



Ellis Henican

# Correction: She's Not Sinnamon

"I'm not Sinnamon."

This is important to Cheryl Howard. So let's quote her again.

"I'm not Sinnamon."

Howard, a 30-year-old correction officer on Rikers Island and mother to a 13-month-old girl, has been trying to spread that message — trying desperately — for many months now. But she's not having much luck.

So one more time. Let's do what we can to help get Cheryl's message out. "I'm not Sinnamon," she said again yesterday, speaking now at the Lower Manhattan office of her lawyer.

The lawyer had just filed an \$80-million lawsuit in Cheryl Howard's name. So maybe someone might listen now.

Cheryl Howard is most definitely not Sinnamon, the lawsuit says.

Sinnamon, for those who don't know, is the *nom du porn* of a semi-famous X-rated actress. She's been in dozens of hard-core movies and appears, quite undressed, in such adult magazines as "Black Tail." Her films — none G-rated — include "Behind the Black Door," "Black Orgies" and "Soul Search." The real Sinnamon is also a featured dancer on the West Coast strip-club circuit.

But one of the things this Sinnamon isn't is Cheryl Howard, correction officer and single mom from New York.

Yes, the two women do look somewhat alike. Both are petite with wavy dark hair and a cafe au lait complexion. But that's about it. No, they have never met. No, they aren't related. No, they are not one.

But somehow or another, this rumor got started last year, a rumor that has turned Cheryl Howard's life into Kafka, a rumor that will not die.

The talk spread like chicken pox up and down the halls at Department of Correction headquarters. It was passed from cellblock to cellblock at Rikers. You can only imagine how that made going to work.

"We have to take inmates to chow," Howard said yesterday.

"There's a whole bunch of them in one crowd. They just yell things out through the crowd. They yell things like 'porno star.' They yell her name at me. But you don't know exactly who's saying it."

As you might imagine, the inmates aren't too shy about using vulgar words, or making vulgar suggestions, or shooting vulgar gestures Howard's way.

Every day, everywhere. "I've walked on poats," she said,



Sinnamon, shown above on one of her porn video boxes, bears a striking resemblance to correction officer Cheryl Howard.



Newsday Photo / Michael E. Ach

"and the inmates have the magazine so I can see it when I walk past. That's not coincidental."

All of that's been bad enough. What's been worse is that the bosses at Correction were all too quick to believe this talk.

Apparently, they barely bothered to investigate at all. They just went ahead and filed disciplinary charges against Cheryl Howard. She was accused of "bringing discredit upon the department" and taking outside work

without permission. She was forced to surrender her off-duty gun right away.

"When they first called me down, I didn't know what I did," she said. "When they told me it was because I was in this magazine and the videos, I couldn't believe it."

But no one would believe her denials. And the talk was quickly spreading from the job to the street.

The clerk at her local Post Office: "You're the woman that's doing the porno movies."

A recently released inmate she met outside a store: "You're the corrections officer who's the porno star."

And nothing she said could convince anyone.

Finally, Howard showed up at Philip Taubman's office.

Taubman is no private investigator. He's a lawyer. But it didn't take Magnum PI to sort this one out.

All it took was a phone call, and finally the disciplinary charges were dropped.

Taubman looked on the box of one of those Sinnamon videos, the one called "Soul Search." There, bright as day, was the company that made the movie. Western Visuals, the company is called, and the office is in Van Nuys, Calif., just outside L.A.

A man named Bill Falcon, the company's president, came to the phone when the New York lawyer called.

"No way our Sinnamon is your client," the movie man told the lawyer. She's a California actress and dancer. Real name: Kamilah Rouse.

The movie man knew this and could prove it. The files in his office included the real Sinnamon's ID and Social-Security number — even the results of her AIDS test.

He happily sent a letter to New York, clearing Cheryl Howard, clearing her in no uncertain terms.

And so yesterday, the lawyer and the client were sitting down together with their \$80-million lawsuit and their heart-felt plea.

"It's just incredible," the lawyer said. "A city agency with scores of investigators — scores and scores of them — couldn't find what I found in one phone call. I suppose all black women must look alike to them."

Not that the story is done. Not yet. "Everywhere I go," Cheryl Howard said, "people call me a porn star. I want everybody to know it's not me. They still think it's me — no matter what."

"But I'm not Sinnamon. I'm not."