MAY GOD ABOVE INCREASE HIS LOVE

I am sitting at my computer looking out at a winter wonder-land as I write this, knowing how cold it is outside and that only a window keeps it from me. Just a couple of months ago, everything was really beautiful, and full of life. Now, except for a few green trees, everything is now brown or white and bare.

Soon, and very soon, it will return in all of God’s beauty. No more bitter cold and barren trees. But even now, we who know God can feel the warmth of His love.

At the beginning of last fall, there was a large area in front of our home that was full of ivy, which I removed, and planted what I hope will be a colorful flower garden. Lots of work and much planning later, all the bulbs and plants are under the snow. We can hardly wait for spring and its surprises, and pray everything grows. Satan will send weeds, but with a lot of effort, we will show you a picture of the finished garden.

HOW WILL YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Our dear friends at Voice of Prophecy have again featured Someone Cares on the radio. Yvonne and I were to go to California to do this show. The accident created a problem that VOP solved: we did the shows by phone. We welcome all of you who God drew to that show and to the God Squad.

Those of you requesting to be a Pen Friend will be planting your own seeds in the heart of the inmate with whom you are matched. Your letters to your assigned inmate are “Paper Sunshine” in the dark atmosphere of his or her prison cell.

It will take time and care for your friendship to blossom. To those of you who are new to this ministry, and to some who have been with us a long time, not all seeds grow. Your letter may enter one of the worst prisons in the nation. The inmate picked from our amazing two-pile system may be the worst of the bunch. When you contacted us by phone, Email, or letter, your name went to the bottom of a pile, next to a large pile of inmate applications. When your name reached the top of your pile, the inmate at the top of the pile next to you is yours. Congratulations!! You’ve been matched.

Remember, even though convicts get lonely and scared. It may take a nudging letter or two to
move them. Please remember that God sees us not as we were, nor as we are, but as we will be through Him.

If, after two or three letters, you don’t hear from your inmate, let us know and we can re-match you. Please don’t give up on us — you have been inspired and called to a valuable ministry. Your inmate may not have enough in his or her account to buy a stamped envelope to write you back for awhile.

I often smile when I hear from inmates so excited to have their name called at mail time. To save embarrassment, some inmates write to themselves to just hear their name.

**YOUR PEN FRIEND**

The inmates that we attract are from every prison in the United States. They may be young or old, or from the gutters of the U.S. to the very upper crust of humanity. Educated or uneducated. Why did they ask for a Pen Friend? 50% are men or women who made a mistake and really want to change. Most of these grew up with some kind of church background. Also, they have either a lot of education, or at least some. 20% are men or women looking for something different but aren’t really sure what. Both these groups are scared and lonely. Also, half of them have suffered from some form of abuse. Then there are the hard core who may never change and don’t care. This group has those who are trying to make it through life, no matter what the cost. They are the ones who prey on the rest. Almost all of these are prison gang connected, and even in the other groups this is a factor.

Why does our program work where others do not? We are the buffer between them and you. Since we read their letters to you, we can prevent problems from happening. We suggest to all of you who have a computer, go to our web page and wander through the archived newsletters. Follow the instructions given in your packet.

If they ask for a Bible Study and you don’t have one through your church, go to our web page and click on “Bible Study” and enroll them.

To get an idea of how important your letters can be, after dark go into any room in your home. Turn off the lights and light a match. That’s the sunshine going into a bleak cell somewhere. With massive overcrowding in all prisons, inmates spend hours at a time in a cell. There’s little to read; often no TV. Although they want mail, there is a problem:

Pen Friends need to know that there is very little to write about. Building a friendship takes time and asking lots of questions. They have enough problems and don’t need yours. Ask lots of questions but don’t pry. Don’t ask why they are in prison, and be honored if they tell you.

**ON THIS ROCK WE STAND:**

Yvonne, I owe you a lot and was so sorry to hear you were so badly hurt in the accident.

About ten years ago you saved my life. I had been matched in your letter writing program. You matched me with a neat couple and like a fool I tried to run a number on them (to take
advantage). You wrote me, sending my letter back with a real verbal spanking.

I wrote Jane and Jim another letter, sending also my first letter. I explained there are those of us that try to take advantage of free folks. I begged to be a friend and they accepted me.

Jesus Christ was a swear word to me then, now HE is my best friend. I may never get out of prison but I am walking a different path now. Thank God for your angels who were riding with you.

Also thank God Someone Cares. We in prison so need that.

Marshall

THE ACCIDENT

God Bless each of you who sent cards, Emails and prayers our way. Yvonne has gone through a lot, but is recovering well.

My surgery is still coming, as soon as Yvonne is much better. Thanks to several wonderful folks we have replaced the wrecked car and a car that was a wreck. We truly love all of you. This is not just a ministry, it is a true Christian experience.

FROM ALL OF US

We were really scared when we found out about your accident, from one of our Pen Friends. We are a group of 26, all with Pen Friends through your ministry. Would we lose our Pen Friends? We were overjoyed when the Chaplain here allowed us to call you.

I will try and sum up our feelings. Like most prisons, Chaplains are overworked and understaffed. Religion too often is used and abused. Tony, who has now gone home (PAROLED!) started this group.

We first met on the yard and when the group got too big we were allowed a class room. We became, with your help, an All Faiths Group. What a tattered mess we were, but like your life, Don, God put the pieces together and we now have a solid unity among us.

(Two of the group were transferred to other prisons and started a group where they were.)

Snowball-growing. Also they sent a card and Money Order.

GOD IS OUR BOSS. WHO PAYS US?

For 20 years, we were a Widows’ Mite Ministry, until a gentleman said he was not a widow, so we are a widows’ and widowers’ mite ministry. The love gifts from each of you who is a Faith Partner, keeps us growing. Jesus keeps us going. A small or large gift monthly, yearly, or whenever, has kept Someone Cares “in the black” for almost 30 years.

All donations are tax deductible and needed.
POTTER’S FIELD

I got a letter from an inmate that even set me back. His name: Lawrence. He has been in prison for 28 years. His sentence is up and he should be released. He had lost contact with all his family and has no place to parole to. In most cases, the state would just let him go, but he is dying with one of three forms of cancer so they are keeping him until he dies. Yvonne wrote him, as did many others. He told Yvonne he did not want to die alone and be buried in a plain box in a prison cemetery. He wanted to be cremated and his ashes spread over a pretty place. The cost: is about $1200.

We started the search and B.J. joined with us. It would take a lot to tell you that we have found some of his family.

How much hurt has grown between them over the years! Many family members think he died years ago. We have promised to grant his wish. Donations to do this will help. If the family members decide to help, the funds will be returned. Prayer is really needed now, that there will be time to put these broken family members together, with God’s help.

YVONNE’S CORNER

There is just something about being alone for a long period of time that really tugs at my heart. It is like one of the inmates said when I asked him what he would say to the people on the outside to try to get them interested in Prison Ministry. This was Rocky’s answer.

“If you would come and see all the lonely people and walk away and do nothing, I doubt very much if you could call yourself a Christian. Even if you can’t come, writing is like a visit.”

That was really strong for me, but from his heart.

I personally want to thank each of you for all the prayers and cards. May God richly Bless You and welcome to all of you who are new with Paper Sunshine.

LOOSE ENDS

Please, if you are using a Pen Name, make it a first and last. Seal your letter to the inmate. Put your real name and address on the envelope to us. Do not put stickers on envelopes to inmates. If you plan to send anything to your inmate, make sure it’s allowed. Try to write once a month. We really need your talent. If you write an inmate who only writes once in awhile, take an additional inmate’s name to write to.

SOMETHING GREAT IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN

With all the prayers and stuff going to Heaven, we must have ticked Satan off again. Yvonne had a bad abscess and her white count went through the roof. She had to spend another five days in the hospital. Every day she was there, some good thing happened to this ministry.
The radio show was a smash, and we are again plus writers for a bit. When God gave me a helpmate, He sure gave me a peach. Please keep us in your prayers and join us as the victory is close. A very special thanks for cars, funds, and a lot of prayer!

If you are only writing one inmate, please take another. If you can’t write, send stamps, and please, accept all our love.

JEAN’S JOTTINGS

God has been teaching us month by month to always be cheerful, kind, considerate and warm toward those we serve. He has brought to our attention several times that we’re not serving just the inmates who come to our chapel services, but those who are in charge, and now He is widening our horizons to include inmate families.

Sometimes we arrive in time to visit with families we encounter in the waiting room. One day a mother was upset, so we walked her over to a quiet place, put our arms around her, and had prayer with her. She felt uplifted and grateful.

One of our inmates who comes to the chapel has had some rough times with close family that were under attack by Satan’s manipulations. Shirley was able to encourage and be supportive through prayer, their church, and a family friend of theirs who keeps our group supplied with reading material.

The biggest thrill of all is that we’re going to have a baptism on March 3! We’re all excited about that, of course. The Chaplain and one of the church elders are scheduled to officiate together.

Sometimes even a guard will open up to us as we cross the yard to the Chapel. It’s more than helping our inmates have a church service, or to improve their reading skills, although that’s a part of the package. The chapel personnel experience agape love as well. Someone donated an organ several years ago, so we have church hymnals and good music that goes to the hearts of the Chaplain plus his inmate assistant for the day. One was very enthusiastic about hearing some of the old familiar hymns he hadn’t heard in a long time, so we were all blessed, that day, along with our Chaplain.

Visiting an inmate is a blessing for both you and the one you visit, provided you live close enough to do that. Paper Sunshine is vital, as you know from reading these newsletters. The letters you write are paper hugs, and can be a kind of journal of what’s going on in the outside real world.

I had a Pen Friend whose biggest bit of “culture shock” on release was that everyone seemed to have traded in their cars for big, beefy SUVs. The family had an adjustment to make, as well, as they rode everywhere, and couldn’t un-derstand why anyone would want to walk anywhere, un-fettered by barred windows and fences at the “Razor Wire Resort.”

Shirley and I have learned so much about the system, the good rules and sometimes a bad one, about being kind to all we meet, to reach out to families and prison staff alike. Thank You, Jesus!!!