days when you had to call your boss and try to sound like you were coughing up a lung in order to call out sick. Now one can call with confidence, and just straight up say, "I cannot come in today. And I want to apply it to my sick time." So now you can stay home and have all the sex you want, and not worry about getting fired---that's if you have the time available in your hour bank. So yea; call in and enjoy.

40. Don't listen to anyone, always write down your passwords.

I really hate it when they tell you not to write down any passwords anywhere. I say, "Fuck that! Write them all down. Keep a *password diary* if you have to; that way, you'll never get locked out of your system. Listen, no one else wants to work on your system anyway. So, don't worry 'bout it! Write those damn things down, and be proud.

41. Always make friends with the IT department.

Throughout my years, I have created the longest IT assistance file in history. I have always been plagued with computer issues at work, and it seems to follow me wherever I go. It could be that I may be a *slider*--people who cause strange electrical phenomena due to emitting electrical pulses--or I just might be unlucky; either way, I end up calling the IT department at least once a week, and *they know it*. One year, I called the IT hotline so many times that they knew me just by my voice. "Oh. Hi Yasmine. Having problems again are we?"

So my advice to *anyone* that works in call centers, make besties with someone in the IT department---you'll never regret it. It's like having an ace in the hole. Any kind of IT question, and <blam>, there's your answer. That is unless you marry one of them--like me. (FOFL)

Yep, I did. I married one of the call center IT guys from my job in Pakistan and believe me, it turned out to be more zeros than ones (sorry for the bad IT joke, couldn't resist) ---anyway, another

life's lesson for me. Aren't you happy that I have learned all of this shit before you, and that I am so sweet to share all of it with you. (This book is going to save millions of people time and energy. I just know it.)

42. Don't forget to log out at night.

If you don't do this you will see your supervisor's head explode, and that is just too messy to clean up. Apparently, if you don't log out properly at the end of your shift, the numbers will actually fuck up your supervisor's numbers that the Illuminati has set for *them*. (Let that tidbit of information sink in. Do with it what you will; I release all responsibility.)

43. Just know, if you see someone heading toward you with an empty box, your time is finished my friend---time to apply for unemployment. Empty box=packing your shit up.

44. Coffee should be free in every call centers.

Banks *get* it. They understand and offer free coffee to everyone that walks in the door. People are wired on coffee and actually make better decisions. So why all call centers *don't* have coffee is beyond me. I hope that managers are reading this too. Guys, give us coffee, we need it.

If your company doesn't have free coffee, it's perfectly acceptable to bring in your own. But in any case, don't forget to use a closed coffee cup; if you spill, it could be disastrous.

45. The breakrooms are lovely and comfortable--for the five minutes that you have, so don't get too comfortable.

I have really never understood why some call centers invest so much money into break rooms. Stuff like high definition TVs, foosball or pool tables? Why go thru all of the expense? Agents only

have five minutes for break after we are done peeing and calling home to yell at the kids. But, um, thanks anyway I guess.

46. Contrary to what your mom told you, things *do* grow legs and walk off.

Beware! Any lunch that is put into a call center refrigerator can grow legs and walk right on out of there. Lunches will leave you in a heartbeat for some other loser they see opening the fridge door.

I have combatted this plague in a very simple way---I never take lunches that require being put in the fridge. Seriously, I cannot understand how people can just take someone else's lunch. Are they still living in the sixth grade?

47. Parking lots can get pretty crazy.

Parking spaces can get pretty scarce in larger call centers. You will find that you may have to walk some distance to get to your building. There is nothing you can do to get around it. It is what it is. Since the beginning of time, the biggest problem that I have is that I literally forget where I park each day. It's perfectly normal to see me walking around the parking lot trying to locate my car. I really try to park in the same spot each day, or at least the same area, but sometimes I just can't. So then, I end up writing notes to myself and taping them to my desk so that I see them at the end of my day. A note will say something like this, "You parked by the old building today, the one where you saw that guy with the green spiked hair the other day." (You know you're getting old when you start writing notes like this to yourself.) Honestly, this isn't just a problem at work; I have the same issue when I go shopping at malls or Walmart. (It's pretty embarrassing.)

Call center parking lots can also get pretty fricken wild, too. Fighting, vomiting, smoking weed and having sex in cars have all been seen before. In Pakistan, we worked graveyard shift, so it was common to see people sleep in their cars---we just got used to it. One night, I was sleeping in my car, and someone thought I was dead. They began tapping on the window till I woke up. "Oh wow, Ms Yasmine," they said. "You looked *so* still. It scared me." (I wondered how long he had been standing there watching me, to notice that I was so still. *Creepy!*)

48.The temperature in the office is controlled by the owner of the company.

The owner of the company usually has a device on his desk--something like the mixer board in a recording studio. He plays with the buttons while he is chatting on the phone, not realizing that he is sending his agents on the floor into a deep freeze. There is no controlling that person, so just prepare for both hot and cold temps every day. Bring sweaters and fans in the same bag, and you will be ready for whatever mood the big-boss is in.

49.Office politics will always backfire. Stay away from it! (This is self-explanatory.)

50.Use email sparingly.

Trust me on this one. I've been in trouble more than I'm comfortable to admit, because of shitty emails that I have written. It's easy for me to push the blame on someone else, but I'll just go ahead and take it. I've also heard of others having similar issues; one email that was sent out ended up in an email-fight with a string of twenty more emails pitting co-workers against each other. Lesson here: Say as little as possible. It's just easier that way.

51.Colleague dating can be dangerous.

Dating your co-worker is pretty exciting. I get it. Like I had mentioned earlier, I married a man from my call center, so I am an *expert* at office dating. Although my hot story of forbidden love (with a younger man 18 years my junior, by the by) is still talked about today in Pakistan, it is by far the only story out there. One time, a couple got caught on security camera getting it on in the office, right at the manager's desk. How do I say this delicately? She was blowing him really good. And neither one of them remembered that the security cameras were on 24/7. Or did they?

In another incident, the electric had gone off, for whatever reason, so a couple decided to go downstairs and have sex in the parking lot, and then got caught in the act with their pants down, when the electric came back on. Really guys? Are you a bunch of teenagers?

Then there was a time, that a co-worker got pregnant by one of the supervisors, but he refused her afterwards; he was a real dick about it. I lost all respect for him after that and I really felt sorry for the girl.

See, shit like this is just not needed in the work place. And did I mention that all this drama happened in the same call center. Take my word for it. It's just not worth it. Don't do it! Please, just don't do it!

Wait.....one more time just in case you didn't get it. Don't do it!

52. Friends are abundant in the call center; that is, unless you are a screamer.

Although I am against office dating, I love making friends. The bigger the center, the more potential friends you can make; unless, you are a screamer that is. You know, one of those kind of people that talk really loud, all of the time on the phone. For whatever reason, they just can't help themselves. I worry all the time that I am a screamer. I check with the people who sit around me, and they say "No. You're not too loud." I think they are lying to me just to be nice. If I weren't so loud, then why do I pee a little bit each call? *Just sayin!*

53. It's okay to set boundaries

In case you haven't noticed by now, I am a very honest and blunt person. I may not look it, but I really tell what's on my mind to almost anyone that will listen. Always have. And probably, always will. With that being said, I have lots of boundaries and I am not scared to let those who sit around me know about them. In the past, I have even signed papers stating that I do not want my desk decorated for my birthday. I warn holiday decorators that I don't want their fake snow on my desk and to not be offended if I throw any of it back on their side of the cubby.

And if that wasn't bad enough, I have been known to measure and mark the size of the desk and let others know that this is the border, and "please, do not cross it." One time I got sat next to

someone during a training session and I looked him right in the eye and said, “You need to know now. I have boundaries. I don’t like germs. So we need to keep space between us. Okay?”

I heard him mumble under his breath, “I’m scared.”

54. **Every colleague is eccentric. Embrace difference.**

As you can tell from the last entry about boundaries, I *am* a bit eccentric. I admit it. I have my quirks about cleanliness and spacing. I don’t like foreign objects on my desk. I also have other personal things that I deal with. I get very cold very easily, so I always keep a blanket, gloves and my fuzzy slippers ready on demand. And since I am a germophobe, I keep medical masks in my desk and have been known to wear them around the office--whenever I start coughing--or someone else starts. (I guess it’s a boundary thing again; I just don’t like other people’s germs in my safe-circle.) I also tend to wear a bright pink home-made visor to block any air draft from hitting my chronically dry eye. Some days, I have to wear all of these items together---blanket, gloves, slippers, mask and visor. I admit, it can get quite comical, but as long as I am still able to be awesome at my job, I appreciate the management letting me, *do me*.

Now, in my defense, I am not the only one that marches to the sound of her own drummer. One lady I knew actually wore adult onesies to work each day. She had a wide range of colors and designs. One pair even had bunny ears. She wore them every day, and no one in management ever said anything to her. Except for maybe three days she came in jeans---we all noticed. I was in the elevator with her, and said “Oh my god. She’s wearing clothes today.”

Yes, indeed! Between all of the false eye-lashes, tattoos, mustache wax, wigs, crutches and oxygen tanks, the call center crowd is diverse, colorful and come in all types of shapes and sizes. So my being eccentric, means I fit right in---these are my people.

55. **Your cubby is now your home.**

I’m the kind of person that literally lives in my cubby hole on the call center floor. I have drawers full of things that I have deemed necessary for survival, like sharpies, index cards, four pair of glasses, candy, medicine (in a baggie, like a drug dealer) straight pins, napkins, baby wipes, coffee, tea, Twinkies, ding dongs, books, oatmeal, hairspray, deodorant, tooth paste, tooth brush, dental adhesive, super glue, sewing needles, pencils, erasers, perfume, lotion, hairbrush, 2 rolls of scotch tape (clear and shiny), pillow, make-shift footstool and lip gloss (one time I had even brought in a

book shelf from home). The only thing that I don't have is a roll-a-way bed and a porta-potty under the desk (but I hear they are experimenting in China with these things.). Because I am so prepared, I am usually the first person anyone goes to when they need something. I'm like the mom of any call center I work in---and proud of it. But if you walk by my desk and you don't see these things all around me, you know that something is up---I don't feel at home anymore and my time has come to move on.

56.The walls of your cubby is for puppies and babies.

I love to stroll up and down the rows of call centers. I love looking at my colleague's cubby walls . You can really tell a lot about a person by what they have pinned up in their space. Family pictures, drawings and cartoon memes. Personality just flows like water in these places. I love it. When you get a chance, take a walk and *smell the roses* as they say. Try to admire the beauty is displayed; you just might learn a lot about the people you work with.

57.Desktop toys are a must. Find your niche.

Another thing that you will notice when you stroll, is that everyone has their own toys on their desks. I am a people watcher by nature and I love observing agents with their desktop toys while they are talking with customers. I have seen exercise balls, stress balls, footballs, coloring books, sketch pads, knitting, playdough flower making, miniature skateboards, books, tablets, make-up, playing cards, chess game, Uno game and yes, even a Dungeons and Dragon play house. Alas, I am not as creative as others that I peep at. My only desktop toy, is a miniature Kung Fu Panda with a Hawaiian lei wrapped around him like a tube-top (he reminds me that I am the secret to being the dragon warrior in my life) and a paper ball that I have taped up with scotch tape. At times, I bounce the ball around the walls of my cubby when I am bored, but I also stab it with a straight pin--repeatedly. Strangely enough, stabbing the paper ball helps me deal with the anxiety of screaming people on the phone. I am not too proud of this strange habit, but it is what it is. It all started one day with a paper voodoo doll. I started stabbing it, but it just seemed too violent to me; and thus the paper ball was born. (Lately my taped ball has developed eyes and a mouth. I use it to mock callers who are saying obnoxious things to me. It kind of looks like a creepy Pac-Man mutation.)

Truth be told--and I just might be giving too much information about myself here but--I have left tiny pin-holes in myriads of things around me for a long time; I seem to favor boxes and Styrofoam cups. One day recently, I tried to analyze myself about the whole pin-poking obsession that I have, when I suddenly remembered that I had done the same thing in school when I was younger. I would stab my little block erasers so much with the point of my pencil, that the eraser would start breaking apart. It's so weird to me that I am still doing such craziness, but now with a taped-up-paper-stab-ball. If any shrink is reading this, please email me at marsha@marshmarie.com with your diagnosis. I thank you in advance.

Anyway. Back to this segment; feel free to be you. Find something that takes you to your happy place and bring it in. And don't touch my ball; remember I have boundaries.

58. Fans should be mandatory on every desk.

This is just my own opinion, but I think that every desk should come with hard drive, monitor, mouse, mouse-pad, keyboard and desk fan (and a stabbing ball). Can I get an amen?!

59. There is such a thing as too much when it comes to cubby designing.

I guess this is my *Ba Humbugness* coming out again, but yea. I think that little flashing lights draped over the walls when it is *not* Christmas, is just going overboard. And while I am standing on this soapbox, huge wall mirrors, every drawing that your child has ever brought home from kindergarten and your emoticon that is flipping me a birdie every time I walk by your desk, is better left at home. Just saying.

60. Art is a great healer.

Don't take me wrong, I love art. And I love art in call centers. Coloring books are extremely therapeutic for those who are under stress---and yea, I think we qualify for that. So yea,,,, color away!

61. Never get too comfortable, you will be moving soon.

If there is one thing in life that is constant, it is change. And honey, you will change your seat one thousand times each year. Okay, maybe that is bit of an exaggeration, but you will be moving around a lot. So don't be like me, and have to bring in a small U-Haul each time. It's such a pain in the ass. But when you do move, try to take your hard drive, it will save you loads of time. And by the way, your chair is a great little carrier for you.

62. The mysterious cleaning elves will touch your stuff every night---so know that.

Nothing is sacred in a call center. Keep in mind that anything you bring into the office, will get touched and moved when you are not there. I have heard of so many things that get stolen or broken over-night. Such as, money, desk fans, earbuds, keyboard, desktop mouse and even someone's inhaler. Yes, you heard me right. Someone actually had their inhaler broken into pieces and left on the desk. I'm still trying to figure that one out. They were supposed to have watched the surveillance tape to see who did it, but I never heard anything more about it. I think it was an elf with asthma who just couldn't figure out how to use it, or, it was the giant roaches we all knew that lived there. I guess we will never know.

63. Fluffy slippers should be mandatory for every employee.

I mentioned them earlier, but man, I really love my fluffy slippers. They make me feel like I am working from home and they keep my feet warm with the boss is playing with the buttons in his office again. I love them so much, that I think having a pair should be mandatory for everyone to bring in. But now that I think about it, I don't know if I want all of the guys on the floor taking off their shoes at work---at the same time. So, yea, never mind. I'm keeping my fluffy slippers a secret instead. Let me help you forget what I just said (I finally get to use my Dracula voice in one of my books now.): You heard naathing about faazzy sleepers.

64. Pot-lucks are inevitable.

Oh man, do I hate pot-lucks at work! But we all know that eventually we will have to be part of one. I usually try to bring something that doesn't involve any cooking on my part at all. I *hate* cooking for my family and I *really hate* cooking for people who aren't in my family. So I stick with bagged cheese, chips, or my recent favorite easy participation item, bananas. Everyone loves bananas.

65. Chocolate is a food staple.

Mostly everyone loves chocolate. I was so glad when I found a center director who truly understands me. He keeps two huge bowls of chocolate outside his door with bite-size chocolate for everyone to take. Please managers, follow his suit. Chocolate-workers are happy workers!

66. Shift bidding can and will change your life.

Shift-bidding really sucks, but it's a necessary evil, set in place to keep scheduling fair for all. It goes like this, according to your performance, you can bid on schedule slots that are available.

Shift-bidding and I have always had a love-hate relationship. Most of the time it works out well for me because I like working swing shifts anyway, but rest assured, I have had my fair share of shitty schedules. It's just a game that you have to learn to play. Key to winning? Keep your numbers and performance high, and you will have first choices. Best of luck.

67. Displayed queue numbers are always fabricated.

You will see displayed queue numbers on your computer screen--and maybe even on some useless screens hanging around the center. Don't depend on these at all. It may say zero in queue, but you will be taking call after call, and the customer will still say, "I have been waiting for twenty

minutes!” They are such liars!! That’s why I just ignore queue numbers; they just do not matter to me.

68.ID cards are never permanent.

Remember when I said earlier that if someone is coming towards you with a box, you are toast? Well, that is not the only way they get you. I have heard of people leaving the floor to go have lunch, only to return, try to open the door, but find that their access ID card has been voided. I think it’s a coward way of firing people, but after all of these years, nothing surprises me anymore.

One time my card wasn’t working when I came back from lunch and I almost had a heart attack.
FOFL

69.Jobs around the call center are interchangeable.

The great thing about working in call centers is the transferability that also comes with it. Say for instance, that there is an organization that you are interested in working for, joining them as a CSR is a great way to get your feet in the door. Once you have completed whatever probationary period they have, you will be able to move on to different roles that better suit your ambitions in life. You could always move into training, coaching or management positions (that is, if you *want* to be a dictator, cause remember all supervisors are dictators). This is the greatest thing that I love about this job. You really do have more opportunities within your reach; the sky is the limit; and the call center is your ticket in.

70.Office email lists will make you want to pull your hair out.

The only drawback to changing positions within the company, is that it can take forever to get the bloody email list updated. I recently changed to a different department in the center, and I just couldn’t get off the mailing list from the previous position. Daily, I was being bombed with a hundred emails. It took several requests for me to finally be removed. Then I find out that I was still not on my new email list, and I had been missing vital emails. What a ficken pain!

71. Always be careful of the ice-machine.

I know that I have dumped a lot of information on everyone in this book. I'm not a negative person; just a realist. So hear me when I say this, be careful with the ice machines; you never know what you will find in them. Seriously, I know of someone who actually got a goldfish in an ice cube, or a piece of a finger. We will never really know the truth. It was small and orange with dots...it was creepy.... That's all I know.

72. Don't look at any meteors that zoom by.....hide under your desk asap!!!

Because I feel like everyone's mother, I feel it's important to take the time to give everyone vital emergency information that's not mentioned in any of those heavy-ass training manuals we get. My first piece of advice is if you see something streak through the sky and will possibly crash, do not immediately run to the windows to see what it was. Whatever it is streaking across just might cause some kind of a sonic wave that will shatter glass and chances are you could get hurt. You can see this kind of stuff from lots of footage on YouTube about various meteor strikes around the world. The meteors hit, and then glass breaks. Scary stuff. Stay safe. Look the other way until the boom has passed.

73. Yes, it is okay to put the customer on hold during fire alarms or earthquakes.

I remember in 2005, I was working in Pakistan during the huge earthquake that hit and killed thousands of people there. We had hundreds of aftershocks and we were constantly having to evacuate the building during them for weeks. One day during a trimmer, I heard someone say, "Hey, what do I do with this call?"

"Dude, just evacuate, please!"

74.The man in the hallway with the AK-47 might just be part of a sniper teams; but check before you go back to your desk.

You never expect to see anyone carrying an AK-47 at work. One day, I was heading to the bathroom in the hallway outside the floor; I opened the door, and saw a man dressed in military garb carrying an AK-47 standing at the other end. I slowly walked backwards and closed the door. I immediately went over to one of my colleagues and said, "Um. There is a man outside with a gun." No one knew what to do. Later we found out that there was some kind of football game going on in the arena next door and police snipers were called in just in case. *Really? You could have told me that before I pissed my pants guys. These are conversations that need to take place beforehand people.*

75.Always have a plan of escape.... You just never know!

So let's have that conversation now. Have a plan of escape. Look around your office, shopping mall or movie theater and make a plan. Think about where you would hide, where you would run. What door you could lock. Honestly, I often walk around the office spying for nooks and crannies that I can fit in. Sadly, this is our reality today.

Not too long ago, I took my daughter to see the new *Beauty and the Beast* movie in 3-D. The tickets were sold out, and we ended up taking separated seats instead of sitting together. I was in the front row, and she was behind me to the right. I scanned the room for my plan of escape---as I always do. I walked over to her, leaned in and said, "See that door over there," pointing to our left, by the movie screen, "that is where you run if someone comes in with a gun. Okay?"

She looks at me in astonishment. "Um. Okay. Thank you for that happy moment, mom." she said.

"Hey. Once a mom, always a mom. I say these things because I care."

A list of call center movies:

- Outsourced (2006)
- The Other End of the Line (2008)
- Hello (2008)
- The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011)

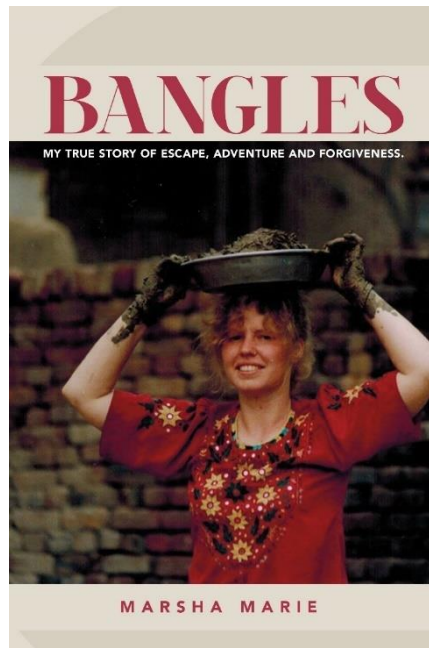
- Call Center Girl (2013)



Marsha 'Yasmine' Marie is an author, human rights activist, public speaker, radio personality, voice-over artist, blogger and mom. She has also worked as an English department head, English instructor, American accent trainer, and communication lab designer. Marsha was born in Ohio, but then raised in Arizona; to escape and domestic abusive relationship, at 25, she moved to the Middle East---where she lived and taught for over 20 years.

She's now back in Arizona and lives with her children. She has joined forces with RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network), the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence and is currently a member of various speaking bureaus to share her story. She is also working on her upcoming radio show, The Izz Wow Radio Show---a show focusing on her love for Middle Eastern music and women's' issues around the world.

Check out www.MarshaMarie.com for updates, information and upcoming titles.



Bonus Chapter from *BANGLES*

Chapter One: Surrender

by Marsha Marie

Twenty years of running ends today—March 1, 2014. As a result, I am sitting here on an international flight, wedged between my daughter and a young handsome Marine going home on his leave. I'm heading towards Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport to turn myself in.

The plane ride is long and tense. I've been chatting on and off since we left Dubai, trying to keep my mind busy. I can't believe I'm finally bringing this to an end. I've taken my head scarf off for the first time in years. I feel an unusual sense of freedom, but shyness at the same time.

Mona, now twenty-five, has been my greatest support and comfort. She calls Dubai her home and rejects the idea of returning to the States, most likely because she fears what lies ahead. Nevertheless, she stays positive.

"They are not going to take you," she says, reaffirming herself more than me. "You have to think positive, Mom."

"Okay, dear. I will," I say with a slight tremor in my voice.

Walking down the long carpeted hallway of the terminal, I feel as if everyone around me knows who I am—knows of what I have done. But in reality, each of the passengers is in their own world, clambering to see who can get to the immigration counter first. The lines are lengthy, but just as well for me.

Wait! Is that my heart pounding? Can everyone hear it? I feel as if I am in Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart." My booming chest will surely give me away.

I step up to the counter. This is it. The man asks for our passports, and I hand them over. I try to breathe, but I feel as if an elephant is sitting on my chest; it's just too heavy to bear. "Breathe, Marsha! Damn it," I scream to myself. "They'll know something's up!"

The immigration officer is wearing a typical black police uniform, safely tucked away in his little Pope-like glassed area. Tick, tick, tick on the keyboard. Each stroke—taking me closer to exposure. Will he discover in the system that I am wanted by FBI? Will he know that I have been eluding the authorities for the last twenty-two years?

Yes, he will. And he does. I see it in his eyes. I guess it's true; a criminal can always tell when they have been made.

He tries to make small talk with me about Dubai. But each stroke on the keyboard seems more urgent, more excited as he informs his colleagues on the other end of the intranet about me. I know on the inside that he is jumping up and down like a screaming little kid, "I have finally caught somebody! Come and get her!"

Suddenly, I see a large police officer standing to my right. "Can you go with this gentleman, ma'am?" the immigration officer says. Slowly and steadily we follow as I grasp Mona's hand. He leads us to a large deserted area in the terminal. About four other officers are huddled together, as if in a football game.

As I watch them discussing nausea sets in. After a minute or so, one of the four separates and comes towards us. "Ma'am. Are you aware that there are two arrest warrants out for you?" the officer inquires.

"Yes, I do," I say. "Can I get my attorney's letter out of my bag? I can show you that I am surrendering myself—to clear all of this up." I continue as I reach in my purse for the letter, "My son should be right outside waiting for me. Can I call him?"

"No! No calls," one officer from the desk area quickly snaps back. The officer standing near me takes the letter and returns to his group.

Mona starts to tear up; the pressure is now too much. This has just gotten real for both of us. I grab her hand again and hold tight—a feeble move to calm a young autistic lady who hasn't been separated from her mother in the last twenty-two years.

“Everything will be okay, sweetie. Don't worry, I have this all planned out. I have to turn myself in. They will let me out in a couple of hours. This is all part of the process.”

“Marsha, we have just spoken to your son outside. He is waiting for his sister,” the officer informs me. “Please stand up. You are under arrest; we have to take you into custody.” Like clanging church bells in my ears, the finality of it all has hammered down. I embrace my daughter and try to calm her tears.

“Why are they taking you? You have done nothing wrong!” she bursts, unable to bear silence any longer.

I try to calm her. “Sweetie,” I say, “your brother is just outside the airport. This officer will take you to him. Okay? I will be fine. This is what I came back to do. I have to do this. For all of us.”

The officer leads my precious Mona away from me—out of the terminal and towards her awaiting brother. She is sobbing. My heart is breaking. My legs go numb, and I have to sit down. A woman officer comes towards me and asks me to stand back up, then handcuffs both hands behind my back. The clasps of the cuffs echo through the empty terminal. I am escorted to the awaiting police vehicle outside.

The cuffs are cold and hard, making it difficult for me to sit in the back cab of this small pick-up truck. The escorting officer bizarrely asks me about Dubai. “Yeah,” he says, “I've always thought about going there.”

“Really?” I reply, almost reminiscent, with a touch of regret for having just left. “It really is an amazing place.”

My holding cell. Could this be any smaller? But still, nothing like I had imagined. The walls are made of cement block, with a cement shelf built into the back of it. The shelf is about two and a half feet off the ground. The entire room is painted a shade shy of daisy-yellow, and the door is oversized and metal. A woman officer un-cuffs me and asks if I would like a drink of water. “Yes. Please,” I barely utter. “This room is awfully small. Can you leave the door open for me? I'm extremely claustrophobic.” The woman very politely—and surprisingly—agrees. (You never know when you'll

get what you ask for.)

I sit on the hard cool shelf, like an obedient child who has just been given a time-out, and watch them as they cluster around the desk reading and discussing my profile on two different computer screens. I eventually get tired of trying to eavesdrop, and look to the floor to size up the room. “Six feet by four. Yuck! Please God, don't let them shut the door.” I pray this under my breath with all sincerity.

“Is it true?” I hear suddenly. I look up and see one of the officers is slightly leaning against the metal door frame, with his arms crossed. “Are you really surrendering yourself after running for twenty-two years?”

“Yes,” I say, without even a touch of pride.

“That took a lot of courage,” he replies. “Well, I think you're doing the right thing by turning yourself in. Don't worry. This will all be just a memory in the morning.”

After a while the woman officer returns to me. We are going to transfer you to the main city jail now. I will have to put the handcuffs on you again. I stand up and go along without any kind of hesitation. One of the male officers escorts me out to the transporting wagon, or paddy wagon as some call it. He opens the little cab area between the driver's seat and the back cage. He guides me in. It is cold and dark—almost black. The seats are hard plastic and my hands hurt pressing against them. I try to scoot over, but my long tight skirt is only complicating matters. I half lean over and my head rests on the side of the cab just behind the driver's side; my feet are still behind the passenger's side. I give up trying to move any further. The only light I can see is from the streetlights looking out the front windshield through the metal screen that separates me from the front. Suddenly, I feel true isolation for the first time in my life. Such intense loneliness I have never felt before. I begin to weep softly.

A few seconds later, I hear a voice coming from behind me. “Mom. Whadja do?” I'm a bit taken back. It's a young male's voice coming from sheer darkness. Not knowing if I am annoyed that someone is getting up in my business, or relieved to hear a human voice in my darkest moment, I

barely give the effort to turn my head to see who is speaking to me.

Oh, what do I even say to THAT? I don't reply but continue to sob.

He says, "Oh Mom, don't worry. Everything's gonna be okay. You'll see the judge in the morning and you'll get to go home. Morning will be here before you know it." Then the voice goes silent again. A driver climbs in the front and we're off. I peer out my screened opening to see if I can recognize Phoenix. I recognize nothing.

We arrive at the main city jail, or "the matrix," as the streets call it. I continue through a rigorous and calloused check-in process, from one small holding cell to the next—all serving different functions: mouth swabbing, groping, finger-printing and of course the infamous mug shot. Like controlling cattle, the door opens to one of my holding cells. The officer calls my name and tells me to stand behind the podium for my picture to be taken—leaving me open for yet another opportunity of enquiry. "So-o," the officer says, all drawn out. "I hear that you have been hiding out for over twenty years. Is that true?"

"I am not proud of what I have done," I murmur.

With amazement in his voice and almost a chuckle, he says, "Well, you're either really good, or we're really bad?" It almost sounds like he wants me to answer the question, but then he quickly adds, pointing at the card taped below the camera, "Go ahead and look at this card right here." Snap! "Turn." Snap!

After the mug shot, the officer instructs me to go to the nurse's station. This main function area is now co-ed. The female nurse sits behind a huge desk. She is wearing a typical white nurse's uniform. She looks over at me and says, "I am going to ask you some questions and you just answer. Okay?" I shake my head, agreeing, another tear streaming down.

"Do you smoke?"

"No."

“Do you use marijuana?”

“No.”

“Do you use heroine?”

“No.”

“Have you ever shared a needle with anyone?”

“No. Really, are all of these questions necessary?”

“I’m sorry, but I have to ask them.” She continues, “Have you ever been a prostitute?”

“No!”

“Have you... Have you... Have you...?” The questions keep coming.

“No...no...no....” I answer with mirroring rhythm.

Finally, the nurse says, “You know what? Looking down this list, I don’t think we need to continue. I can already tell what the answers are...”

Suddenly, just as she was ending the sentence, a mammoth of a man inside the holding cell directly behind me starts slamming his fists on the metal doors and screaming profanities at the top of his lungs. I jump in surprise as fear strikes through me as lightening. I begin crying even harder—but now out of terror. The man keeps pounding and pounding on the door. Three officers bellow at him to calm down. He doesn’t stop. The door flies open. They tackle the man and start tazing him.

My entire body is literally shaking by this point. “I don’t belong here!” I sputter at the nurse, knowing very well she can’t help me.

She leans in closer to me over the desk and says, “Do you want to know how to survive in here?”

I shake my head as if to say: yes.

“Just focus inward. Try to block out everything that is happening around you . Okay? You will make it through the night.” (Again, a voice of reason comes to me when I most need it). She continues, “It’s nice seeing someone that really doesn’t belong in here—if you know what I mean.”

I nod, wiping another tear away. “Thank you.”

I get up and walk to the next process station. I take a seat at the beginning of the long bench. As we are called, we move down to the right. In due time, I make it to the end of the bench. My tears have dried for now. A young boy seats himself next to me. I continue looking forward. Suddenly, I hear him say, “Are you okay, Mom?”

With instant recognition, I look up towards the boy. It’s the same voice I heard in the dark hole. With a half-smile, I reply, “Yeah. Yeah. I’m okay.”

“Has anyone told you what will happen tonight?”

“No. No one.”

“Once you’re done here, you’ll go out into the hall in the next room. They’ll search you again and then take you to another cell for the rest of the night. Then in the morning you’ll see the judge, and then you’ll get out. Don’t worry. It’ll go by fast.”

“Thanks. What’s your name?”

“Kevin.”

“Thanks, Kevin.”

Again they call my name and take me to the next hall just as Kevin had said. The beckoning officer politely instructs me. “Stand here, young lady. Remove your coat and shoes.”

A woman officer heads over with surgical gloves on.

Oh my God. What is she gonna do?

She stands directly in front of me and says, “Bend over at the waist and hang your arms straight down.”

I oblige without saying a word.

“I am sorry for doing this,” she says. She runs her fingers along the bottom-inside of each cup in my bra. She then grabs the middle area where the cups are joined, and shakes it to and fro. Then she says, “Now put your hands against the wall.” Another patting down.

Again? How many times are we gonna do this tonight?

“Alright, put your stuff back on and stand against that wall.” The officer then leads me down the hall into my next holding tank. It’s about 2 a.m., and there are about twenty-five women sprawled out like cats sleeping on the benches and the floor. The room has two phones on the wall to my right, and a u-shaped cement bench to the left. There is a toilet against the back wall and a green thirty gallon garbage can by the toilet. How odd. I find a narrow spot along the middle of the u-shaped bench and settle in—nothing to do but wait for my attorney to arrive.

As women often do, I carefully chose my wardrobe for the arrest. Unfortunately, I didn't consider that I might have to sleep on the floor of the city jail. I'm wearing my favorite long Turkish black skirt with a black turtleneck shirt, my bluish-purple power-blazer, black high-heels, and—to top it off just right—a multi-colored long mini-stone necklace. Maybe I over-thought it just a bit—and by the looks of it, I am the only one who did. Some of the women have dirty jeans on, some shorts and tank tops. One lady even has her house slippers on. But the thing freaking me out the most is this young girl who’s scratching and shaking. Forget her dirty clothes; she has scabs all over her body. What is wrong with her? I later found out that she was a Meth-addict. (This was my first encounter with someone who was on Meth. It was not pretty.)

The cement holding cell is chilly, with a dirty brown cement floor, and a pungent metallic smell. Suddenly, my claustrophobia kicks in. I find it harder and harder to breathe. My eyes begin dashing to and fro, looking for a passage for air. I lock onto the two-inch space under the steel door. I

convince myself that the air coming from under the door is just for me. I can actually see it flowing towards me; it's invisible, but I can see it. "Okay, calm down. You can do this. Breathe... Breathe..." I say to myself, between each long gulp of air. I start to relax. My breathing stabilizes.

One of the girls gets up and uses the toilet. Oh my. Am I supposed to look the other way? After she finishes, she lies down in a different spot. I notice a depleted roll of toilet paper next to me. The other girls are using the rolls of paper as pillows. I had better take that and keep it with me for later. I slyly snatch the roll and press it flat, stuffing the roll into the left front facing of my blazer. Okay, now I'm ready just in case. (That stash of toilet paper came in very handy later that night, as the call of nature came to light in the most inappropriate way for public display. I tried to scrape up some self-respect by using the garbage can as a barrier. (Not one of my funner moments in life.)

Around 5 a.m., we are suddenly jarred alert by an officer at the door. He yells out that it is time to eat. Like a scene in a zombie movie, the women begin rising from the floor and take a spot on the bench. I wonder what they serve in jail. The officer leads a young man in an orange prisoner jumpsuit holding an open box with clear baggies spiking out the top; he couldn't be more than twenty-four years old. Without uttering a word, he walks around to each woman in the cell and offers them the three entrée items from the menu tonight: One small bottle of school cafeteria fruit juice, one hamburger bun, and one baggie with a few tablespoons of creamy peanut butter.

The two "waiters" leave the cell and the women begin devouring. I decide that it's best to ration. Who knows when my next meal will be? So I take a few bites of the bread, and suck some of the peanut butter for flavor. I savor it slowly, and then down it with a small swish of juice. Once the women have finished, they return to their spots on the floor and benches, and drift back off to sleep again. I sit silently in the same spot, thinking. Keeping my food supply near—and just thinking.

Time crawls its way to morning. The sound of the keys rouse me. Finally. Maybe it's time to see the judge? They call out a list of names. Yes! Thank God! I wait anxiously for my next instruction. He tells us to line up against the wall outside in the hallway. With my peanut butter and juice bottle in tow, I accept my place in line and follow the lead. We walk slowly with no sudden movements into a small white room. Again they take my fingerprints. A lady officer looks at my food and says while pointing to a trash can, "You can't take that with you inside to see the judge. You need to dump it here."

There goes my food supply.

The officer leads us into the courtroom next door. It's cold, and much brighter compared to the holding block—mostly white floor and walls.

Hey, where's my lawyer? I look around and keep thinking that he will come into view at any minute, but he isn't. The proceedings begin anyway. A recorded male voice comes over the speaker: "You have a right to..." The words fade into the background. I whip my head to and fro. Where is my attorney? He is nowhere to be found.

A female judge, sitting on a circular brown platform, calls my name with authority. "Marsha Marcum." I walk to the marked spot as one does on a performance stage. "State your name and date of birth, please," the judge commands.

My voice crackles as I answer her.

The judge continues, and without any explanation announces, "Because of your record, you will remain in jail until your hearing."

What? My legs go numb. Oh my God! I'm going to jail? Where is my attorney? This was not supposed to happen like this.

Suddenly, I remember that my attorney had scheduled a quash warrant hearing for me. I finally muster the courage to speak to the judge. "But, Your Honor, I came to America for a quash hearing," I say with great desperation. "I thought my attorney would be here for me right now, but he isn't, and I don't have his number with me. My purse went home with my children."

"Okay. Let me look into it. Go back and sit down. The bench will call you up when I am ready."

My mind is racing a thousand words a minute. I begin mumbling to myself, "I shouldn't have come back home. This was not supposed to happen like this. Where is my attorney? Oh God, what have I done?"

After what seems like hours, but in reality is only about thirty minutes, the judge calls me back to the

bench again. “We looked into it, and yes, you do have a hearing set in a few days. I will go ahead and release you.”

Oh, thank God! “Thank you, ma'am,” I say.

I am transferred to one process room after another. Each room is getting smaller than the one before. I wait anxiously to be released. I am still trying to fathom what in the world happened with my attorney. Why didn't he show up? I replay it to myself over and over again. We had this planned out for well over a year.

The final process room has a phone in it. I try to call my son to let him know that I am being released. But I can't remember the bloody number. I think as hard as I can, but it's just not coming to me. Luckily, one of the other girls being released is calling her mother on the phone next to me. I ask her if her mother could go onto Facebook and let my son know what is happening—it's worth a shot, anyway. After twenty minutes, her mother has found him. “He is on his way,” she says.

Awesome!

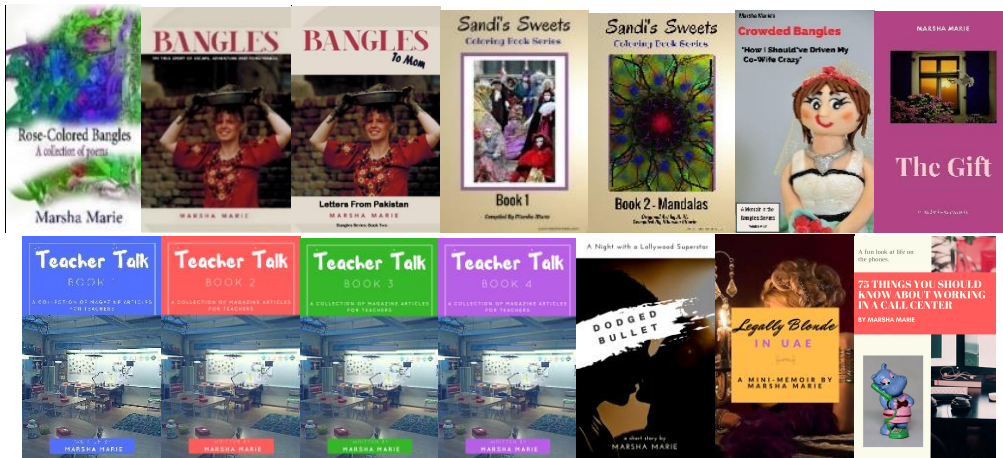
At last, the final door of the matrix opens. I step outside with great anticipation, but nothing greets me except a light shower of rain. But I'm not sad. I'm back home. I made it to America. These cool refreshing drops are a welcome change from my former desert refuge. At last, appearing from around the corner, I see my son and daughter on American soil. We embrace. This is the first day of a lengthy legal battle, but my two children are here beside me, to love me, to support me and my past decisions.

“Son,” I anxiously ask, “where's my attorney? Did you call him and tell him I was arrested at the airport?”

“Oh yeah...” he says, “I forgot.”

Books by Marsha Marie

www.MarshaMarie.com



- ***Rose-Colored Bangles: A Collection of Poems***, Indie Published, 2016. (Bangles Pre-Launch release.)
- ***Bangles: My True Story of Escape, Adventure and Forgiveness*** (Bangles Series, Book 1), Indie Published, 2016.
- ***Sandi's Sweets Coloring Book Series***, Books 1 and 2, Indie Published, 2016. Not for Sale: For Domestic Violence Shelter's only.
- ***Bangles to Mom: Letters from Pakistan***, (Bangles Series, Book 2) Indie Published, 2016
- ***Crowded Bangles: How I Should've Driven My Co-Wife Crazy***, Indie Published, 2016.
- ***The Gift: a mini-memoir***, Indie Published 2017
- ***Teacher Talk: A Collection of Magazine Articles for Teachers, Books 1-4***, Indie Published, 2017
- ***Dodged Bullet: A Night with a Lollywood Superstar***, Indie Published, 2017
- ***Legally Blonde in UAE: A Mini-Memoir***, Indie Published, 2017
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