THE WAY IT IS...

It's the year 2001 and we must still rely on the sensationalized world of media to understand society, while it is known this does not represent the majority of us. Our perception of the prison systems is an example of this: Suspense novels, cable TV and news would have us believe that all prisoners are violent, evil, and stupid. The truth is, the majority of prisoners in this country are poor or uneducated. Most are not killers or rapists, but victims of an economic system in which the majority of wealth is in the minority of people's hands; i.e., the rich get richer, the poor get prison.

We are incarcerating men, women and youth at a rate higher than before, and funds that could be used for rehabilitation or regeneration and education are used to build new prisons. The portrayals of life in prison within these pages present an aspect of our culture that is hidden with barbed wire fences, razor wire, and a thick wall of misinformation.

MODERNIZATION OF PRISONS...

Prisons throughout the United States have been streamlined to bare necessities for a prisoner's day-to-day existence. Prisoners are forced to live in what has become a wasteland of isolation and despair. Each day inmates can be found wandering in prison yards, as if suffering from what appears to be a catatonic form of schizophrenia. Minds which once had the potential for growth are slowly turning into mush. Upon close observation, we see the psychological fight of productive energy, resisting being consumed by slothfulness and inactivity.

The silent screams of dying souls can heard as they slowly dissipate into the province of the living dead. Prisons, my friends, are the burial grounds for minds entombed alive in fields incapable of supporting life; the breeding ground for the virus which destroys the will to live, and the cafeteria for politicians partaking in a feeding frenzy of human life. Concrete and steel are the coffins, created as airtight cells, ensuring the asphyxiation of the mind, the soul, and the spirit seeking to know itself.

FROM HELL ITSELF...

Behold! From these tombs of insidious destruction, from the embers of destroyed minds, there are those able to rise above the smoldering ashes in order to transcend Dante's burning inferno. These find forms to become the saving of creative selves; some in art, some in reading, some in religion, but escape is possible.
PRISON LIFE...

is monotonous and dreary. Steel, concrete, and wire. In conditions where there is no overcrowding, two inmates live in a closet-sized cell with bunk beds, a toilet and sink. In situations were there is overcrowding, which is almost everywhere, prisoners may be lined up in cots, on the floor in a gym, or chapel, or tripled up in small cells. There is no freedom and no privacy. Brutality is a daily part of life. Rapes, fights, stabbings, harassment from guards and other inmates, are constantly reported. Prisoners are disempowered to change this, but Jesus can. Reporting instances of trouble can get you in more trouble, loss of privileges and solitary, or a snitch label.

Then there is lock-down. This can be temporary, or last a long time. It is a temporary restriction of one's rights. Prisoners are stuck in cells, refused mail, visits, library, even showers and phone calls.

Then there are maximum security units popular in U.S. prisons. Here inmates are kept alone in a cell twenty-three hours a day or longer. There are documented incidents in control units of sensory deprivation, arbitrary beatings, excessive restraint and mail censorship.

WHY IS RECIDIVISM SO HIGH?...

Prisons could have medical attention, counseling, rehabilitative programs, and educational services available to all inmates; i.e., school/work programs. Once California had a day-for-day program. Go to school or work and get a day off your sentence for each day spent.

Classes and therapy are seen as lavish treatment for criminals, rather than necessary measures to reduce returning to prison. Convicts are released with no skills, no education, no money, no place to stay, but it costs an average of $35,000 a year when they return. Your tax dollars at work.

STAND-OFF...

Let's say George gets into debt to one of the prison gangs. He may have gambled and lost, bought drugs and did not pay, even may owe for sex. Once in debt, he has a problem. If he does nothing, he could die or get hurt. He could go to the police (prison authorities) but they will do nothing unless he gives up all names. Then he carries a snitch label forever. Prison is a terrible place.

WHO IS IN PRISON?...

There are people in prison who have done terrible things. We do not defend them. There are people who are uncaring, self-loathing, mean and more than capable of harming others. Most are uneducated and from poor families. Many are truly not violent criminals. Most are not in prison because they committed a violent act. Since 1980, 84% of the increase in prison population is from non-violent offenders for drug-related crimes. We in the US have the highest incarceration rate. The world puts away 100 or less per 100,000; we put 645 out of 100,000 in prison. In a 12-year period, California built 21 prisons and one University. States have been known to spend
$28.9 billion on corrections and $14 billion on welfare.

DO THE CRIME, DO THE TIME...

The Chicago Tribune printed that Prosecutors concealed evidence of innocence or presented evidence they knew to be false in at least 381 homicide convictions that were overturned. California is going to see similar stats.

DEATH REPORTS...

Rep. Asa Hutchinson, a former prosecutor, wrote a bill to have investigations of death when over 1,000 inmates nationwide die each year of suspicious circumstances. I remember a case where an inmate's death was ruled a suicide by shoving socks down his own throat [yeah, right!] in a maximum security cell. He was there for raping a female officer.

JESUS ON THE MAIN LINE

President after President has said we need more volunteer programs in prison to help. But more and more programs are cut, despite efforts to keep them intact. Regeneration does prevent recidivism. A man or woman who is set free by Jesus is free, indeed.

Your involvement in Someone Cares Prison Ministry will help change the face of grief in prison across the nation. Paper Sunshine brings into prison a ray of hope. Sure, you might be matched with a terrible person who wants nothing but what he or she had on the street. But you just might help someone find the straight and narrow path to Christ's freedom. We will help weed out those who try to use you and us.

BLEST BE THE TIDE

I am totally amazed at the radio show done at Voice of Prophecy last month. The phone rang off the hook, the E-mails loaded our computer, mail from you and inmates came in. We had a large pile of applications, next to a load of letters to send to inmates for applications, and all were matched. Some inmates who requested an application got one with a Pen Friend attached. God is so good.

If you have not been matched yet, it's on the way. We have had massive responses before, but nothing close to this. Talk about Mountain Tops! We're up in the clouds. God Bless each of you joining us, and those of you who have kept us going.

Is a new Prison in line for us? Stay tuned for this breaking story, as they say in the news business.

THE ROAD AHEAD

This ministry grows by three for every one inmate helped. We are running behind but should
soon be caught up. We need to increase our funding base, and pray that each of you not supporting us will jump right in. Fear in the economy scares many and does affect us. We do nothing without funds on hand.

We can use two quality used cars. One car's speedometer does not work, but it sure has a lot of miles. Prayer keeps it going. An interesting way to support this ministry is to buy AVON products from Yvonne, all ordered on the Internet and shipped direct to you. Yvonne will tell you how. Dear Friends, we hate to ask for money, but Satan works overtime. We want to claim the Victory! Jesus paid the price to give these men and women a chance!!!

YVONNE'S CORNER

It is very difficult to work in and among the surroundings that Don mentions above, but that is the way the system works. I have learned to look at prisoners with love and compassion, as our Dear Savior must look at us in a sin-filled world. There was a time in most of our lives that we did not have the T.V., or computer games, etc. We really had quality time together as a family, sometimes two or three generations. What joy! I'm beginning to think that I must be getting old, as it seems so simple to just stay at the foot of the cross, and be spiritually fed. I've noticed that in our daily lives we learn something new from just staying at the foot of the cross.

God definitely brought us here for a reason, so we start out anew, with your help. We want each of you to know that we pray for you on a daily basis, and to us prayer is essential!

Continued...

Oh, yes, I do sell Avon products through the Internet to help supplement our income. You can go to the Internet for Avon Products, and I have a web site. It is ymeavon@myavon.com. How will they know that I should receive the credit? You give them my phone number (812) 342-3021. We thank Avon Products for this opportunity, and May God Bless each one of you!

BIG DOOR OPEN

My life has been hell on this earth: high tech, high speed, big bucks. The more I made, the more I needed. I ended up stealing and going to prison. This started a massive pity party, as I lost wife, home, friends.

Through my Pen Friend I learned I did not lose my talent. I made a mistake and paid the price. My friend sent me the addresses of 14 computer companies. I wrote them all, telling the truth about what I did, and have two job offers on my release the first of April. I was also told that had I attended church, I might have found a better way. My wife remarried after the divorce, but my two kids are picking me up and one is taking me home. Folks, those of you writing, don't give up, we need direction and someone who cares.

Terry

PRISON PEN PALS

Dear Don & Yvonne:
While a prisoner incarcerated in Virginia from 1983 to 1996, I was a client on your pen pal list. I was teamed up with a wonderful lady out in Washington state and was blessed by the companionship that we shared. Now I am a citizen in free society and actively involved in prison ministry in the Potomac area.

My wife has expressed an interest in writing to prisoners and I am at this time requesting information needed in having my wife registered so she can begin a letter ministry. Please accommodate me as soon as possible.

Thank you, In Christ,
Nelson Ryder

JEAN'S JOTTINGS

I think Don should write a book on the prison system, telling it like it is, although I can't imagine where he or Yvonne would find the time.

Sometimes I go with my best friend to visit her husband, and I've noticed that what was a minimum security, trustee facility, has been turned into a formidable place with extra razor wire on the fences, and the entrance building looks like a concentration camp, razor wire to the roof including an extra barrier atop the edge.

The warden has issued an edict that visitors must fill the room from front to back, no longer able to choose where they feel comfortable. The rules upon rules are just as hard on the guards as the inmates.

Multiply $35,000 by the number of inmates in your local jail, or prison, or state, and you can begin to see the enormity of money being drained from productive society to keep people locked up. Many do not belong there. Many more do, and all need your caring kindness.

Those who Don said were so depressed may be suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder the year around in their gray environment. Try to write letters to your inmates on bright, interesting papers, use colored inks, send photos of your spring flowers, and use colorful word pictures to describe events in your life (nothing personal-you are writing to very lonely people).

Trust me, they already know they're sinners. Send them Jesus' incredible love in your messages, like apples of gold in pictures of silver. Encourage them in whatever way you can—a clean joke, an uplifting Bible verse, and let your Pen Friend(s) know you love them as Christ does. Be careful about how you say you love them, however, as your friend could mistake it for the kind you can only share with your spouse.

Welcome, new Pen Friends and supporters! Your ministry of Paper Sunshine is appreciated, not only by us, but those you will bless, also.

Someone Cares Home Page