COMING HOME

After years of waiting and counting down, it is almost time for the gates that have bound them to open. Their greatest dreams or worst nightmares are about to be realized.

Their loved ones may be there, waiting, and no, they really don’t know each other any more. Is there hope that they can all be healed? That they and their loved ones can be as they once were?

The answer is yes, if honesty and patience and hard work are practiced by all those involved.

The experts say that it only takes months for a person to become institutionalized. After almost thirty years of working in prisons, we say that those experts are being very optimistic. The length of time locked up leaves wounds that must be healed. All must understand the nature of the enemy (prison), in order to understand the damage done to those who have served time.

The prison system, regardless of where it’s located, systematically, intentionally, often scientifically, makes every effort to dehumanize a person in order to better control and “manage” the prison population.

Immediately upon entering the prison system, activities are taken to strip away a person’s identity. Their names are taken away to be replaced by a number. Who they are is replaced by “what I am.” Almost all opportunities to make a choice are removed. They are told and retold what little worth they are to humanity. They are punished for showing any emotion; questioning any decision; or stepping even a little outside of an accepted standard. In order to survive such an environment, they must have been flexible to adapt, and once adapted it must become his/her way of life. It is life alien and warped, even to the worst that becomes them. Leaving prison after any length of time is often tougher than going to prison. Many have been deeply wounded, but with time, can heal.

HELPING THEM TO GO HOME:

In prison, there are very few positive programs. With massive budget cuts, even the few good programs are being cut. Over-crowding means that getting into some programs requires a long wait, and many are discouraged.

That’s why the Pen Friend Program really works. There’s someone to talk to, someone to share with, someone to teach, someone just to listen, without judging.
Many are scared to even try this. When an inmate is locked up inside this madness, what do they find to write about? A day in the life of an average inmate is not much to write about. Many are locked down for 23 of 24 hours a day, seven days a week, twelve months a year with no newspaper, radio or TV. Most are willing to do Bible studies, but where do they get a Bible?

They finally decide, because of others telling them how neat it is to write and ask for a Pen Friend. Often they sell a meal to buy a stamp to write us. Sometimes they can’t get a stamp to answer your letter. Many prisons allowed a limited number of free stamps each month, but now that is being done away with. Often we have the assistance of Chaplains and can bend some rules. We spend hours trying to make all our programs better and workable.

**BREAK THROUGH THE SYSTEM:**

We pray this information helps you understand, and helps correct a big problem.

On June 28, a stabbing assault occurred on the exercise yard involving Southern Hispanic inmates. Subsequently, a stabbing of an inmate by Crips (a black prison gang) occurred. Then information that white inmates were planning an assault on staff was received. This caused a lock-down of all races.

Racial tension caused by gang activities fuels the already prejudiced system. The culture of prison, often created by the system, causes us problems.

We have always tried to arrange matches by the following rule: When we get an inquiry from a free person to write, we put their name in a pile. When an inmate writes, we put that in the other pile. The names on the top of each pile are matched.

On the inmate application, there is a section as follows: “Will it bother you to write a person of a different race?” Even though the answer is almost always “no,” peer pressure changes that.

We also (thank God) received several requests from free folks saying they would rather write same-culture inmates. We will try. Please don’t get angry at us. If we have problems, we have to fix them. We will be very happy when Jesus comes to do away with that problem.

I have noticed something strange lately, especially from Texas prisons. The application does ask for race. We are seeing Black, Negro, Colored, African-American; we have to work through it all. The one problem, I am very sorry to say, (worse yet, ashamed to say), we matched a lot of folks who never wrote the first letter. During an expensive follow-up, we found 27 white Christians matched with black inmates, nor did they return the information to us so we could rematch them.

We found almost the same number of black Christians matched with white inmates. All the inmates have been rematched. Again, please don’t find fault with us. When an inmate writes us for a friend, we comply with their request. To my knowledge we have never broken a promise to an inmate. If the free person does not write, it’s not a reflection on us, but Jesus in the minds of the inmates.
THANK YOU SO MUCH:

I called Yvonne about a year ago about my daughter and was given a bit different tough-love story. I did take Yvonne’s advice and told my daughter that I did not approve of her lifestyle (drugs) and if it was not going to change, she had to move. She did. I cried a lot. Then she got arrested for dealing and ended up in prison.

I was angry at you. But you matched her with a couple from Kansas.

My daughter writes: “Mom, I sure wish I had listened to you before all this happened to me; you; us. I think I would have always been bad, as you never went to church, or worse yet, we never prayed. Well, I now do both and will soon be coming home. If we are going to have any bonding, it needs to be with help and guidance.”

Bit of a shock to me, but I have gone back to church and got enrolled in the same Bible study my daughter took. We have a lot to work out, but it will be with the help of Jesus. Amen...

Don & Yvonne

MY HUSBAND FORBIDS ME

...to write to an inmate. He is not a Christian and was really mad when he found out what I did when I saw you guys on TV. You had already matched me and I had written the first letter.

I think God called me to do what I was doing. I got a girl-friend to let me receive my letters back through you at her house. That was about a year ago.

My walk with Jesus became a run, as the inmate I was writing made me grow in God. I called you and you told me I must tell my husband.

Don, you will not believe what happened. My girl-friend’s husband got the letter for me when his wife went to have a baby. He brought it over and gave it to my husband. My husband was so touched by the letter he, without me knowing, also wrote my Pen Friend.

Last week, John said, “Why don’t we go to church together? I was shocked! He also said, “How about having a little prayer?” I was stunned! In the prayer he thanked Jesus and then he thanked Jerry, my Pen Friend, for leading him to Christ. You will see us both writing through you, and my husband would like his own Pen Friend.

Amen and Amen.

Hebrews 13:3

TOO MANY BAD APPLES

I have been a part of your ministry for a long time. As you know, I have my share of bad apples. John, who was mentally unbalanced; Jenny, who was obsessed with smut; Tony, who had a very bad case of “I need;” Mohamad, who was going to save the world if I sent him money; and about ten others. Well, I am about to clean the slate, so please send me five more inmates. (We wish we had a dozen or more Sandras!!!)
IT TAKES AN OFFERING:

With gas prices going out of sight, and postage going up, so are our expenses. We have a ladies’ group who meets monthly and they have chosen to send us stamps.

A youth group had a garage sale for Someone Cares.

A surprise is our last bank statement showing that many of you went to our Web page www.someonecares.org and made secure credit card donations.

Several have asked about receipts. We send these with next February’s newsletter, but if you need yours earlier, please ask.

An area that has grown, and we are so glad, is the whole bunch of you Emailing your Pen Friend. A reminder: the Email comes to us.

We have two needs: a lap-top computer and a quality used car. All donations are tax deductible. Also, to our California friends: avocados, if the heat did not destroy them.

YVONNE’S CORNER:

There is one experience I shall never forget and I don’t believe Don will, either. It was a beautiful morning like only California can have, we had arrived safely in the parking lot of San Quentin, with a long walk ahead of us to the entrance of the prison, then on to the chapel to find out what the day might be like and meet with Chaplain Howard and other volunteers.

Before going to our assigned areas, we would always have prayer, fill our cases with literature that the prison allowed, and then we would all leave, going to different cell blocks where we would always sign in, and go cell to cell sharing Jesus with all who would listen.

As Don and I were walking across the upper yard, we were approached by three large Afro American inmates. As they were speaking to us, I was trying to figure out if I had seen them in Chapel or knew them.

When they really did get my attention by telling Don that they and other inmates were making us honorary Blacks, I do believe my mouth just dropped open! I felt so honored, but could not keep quiet; I asked, “Why?”

They looked at us and said, “You are always here for us, we will be here for you.”

Now I was in awe, and totally speechless. What a wonderful God we serve! We left the prison that day knowing that our God is an awesome God, and in my heart I was happy to be accepted as one of them. What an honor. Soon and Very Soon we ARE going to see the King!!

P.S. Of that group, Yvonne did not tell you that four accepted Christ and left the prison gang. ?? ?? ?? ?

JEAN’S JOTTINGS
I, too, am awed by this issue, and I know that my Guardian Angel is keeping the demons away from the computer today. They were starting in at the beginning, but they were defeated when they rebelled in Heaven, and God’s loyal angels keep them in their place here on earth. TYL (Thank You, Lord.)

I know the peace, also, of having Don and Yvonne praying for me. The only time I’m allowed to covet is for your prayers as well, dear readers.

The “Coming Home” story is a huge comfort to me, as one of my family is doing just that. I’ve seen one of my own go through rehab, learning “Blessed are the Meek,” from guards and inmates alike, “make no shadow when he walks,” as they say when keeping out of trouble.

He has taken advantage of the educational opportunities offered, and can go back to school when he’s free.

I tried not to let him know how angry I was that he took the path to perdition; then had to use “tough love” when he hit rock bottom for several months into counseling. Then the prayers of those I love began to kick in, and I cautiously began to rejoice when each letter began to give me hope that he was getting his head screwed on a little tighter with each passing week and month.

Thank you for those of you praying for my partner and I who keep our prison ministry held up to Jesus. A huge family problem has improved, much to our joy, and we’ve gained a new member at our chapel service.

Oh, friends, every word of encouragement we speak to others, every act of kindness, each note of cheer to some soul in distress, brings them closer to Jesus.

Sometimes He bypasses Don & Yvonne’s stacks of names waiting for, or to be, Pen Friends, He matched me with an inmate who needed an understanding friend, who could point out prejudices I didn’t know I had. It turned out to be a two-way street, because he was hung up in Black history that still exists today in America.

When We All Get To Heaven, I can’t imagine that as we greet each other we’ll shun them due to their skin color. Yes, we have different cultures, but when we take the time to learn from the other, color will only enhance the beauty of our neighbors.

A local church member remarked about someone he didn’t care for, “well, they’re going to live on the other side of Heaven and we’ll live on this side.

“Duh, Hello,” as the kids say these days. Let’s get real – we can’t have peace and war at the same time.

J