WHAT A TRIP TO THE MOUNTAIN TOP

For many years we have written newsletters sharing what God has done through us thanks to you. 2005 was an exceptionally good year thanks to radio and television that featured us. To my knowledge, The Pen Friend Program reaches into all United States Prisons and is expanding worldwide.

LET’S CHAT ABOUT INMATES

Men and women in prison represent a whole lot of types.

Just like the world, some are different from others. We live in a world that deals with the Upper, Middle, and Lower classes, and one less than lower. In prison there is very little good going on.

Things that do make a difference spread like wildfire. The Pen Friend Program is one of the more positive programs in all prisons. We do not offer this program to just the cream puff inmate, but to all. When inmates hear about this program, they write us to request an application, which we send. The radio show over Christmas brought so many responses we sent the letter requesting an application, and the application, to many of you to start.

How we match is important, as it’s the way we put the program together. When the applications come in, we put them in a pile as they arrive. We do the same when your letters, phone calls, or emails come in. Your name goes on an envelope and in order of arrival into another pile. When your name reaches the top, whoever is on the top of the other pile is yours.

NOW LET’S CHAT ABOUT SOME PROBLEMS

When you and the inmate contact us we know little about either. We can tell by the letters from inmates, their educational level. We often match a college graduate with a drop-out.

A key role for Christians when writing is learning to first communicate at the inmate’s level, not bring them up to yours if you have more education. Keep it simple, ... , (you know the phrase).

We call it Pen Friend, as that is what most inmates are looking for. Some are looking for what we try to prevent. We have been in churches where members do not talk to other members. So establishing friendships is important. This does not always happen. The inmates have no trouble
saying to us that they can’t handle the person to whom they are assigned. We rematch both. For some reason Free folks don’t always do that. They just don’t write. Too often they don’t write and don’t tell us. We have to find out in other ways.

Free folks are used to writing and getting an answer. In prison, they don’t have things like paper, envelopes, pens, pencils, and most important a stamp. If you don’t get an answer, try again. After the third try we will take over and rematch you, then try to find out what the problem is.

Asking questions is a good way to open a person up. BUT. Inmates do not trust anyone. They move very slowly to establish trust and provide information, Do not ask about their crime and rejoice if they tell you.

Another problem here is they establish a trust in you and decide to open up. You may be shocked when they do tell you why they are in prison, Put yourself in their shoes and do not give a negative or shocked response, or judge them. They need “real people” to help them deal with the real situation they are in. The purpose of this ministry is to lead men, women, boys and girls to Christ, not our denominational churches. That may come later, but a bond of trust must be built first.

To all of you reading this for the first time. Do Not Let Your Doctrine Be a Barrier, but a Bridge to Jesus.

Do not make a promise to an inmate you don’t know if you can’t keep it.

Do not send cash or a check to them. Each state has different policies in giving and receiving. Find out.

Books must come from an approved vendor.

Baked goods: send to us. Inmates can’t have them. If you don’t know, ask. If you ask we will put your question and answer in our newsletters. It will also help our other Pen Friends.

A REALLY BIG PROBLEM

I got jumped on for this last time, but need to deal with it. Racial tension in prison is a reality. All races have gangs, If we know the inmate is of a certain race, we try to match him with his own race. Look through the piles. This is not a usual problem with Christian inmates but not all of them are Christians. A couple of helpful Books are: Games Criminals Play, and Man the Manipulator are good reading. Inmates have nothing but time and The Antimony of a Set Up, shows how long they may take in trying to get you to make a mistake.

Yvonne and I have crossed paths with such as Juan Carona, Tex Watson, Sirhan Sirhan, Charles Manson, Ted Bundy. You may also. This is why the mail going through us is important. Once in awhile we slip up. If we do contact us. My Email address is on our newsletters.

UPDATING OUR RECORDS

We have a pile of mail and have no idea where to send it. When we match you there is a Blue
form you are supposed to fill out and return. Many did not. A few used a Pen Name and forgot to tell us. Please send us your full names, your Pen Name, and who you are writing. If we sent you a packet and you never wrote the inmate, please return all data.

When we match folks, we think they are going to write. Often we find they just want information.

PRISON

This is a place where nothing is something. Fear is real, reality is often lost, and trying to be a Christian is tough, Survival is a primary function to get through the day. The weak hide, the strong form numbers. Shanks (prison knives) are everywhere. Rape is common, homosexuality is a way of life to many. Over-crowding is everywhere. Having someone to trust is almost impossible. Paper Sunshine (Your letter) can change that. Weak inmates are housed in protective custody, tough inmates in Administrative Segregation. The rest mingle. Finding something to write about is often difficult. You will see a world that is hard to believe exists in our world. You may ask a question and not get an answer because their letters are read, often by staff. So if you don’t get an answer, take your time. They will ask for things; in fact some join our program just to ask. When they find out nothing is coming their way, they move on.

SUPPORTING SOMEONE CARES

We are a Self supporting Ministry, a Non-profit organization. All donations are tax deductible. The post office just made us increase our budget with a 2 cent increase in postage. It doesn’t sound like much, but when you do the amount of mail we do, it’s a lot. We do a massive amount of mail to Canada as well as U.S.

Now we’ve added writing by E-mail. This means we get your E-mailed letter. We then “Snail-mail it to the inmate, and mail the inmate’s reply letter to you. That all adds up.

Those of you who are not familiar with the new E-mail Paper Sunshine, you start your letter to us, starting with your inmates name and number, and full address.

NO ATTACHMENTS, PLEASE!
Complete your letter.

Sign your letter with your full name or full Pen Name.

We will cut off e-mail address stuff at the top of the letter. (Yvonne is going to deal with content.)

Please, on your letter to your inmate, in the upper left hand corner, put your full name, or pen name, and our address. Drop down two lines and type your inmate’s name and number and address. “SOMEONE CARES” SHOULD NOT APPEAR ANYWHERE ON THE LETTER TO YOUR INMATE.

Last year we received a lot of one dollar bills, amen, and we thank you. If everyone who made a tax deductible donation last year equals that this year; then, if 300 of you became monthly Faith
Partners, we will increase this Ministry by 30% again. We do not need this to keep going, we need it to keep growing. For those of you new to Someone Cares, over the years, over one million inmates have completed Bible studies through one of the many Bible Schools we use–mainly Voice Of Prophecy. If all who completed these studies invited Christ into their lives, it should mean a million less crimes committed when they are released. Speaking of release, you many continue to write through us after release.

YVONNE'S CORNER

I personally want to welcome all of you who are trying this for the first time. I know that it is not easy to just start writing to a stranger, yet you have the safety of doing this from the comfort of your home, and being able to maintain your privacy. When you write, please try to write at least a full page. Your letter is all they may be receiving and you might be very surprised when you receive an eight to ten-page letter in return, especially when they get to know you and trust you. Please keep in mind that they may have never been near a church, and they didn’t get to prison from singing in the choir!! In the same respect, you need to keep your letters to not more than a few pages, and please try to keep it on the light side, if they want to hear a sermon some may attend chapel. Just try being a friend first, then everything should fall into place.

I suppose why they call me double trouble as a nick name is I like people and even in today’s world when we are cautioned on the news to beware, I trust God and pray His will be done, so fear has never been a factor for me. However some places in the prison’s where we have been, I have asked them not to swear, and I quite often remind them that I am a Lady; please watch the way they speak, and it is o.k. to do that. They later appreciate your help in trying to help them. As a pen friend, you must do the same. If they overstep their boundaries, please correct them; they need to know you care enough to do that, and that is why you are correcting them. May God Bless You in This New Year!

THO’ I WALKED THROUGH A STORM

The E-mail read: My name is Mary and I lost my home and all I own through Katrina. Living in a shelter, I listen to you on Christian radio. I would like to write an inmate. I have a PO Box, all I have. I don’t know what to write about but I can tell about what happened to all of us.

When I read this appeal I was really touched. We, of course, matched her. We also knew a church group going down there and they took her some things,

SOME ARE CALLED

With the massive amount of E-mails we got during Christmas I was amazed at folks begging to do something for Jesus. Think about myself as a babe in Christ now so many years ago. I was taught that there’s no” I “ in Jesus just “u” and “us”, Neat team..

I also informed some that they need to make sure this is what they were called to do. I was in my infancy in Christ, when asked to be a youth leader. I was not called to be a youth leader. I kept bouncing from pillar to post until Jesus led me back to prison again.
Christians need to be alert in these Times Of Trouble: AIDS is a plague and storms are running or blowing everywhere. A wise old man said, “It’s about time the world got of its “Rusty Dusty.”

ASK IN HIS NAME

We are the very happy owners of two new computers and a very neat printer. We prayerfully thank the donors. If there is a good used car doing nothing but lying around, we sure can us it.

WHEN DEATH FELL ON SAN QUENTIN

I will not get into a discussion on the Death Penalty. But the result of one follows.

“I have been a member of a prison gang for a very long time. I met you and Yvonne here at Quentin long ago. I told Yvonne when she asked were I was housed, in a visiting room chat.

“I said I had bought the Bitch (Death) and lived on the row. She met my folks and they and she tried to get me to leave gang life. I am sentenced to die but didn’t want to die leaving a gang.

“But watching so many die, and so many arriving here to wait to die, made me reflect. I do deserve to die for my crime, but to live again in Peace.

“I asked for and got, in a heart beat, a Pen Friend. I am a very well educated man and the person God chose for me never finished school. I was from upper middle class, they were from the ghetto. But my Pen Friends did, they knew about Jesus. They had to pray for everything, from heat to food. Having nothing, they had everything. We cut a deal. I taught them writing and reading and they taught me about life forever. Here is an example: ”u have to beliv In Jesus cuz he is yor only hop.

Well, I got the message and they got a simple reader, and Don arranged a class for them.

My prayer is that everyone on Death row here and everywhere are given a chance. I also pray that the folks we hurt, or families we ruined, can find The Peace That Passes all Understanding.

Because Someone Cares, I care. Because of a stranger-- no, two, I will one day see both of them in Heaven.

Please Forgive me.

WE ARE SO SAD

... that we received the following: “I am so sad that I am not able to honor the commitment I made to God and you and my Prison Pen Friend. I don’t understand it myself, but I can’t put off admitting it and denying my Pen Friend an opportunity to get another faithful pen friend. It has been over a year since I have sent anything. I am so sorry.”

When we match folks, we expect them to write and/or return the information. Failing to do so
reflects on Christians and Someone Cares.

Now, we have letters from inmates to folks we just do not know. Many have forgotten to return the assignment form.

Please claim: Vicki Alex from Musmatt; Jean Austin from M. Green; Bob from N. Crus; Elsie Bont from J. Smith; Betty Brown from B. Valdez; Rachel Butler from Tamara Leal; Rachel C. From J. Emmick; Nadie Clark from K. Gross; Ruth E. From C. Payton; Mary Ellen from A. Hernandez; Clem Holly from E. Sills; Chris from A. Alexander; Jason from A. Maddalena. We have more!

If you are missing a letter, Email us. Those of you who have been matched since Jan. 1 SEND US THE BLUE FORM.

JEAN’S JOTTINGS

It’s hard to believe we had the January thaw in December, and our first prison ministry session in the first year. We’d expected some of our group to be missing, but were happily surprised to find them all present, eager to sing and read the material Shirley, my partner, had prepared for them.

We’re so blessed by the full support of our church family, plus the third volunteer who drives a four hour round trip to nurture our group on the two alternate weekends a month, and a pastor who understands when we have to leave early and miss part of his sermons for our bi-weekly ministry.

We’re so blessed to be with this group of inmates who, in turn, minister to us, then take what they receive from us back to their “cubes” to spread the gospel where we can’t go.

When we sing, sometimes the angels join in and the room is full of music – more than we could provide by ourselves.

A Pen Friend received a request from his inmate for writing paper. The wise Pen Friend checked with Someone Cares. The answer is, generally not. Paper, stamped envelopes, pens, short pencils, grooming aids, snacks, etc. Prisons keep “Stores” where they sell these items at inflated prices. Inmates used to use stamps for money, but no more. The prison system charges those who have nothing for most everything, especially stamped envelopes! Anything can be classed as “contraband” and confiscated.

Someone Cares Home Page