

Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast, I'm your host Allison Tyra and today we're talking about two spectacular jailbreaks.

Standing by your man isn't always easy, but Gaby Bloch and Mary Ann Bugg went above and beyond to break their partners out of prison. While both demonstrated loyalty and ingenuity, that may be where the similarities end. Mary Ann was a bushranger, a type of 1800s Australian bandit, while Gaby was a member of the French Resistance during World War II.

Let's start with Mary Ann. Born in 1834, she grew up experiencing all the discrimination you'd expect for someone who was both female and Aboriginal, being Worimi (Warrimay) on her mother's side, and the daughter of an English convict on her father's. First married off at age 14, she had several children and exes by the time she took up with Frederick Ward in 1860. He went by the name, and no I'm not joking, Captain Thunderbolt. Ward was basically on probation for horse theft, and when he violated that probation, he was sent back to Cockatoo Island, which is not as adorable as it sounds. The island prison in Sydney Harbour, about 400 meters of shark-infested waters to swim - which Mary Ann reputedly did, carrying a file to take care of those pesky leg irons. They carried on robbing folks and making babies for several more years before separating at the end of 1867. It's also worth noting that jailbreak aside, Mary Ann was probably doing the heavy lifting in their partnership while Thunderbritches claimed all the credit. She hunted their food, was the only one who could read a map, scouted ahead and spread false information to evade authorities and even taught him to read. He was also shot and killed within a year and a half of their split, while Mary Ann lived to age 70. She also had 13 kids and evaded arrest by pretending to go into labour.

Several decades later and halfway around the world, Gaby Bloch had been arrested with her husband and other members of the French Resistance in October 1941. Although Gaby had been released after three months, the men were still being held by the government on charges of treason, and at risk of being turned over to the occupying Nazi forces. Gaby turned to Virginia Hall, one of the most effective agents sent to France by the UK's Special Operations Executive. Known as the "Limping Lady" due to her prosthetic leg, Virginia's brilliance was often overlooked. The women arranged to have a radio smuggled into the internment camp at Mauzac, and Gaby would travel the 35 miles there several times a week, sneaking in messages, tools and supplies a bit at a time. Gaby also recruited support from the staff - if she'd said the wrong thing to the wrong person, or been discovered smuggling items into the prison, either could have resulted in her death. The plan was almost ruined when one of their inside men accidentally slipped a message into the wrong guard's jacket - fortunately, that guard was happy to be bribed to keep silent, but it must have been terrifying when he confronted Gaby with the note. The escape went off without a hitch in July 1942, and although Gaby was arrested, Virginia had made sure Gaby had a rock-solid alibi for the time with plenty of witnesses and the police were forced to release her. The Special Operation Executive's official historian called the prison break 'one of the war's most useful operations of the kind'. Gaby and her children reunited with her husband in London, where the couple went on to serve the French security services. Both received the Legion d'honneur, and Gaby was recommended for the King's Medal for Courage in the Cause of Freedom.

Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast, and remember - well-behaved women rarely make history.