HAPPINESS IS TO KNOW THE SAVIOR

I’m at my desk, glancing out the window at the snow covered street, knowing it’s 10 below outside. There is a kind of warmth around me just after New Year’s Day, reflecting on all the joy we have received through Someone Cares.

The true power in God’s word that directs this ministry, Yvonne, Jake and I. I’m typing this on a new computer donated by a saint, looking ahead at the wonders God will provide this new year.

We keep on keeping on, because we know how and when to claim God’s promises. We know we will make mis-takes, and we know Satan will attack as often as he can. But as long as we have the full armor of God we are going to sail through. When Jesus said, “Stay in the boat, we are going to the other side,” HE was not kidding!

WELL, IT BROKE AND YES, WE FIXED IT

When we finally unpacked after we moved in here, I came across some old files. Sometimes we just need to reflect on the start of Someone Cares. How truly awful our newsletters were. All donations were handled by hand-written receipts, sent out monthly. As God blessed and we grew, so did the paperwork, not my best area of expertise. Then I got my first computer and I still remember how fear entered my heart every time I turned it on. Since the day God chose me for this ministry, He always sent me the right folks to help. The computer was programmed to handle the Pen Friend Program; a church contribution program was given to us. The donor said it would not last long, but it did. We then updated all our records.

When whatever happened to our old computer happened, we learned how much we needed updating! Now we have a better system. We can tell you when you last wrote your inmate and when they last wrote you.

A new label program prints the address label to forward the inmate’s letter to you. Funding now is handled in two separate files, both with separate backup systems.
2003 RECEIPTS – IMPORTANT

On New Year’s day I ran the receipts and watched the Rose Parade as they ran. When they were finished, I knew we might still have some problems. I am sending receipts as quickly as I can, but need you to verify that they are correct. Please, when you get your receipt, check the amount and make sure it agrees with your records. If not, e-mail me at once and we will send a corrected receipt. Being good stewards of your donations has always been a top priority and to have this happen really sorrows me. When our old computer crashed it also crunched the backup files. So, working together, we will get the correct receipt into your hands. We sure do not want to lose any of you! Our prayer is that each of you can give this year what you gave last year and God grant any increase. Then those of you who have never been a Faith Partner can give a MITE.

FROM CALIFORNIA

I wanted to write after I called to again thank you. My name is Sandra Smithe. Don, when I read about your ministry years ago, I am thankful I kept the article. I thought someday I would like to help you. About a year later my son Howard was caught embezzling from where he worked. Howard was a top executive with his company -- married, I thought happily, with three children. Both he and his wife drove new cars every year, they lived in a very expensive home, but all was debt. He robbed Peter to pay Paul and then finally got in too deep. He was tried and convicted and given 7 years. They lost cars, home, everything. My daughter-in-law never worked. Now she had to go to work. She met someone there, and got a divorce.

My son, who grew up in an upper class environment, could not handle prison; he attempted suicide. About this time I found your article and called. This is, as I understand, what happened as a result.

You wrote him a letter and offered to visit. You and Yvonne visited him and apparently got him interested in religion, something he got little of at home. He enrolled in and completed many Bible courses, and according to him he got saved. In our visits we saw a completely changed person, one we really liked. Both my husband and I caught the fever and now we also attend church. We now have Jesus in our lives.

Howard served almost four years in prison and was released about a year ago. He has a good job, not anywhere near as good as he had, but he is so happy. He is dating a nice lady and sees his children often. I thank you, as all this happened because Someone Cared.

[Strange – we get the credit, but the folks who really deserve it are his Pen Friends.]

IF HATE COULD BE BOTTLED

My name is Janice and I thought that I would send you this Christmas card to thank
you and Someone Cares for caring.

I grew up in Hell’s kitchen and believe me, it was no fun. My dad was a drunk and my mom a tramp. I had three brothers and two sisters, all as bad as I was. Gangs, drugs and being a hooker was all I knew. Didn’t go to school and no one cared.

I got busted the first time at 13 and my hate festered. No words can tell you the abuse I took while locked up. Home was looking good. I did a year and a half and returned home. Dad was gone, one brother in prison, the other on the run, one sister married her husband in the joint (prison), the other was still working the street. I wanted more and ran.

I ended up in California working the streets again. Now into drugs big time. I was arrested for trying to kill my pimp and given 15 years. In the famous L.A. County Jail I met Jesus though a book called Steps to Christ with your address inside. I kept the book until I got to prison. I met a girl who also knew about you guys and we wrote. I was enrolled in a Breath Of Life Bible study, my friend in Voice Of Prophecy. I got a Pen Friend, so did Sally.

I remember a song I used to sing “Out Of The Tree Of Life I Picked Me a Plum.” Well, the couple you matched me with: WOW! We wrote often for about six months and then they let me call them. After a year they came to visit. They were both just a little older than me and came from an area similar to mine, but they had Jesus growing up. They shared and gave me this love of Jesus.

My sister got AIDS and another brother was killed. In a prison visiting room I gave myself to Jesus, and was really set free. Back in my cell, alone, I took 26 years of bottled hate ad gave it to my Lord.

I am out of prison, I completed high school in prison, and was able to learn computers. My Friends helped me get started. I have my own place and belong to a neat church where folks don’t care where I came from, but where I’m going. Enclosed find a little donation. Please find another me and change her, too.

[Again, we are getting credit for what her Pen Friends did.]

PLEASE, CAN WE HAVE ANOTHER FRIEND?

As you know, our friend Janice has been released. We would like two more Pen Friends. We want to thank you for what you did for us when you spoke at our church. We grew up in a Christian home, learned Christian values, but never knew what to do for Jesus. We joined your Pen Friend Program and we were blessed. We do admit, Janice was a really difficult girl as she was so hateful. It took a lot of prayer and assistance before she learned to trust us. We also took additional Bible studies and have learned a lot. We are having Janice over for Christmas dinner and are really looking forward to it. She just found out her dad was killed in a bar fight.
JO ANN CALLED

Don, I want to make a presentation to our whole church on the Pen Friend Ministry.

Well, Jo Ann, I would start with all the blessings that those involved will receive. Oh, there are those in prison who will never change, will try to use and abuse this and any program. But 90% of those in prison get the warmth of Paper Sunshine. A little reminder: Yvonne met a man in the Hole at San Quentin who had not received a letter or visit in 17 years. She promised to get someone to write and we did. It started this very special ministry.

How it works: Daily we receive requests from prisons all over the United States for an application. Many, up front, make requests in the wrong direction. We inform them this is not a dating or matrimonial service.

They fill out an informational application and write a letter of introduction. These letters can be a bit of an overview. These applications go in a pile as we receive them. Then either through radio shows, TV, or appeals like Jo Ann’s, we receive names which go on another pile. We match the person on the top of each pile. The free person receives the application, letters and some do’s and don’ts. This is so safe that children can and do write. The only address the inmate ever gets is ours, so your location is safe. The important thing is, when you get the packet, write the inmate or return the information to us to re-match him/her. We have Sabbath and Sunday school classes writing. I pray we soon have YOU writing.

I ARRIVED ON DEATH ROW

My name is Tom and I am sentenced to die for a crime I committed and deserve to die for. I found this application in the corner of my cell and did not fill it out for awhile. I’m not a Christian. In fact, I’m a pretty bad person. The reason I’m writing this is: I really, if there is such a place, don’t want to go to hell. I don’t want to die, either, but know I will.

I graduated from high school even though I could not really read or write, they just kept passing me on. I don’t deserve a chance but if there is one I’ll take it. (We matched this man with a young, newlywed couple who were looking for a way to minister. They led Tom to Christ and were with him when he died, a smile on his face, knowing that with the injection of the needle, the next face he would see would be that of Jesus. They are now writing two other Death Row inmates.)

WHAT A FOOL I AM

When I joined your Pen Friend program I did everything wrong. First, I did not tell my husband, who blew his stack when he found me writing to another man. This we worked out. Then I decided to write direct and gave him my address. The inmate is nuts and we want out. (I called the prison and told them of some of the things this man had tried and they stopped him.) Second page: can we, my husband and I, start
over, follow the rules and try to lead a man or woman to Christ?

**JAKE’S CORNER**

I don’t know how you would feel if the police knocked at your door. But I can tell you how I felt. When the police knocked at our front door, I was very scared. I did not know what they were going to do or who they wanted to see. At this time I was only six years old. I did not understand what was going on. My dad was in our basement and he was drunk. I did not know what that was at that age, either. When the police entered my home I felt strange. They asked for my father and I said yes he is in the basement.

They went downstairs to get him. And when my father saw them his reaction was trying to fight them. I wondered why he tried to fight them. I did not know what the police were doing in our house in the first place and why my dad was so mad. By the time I got to my mom, my dad was already gone.

I felt very scared like I did something wrong. My mom said, “Where is Mike?” That is my dad’s name.

I said, “There were these men, and they came in the house and got him. They were police.

Her reaction was, “Oh, NO!!” She fell on the coach and started crying.

I said, “What is wrong?”

I realized then there was BIG trouble and all I could do was pray. A LOT!!! Well, that is all for now. So please pray for my Dad as he is in prison now.

**YVONNE’S CORNER**

There is a song that is titled “They will know we are Christians by our Love.” We always used to sing it in prison. I had a lot of inmates ask me why it wasn’t that way when they were released from prison and they attended church. Why were the people not friendly?

Well, that started me thinking and observing, and I noticed that people did not always look happy and excited as they came into church. I dismissed it at first, thinking that we all have our off days, or maybe they just were not feeling good. But just recently I read a very interesting article on how every day we should be clothed with Happiness, Love, Forgiveness, Kindness, and be more Christ like.

I was the one that needed to change my outlook and be more Christ like. Yes, the people in prison are people just like you and me. All they want is to be forgiven and accepted. That is my part to do as a Christian.

How are you clothed? When we were in California several years ago, the state
asked me to write a dress code for female volunteers that came into the prison. I took the challenge and wrote the dress code as I changed what I wore into prison myself. It is amazing how much you see what is wrong with yourself, as you study a subject.

JEAN’S JOTTINGS

I love this job!! This column almost writes itself each month as the wonderful stories unfold. God isn’t restricted by prison rules that often baffle, but through our Pen Friends, He reaches into hearts on both sides of the prison bars. The success stories happen because you take the time to write and encourage people just like you, who mess up and find forgiveness.

My partner and I had our eyes opened soon after we started as volunteers. All those men were real people who had made a mistake and needed Jesus. Being a volunteer is a very rewarding experience. We come away from our meetings feeling we’re more blessed than the inmates we’re there to minister to. I’m looking forward to Yvonne’s dress code rules. I know she educated us to wear pant suits and walking shoes. Dresses and fancy shoes can fuel the imaginations of the lonely, for one thing. But in case of a riot, this kind of apparel is downright dangerous. Our chaplain reinforced her instruction, and we quickly complied. The guards are more comfortable, also, when we’re dressed more like they are.

Those who have been with us awhile know that we, too, lost a dear friend on Death Row last spring. He was also at peace and was sure of his place with all of us who were Heaven-bound. What a trip!

I want to thank all of you who prayed for me and sent cards. I’m healed now, and feel well. We’re fearfully and wonderfully made, that our bodies are designed to heal themselves if we give them the right tools. J

I do miss walking now that the weather is so bitterly cold. But there’s a mini-trampoline next to the fireplace, and the church has Gym Night every Thursday.

Please pray for Don and Yvonne, also, as they direct this ministry. Without them and the newsletter experience, plus a dose of the reality of the justice system, neither Shirley nor I would have had a burden for this kind of outreach.

God is also calling young Jake to know what it means to be in ministry to young people who have parents locked up. With two million inmates in this country, multiply that by, let’s say, three, and the picture of that mission field is mind blowing!!! Churches can and should reach out to the families of those in prison. The Dress-Out Program would take care of itself. Their pews would soon fill with others of Christ-like compassion, and our work for the Lord would soon be finished.

God doesn’t want to watch the huddle; He wants to see His players win the game!