SUCKER PUNCHED BY GOD!

It was 1965 when my world caved in. I had been in and out of jail since I was 13 and still had not learned my lesson. I was into everything I could get my hands on; if it was theirs, I wanted it. I had gotten high at a party and was driving, who knows where, when a red light shined behind me. I almost floored it but saw the cop was alone. I pulled over, my .38 next to me. The cop walked up and saw who I was. He said “Terry, about time we got you,” as I pulled the trigger.

I took off but did not run long or far. Now I was headed for prison, given 25 to life; the officer did not die.

When I got to San Quentin I learned quick. I was into gangs, drug trafficking and every-thing else. I was an enforcer, and a member of the Arian Brotherhood. I was pretty smart and to make it in prison I saw that religion was being used by a whole lot of guys, running numbers on Christians to get what they needed. Not me. In the late seventies I was transferred to Soledad. I was there a minute and got six months in the hole for stabbing a dude. The Hole: a prison in a prison. No radio, no TV. Nothing to read. Maybe a shower a week.

There was an old con in the cell across from me and he said, "If you want to die in here, don’t change. If you want freedom, get to know Jesus.” I asked if he were a Christian and he said "Yes." “Why are you in the hole?” Some bloods a (black prison gang) were hassling him and he said, " I could no longer turn the other cheek. God has forgiven me, though. We rapped about everything but he kept coming back to something like the peace that passed all understanding.

I finally got out and was sent to Soledad Central, one long hallway to hell. Back into gang stuff and misery. My cell mate was a pretty nice guy and pretty smart. He said, “Terry there is a better way.”

I asked “what?” and he simply said, “You have got to change.

“That Christian stuff?” I asked.

He said, “It sure does not hurt the way you are hurting.” The next night he told me they were having a special program in the Chapel--food, punch, music. Me go to Chapel? Never!
The word on the yard was riot and I changed my mind. Chapel is a secure place when things go down. I was surprised at how many guys were there. I listened as they introduced The God Squad, Don & Yvonne. Yvonne handled the music, and even though I did not know the songs it was a bit better than anything I had seen in a long time. The singing finished, and this dude walked up front. He said, “Let’s pray.”

Who, me? Never!

My cellie tapped me to bow my head. I heard the praying voice coming my way.

A voice that sent shivers through me said, “This man needs to know Jesus.”

I lifted my head and he was looking at me! I said “Go to Hell.”

He said "I’ve been there, now I’m on my way to Heaven and I’m going to see you make it, also.” My fist clenched as I stood. He placed a hand on my shoulder and said, “Jesus, there is room in the family,” as everyone, with Yvonne playing, sang The Family Of God.

I felt a warmth come over me and cried as I never had before I felt hands touch my shoulders as Jesus came into my heart. My old self went somewhere and my new self is finally out of prison.

Why Sucker Punched?

A sucker punch is one you never see coming, and that night, God knocked me into Glory. I learned God's word and how to make it change me, and use me to help others.

Folks, I was a real bad dude. God forgave me, God changed me, God helped me grow, and most important, God set me FREE.

Last night I was taken to dinner by the cop I shot, and his wife and kids. We prayed to-gether and laughed together. A half inch closer and I would have killed him.

Don & Yvonne taught me how to study, how to teach, and how to witness. I turned my shank into Holy Boldness. If you are called to write an inmate, try to be understanding. Most of us are just not used to kindness. Give us awhile, and use Don & Yvonne’s very vast experience.

Because of them and you, many will be in Heaven; without you-- no chance. Thank you, Jesus!

Terry.

THANK YOU, TERRY

We can and will, as long as you listen, tell stories about men like Terry. I, who had nothing, who created fear and lived in fear, to whom God has granted the key to Paradise, we owe all to Jesus and Stanley Reed (now retired), then Chaplain at Soledad, who needs our prayers. Thanks to men like him, many like Terry and I are doing the Lord’s work in
and out of prison.

It was Jesus who said, "I was In prison and you visited me not." did you hear HIM? Those of you writing, ask your friend about their life in prison and may we print their story.

WOW! IT WORKS

I was matched with an in-mate who, in his first letter, asked for things. I tried to follow the rules but was un-comfortable. I called Don and said I wanted a new inmate Pen Friend. He asked if I was giving up on the other. I said yes.

He suggested I write the following: “Rudy, I was assigned you as a Pen Friend because you signed up for one. I guess prison has changed you and all you want is someone to give you things. I can give you my Christian love, which is spel-led Agape. If you don’t know what that means, I can tell you if you write back. I may help you from time to time if you send me the policy of your prison. I care for you, but am not concerned that you can’t buy cigarettes. You said you don’t have money for stamps, but the head of Someone Cares said your prison allows free letters.

“Also, I am very happily married and have no interest in you except as a friend. We (you, me and my husband) can chat about anything. Now if you are looking for some-one to provide for your needs, this is the wrong person.” I sent it on, never expect-ing to hear from him again. Almost at once I got a letter back thanking me for being both open and honest, something he was not used to. That was six years ago. Every other month we ended up sending him $10; the other months we sent money to Someone Cares. Last week we picked him up and drove him to his home and met his mom and dad, two very grateful folks.

Barbara & Jim

HELP! HELP! HELP!

The inmate you assigned me is not very smart and keeps sending me a few lines and a lot of Chapel tracts. What can I do? Yvonne asked me to ask him a lot of questions: what prison is like, were he is from, what he likes or dis-likes. In other words, help him write a letter. My next letter had 10 questions, all answered. We still ask questions. He helped us make a choice of the color of carpet for our house. We found out how really boring prison is. How little they have!

He does not have a TV. We are going to get him one for his birthday. He cannot choose what he wants to watch on a little TV nearby, controlled by an inmate group.

This has been a long, tedious process but the net result: he just got his GED and is taking his first Bible Study! Four years it took.

[Please ask your friend to NOT SEND DAILY BREAD and Chapel tracts. We must pay the postage increase. Also, folks, Someone Cares is not writing these folks, YOU are. On Page 3 are letters we need homes for.]
There may be ups and downs in Prison Ministry, yet Our God is an Awesome God! Don & I were Ministering in "C" section at San Quentin in the year of 1985; for some reason Don was not with me, but I met a friend that day, his name is Charles. This last week we received a letter from him, he had heard us on the Voice of Prophecy Radio program. I can't begin to tell you how excited I was to read his letter and catch up on the lost years we had not heard from him.

In this type of Ministry you try to sow seeds of kindness, and just as a farmer sows seeds and prays for the plant to grow, we as Christians do the same. So many times we never hear from the people again, but when you do hear from them it is like an answer to prayer.

When I first met Charles, it was not a nice place in the prison, it was what they call segregation. It was a locked-down unit, a place I thought would never exist in America. The conditions are not the best, to say the least. At times I wondered what I was doing in a place like that, but I knew they were all God's children whether they knew it or not. It was up to me to give them the Good News that Jesus loved them no matter what they had done. He is always willing to forgive and cleanse. I'm writing this to let you know that the least bit of kindness you show will never go unnoticed, because you are letting your light shine. I want to thank "Charles" for his letter; we hope to hear from him again soon.

Pen Friends, keep looking up. That is where your strength will come from. Charles is now in Lancaster, no longer at San Quentin. Please remember him in your prayers. You just never know what your letters can do with God's Blessing.

UNCLAIMED? Many of you wrote using a Pen Name and forgot to tell us. We have mail for:
Jane Gustofeson
Chris Phoenix
Marge Hall
Andrew, Rosie
Dennis Renk
A. Venson
Kay and Family
Pat Aletest F Bishop
Barbara Lisa Belt
R Curtis
Lance Daniels
I Escobar
Betsy Gill
S Graham
Ann Janna
Terry K, Kay
Keenhnel
L Lynn
C Page
V Pladie
Hello, I was a Pen Friend a few years ago (1997?). I found some old letters from inmates today when I was doing some cleaning and purging. This new interest is a Spirit prompting. I know because I just read your recent newsletter. Mind you, I've never been to your web site ever, until today, after finding these letters again. It had not crossed my mind to do so. When I was a Pen Friend before, I did not have a computer. It was only today that I "noticed" you even have a web site, go figure. Anyway, there on the screen before me is a letter from an inmate I once wrote to; "From California," the three strikes story. I just know this is David D! Is this a message from God, or what? The first time ever, in 5 years, I go to the web site, and there's my inmate, right before my eyes.

My only choice is to obey. I forget why I quit before. Doesn't matter! Okay, I'll do this again. I resist the sins of procrastination, apathy, complacency, and just plain laziness, In Jesus' Name! AMEN! I can reestablish contact or I will take new applicants since it's been so long. These three may not want to hear from me since I quit on them, especially if they have new Pen Friends. I can read, write and speak Spanish, if you have any Hispanic applicants, male or female. I won't quit this time.

Bonnie

Bonnie, if you want to, try writing these inmates again. You can do so since you kept the addresses. If the mail is returned, write the prison or state Board of Corrections with names and numbers to get a current address.

May Jesus bless you for rejoining the God Squad.

FREE, INDEED

We have often said “To be free in Jesus is to be free, indeed.” Society should no longer fear you, and release should be in the future, maybe! However, should religion give an inmate a pass out of prison? The truth is no.

Even though a man receives a pardon from sin from Jesus and receives abundant grace, this does not mean he should not pay for the crime. The Bible says that when the penitent thief who died beside Christ prayed in faith and sincerity, Jesus’ answer was clear. Christ gave him a passport to Heaven, but He did not give him a parole or pardon. He was delivered from the second death, but He did not cancel the Roman death penalty. God needs witnesses in prison and we all can help them do just that by helping direct their walk. The truth will set us free, but not necessarily let us out of prison. That is, the prison with walls and cells. Pastors need to learn that life is not a game Satan uses. They need to preach not where we are going but what we have to do to get there.

GIVERS
The Lord loves a cheerful giver. His son gave his life for our salvation. Those who have the pace that passes all understanding know that He expects his servants to be good stewards of time and talents and money. We are so grateful that so many also feel the leading of the Lord to support the urgent work of leading prisoners from crime to Christ.

JEAN’S JOTTINGS:
GOD’S FORGIVENESS

A couple of nights ago, I heard a thumping noise near my pillow. My cousin had just installed a 3ABN satellite dish that day, but he tied the coax securely to the house. That couldn’t be the cause.

Thump, Thump.

“Knock it off!!” I yelled.

Pause. Thump, Thump.

I turned on the light, and there, at the bottom of the empty wastebasket was a little mouse, probably an escapee from one of the cats, staring up at me with huge, trusting eyes and twitching a little French knot of a nose. Its hair was a dark, shiny velvet, and its ears grew in perfect folds. I could see him done in a fabric in a quilt.

The longer we looked at each other, the more endear-ing he became, and I realized that God’s mercy was so much greater than anything I could imagine! He doesn’t care if His rest is disturbed by a human at the bottom of the waste basket of sin, trying to get out. Thump, Thump. He simply offers us a way of escape and lovingly sets us free.

I picked up the waste basket, carried it downstairs, outside to the edge of the porch, and set the little guy free. To quote Bonnie, “Go figure.”