WHOM THE LORD SETS FREE IS FREE, INDEED.

Yvonne and I are overjoyed when we hear that through this ministry, male and female inmates are “Set Free.”

I often think back when I was locked up and think “Free?” I also think of all the prisons I was locked up in: Drugs, Alcohol, Cigarettes, Lifestyle. The joy I received when Jesus came in and Satan was kicked out. We have grown so much, as has this ministry. Thank you, Jesus!

It’s almost impossible to understand the feelings associated with imprisonment until you have been there. Most volunteers that go inside are exposed for either minutes or hours to the kind of atmosphere the convicts breathe, every moment of every day. What they are not exposed to, what is completely foreign, is the way convicts think and react. They are part of a value system and a code which only remotely resembles anything you have been used to. Prison life mandates different behavior from the outside world.

WHAT THEY DEAL WITH

Some prison volunteers are shocked when a Christian inmate talks about drugs, rape, or even murder. It’s not likely they will speak openly about these things. Free folks think you should report that (normal thinking from free folks). But the inmate is surrounded daily by situations that are illegal and immoral. Reporting that gives the inmate a “snitch jacket” that can result in death or mandatory protective custody. New volunteers often have a naive or even romantic view of inmate ministry. Thinking that applying the same principles used outside prison will apply inside...that the inmates will become solid, mature Christians and all their problems disappear.

It is true that God works many miracles with those in prison. In prison the ghosts of the past turn up to haunt them. When this happens they need a spiritual high to get them through; they need a solid foundation.

COMMON FAILINGS

One common failing we have with volunteers is that they often try to present an unrealistic view of Christianity. This view is generally supported by books and tapes they gravitate toward. They
start looking for a mystical, magical solution to their problems.

Some use faith teaching that leads them to believe God is a cosmic bellboy who will accomplish whatever they want. They are too often hit with all the do nots. Inmates do need to understand that Jesus is a friend as well as a Savior. They need to know that God does care for them, and that HE is at work in their lives. Don’t close the door on miracles and healing, but don’t reinforce the unrealistic idea that a Christian life is nothing but miracles. Help inmates develop a balanced, practical approach to their faith. We try to warn that unreal expectations transfer responsibility. In other words, the inmate can adopt the attitude: “Well, God’s supposed to take over and make me over in a miraculous way, so it’s His fault if I fall.

REGENERATION VS REHABILITATION

There is little or no rehabilitation in prison. Overcrowding everywhere. Lack of jobs and educational opportunities. Gangs and corruption. Volunteer programs getting cut way back.

So, how important is it being a Pen Friend? You may be the only step toward freedom. One-to-one is, and always will be, the only way to minister in prison. We have always said, “Don’t let your doctrine be a barrier, but a bridge to Jesus. If the Chaplain lets you in, have an All Faiths service, not just your ideas. Chaplains are territorial and have their ideas on what the Bible says. Chaplains are often forced to be more cop than minister. But as much as we can, we try to work with all Chaplains.

With the massive overcrowding, some inmates would love to answer your letters. Even free stamps are getting cut back. Also friends, it does not take long to realize that a Pen Friendship may not be in the cards for some inmates. If you do not get along, let us know; we have a ton of inmates waiting. Or, if you can, take another, PLEASE!

PEN FRIEND

We try to stay away from Pen “Pal.” Your job, if you decide to take it, is to establish a friendship with your inmate. Although the application the inmate fills out explains we are not a dating service and that the letter comes through us to you, they try to get around us. Writing them should not be hard, as you are defining yourself as a Christian friend. A few of the problems we run into:

Racial tension in prison is very high. Things we take for granted, such as paper, pen, envelop and a stamp are often difficult. This next is vital: Many join to try to get everything they can from you. Writing through us should prevent that. Although most claim to be Christians, a few letters will define that. A prison day is very boring. Most do not go to school or work. Their time is spent between the yard and their cells. Some have TV or access to a TV; others just listen to programs in other cells. This is very important. Their letters are often read by prison personnel, so inmates are careful about answering questions. Your letters must be open and honest.

Talk about family, your interests, and ask a lot of questions. Try to remember these, as you can find out a lot from not answered questions. Most will want to call you. Phone calls from prison are collect and can cost up to $6 a minute. The Lord Himself has blessed this ministry. Its
growth is amazing and it continues to grow.

A BELATED HAPPY BIRTHDAY

My friends, I just had a birthday. I’m as old as my tongue and a little older than my teeth. We are looking to build up our funding base. If we can, we are thinking of splitting the U.S. into 4 sections, if we can find four willing to do what we do. A Someone Cares of Canada is also possible, but all things are possible with God.

OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM

We have a stack of mail again that I have no idea where to send it. On your mail to your inmate, put your name or Pen Name. Our address is the only thing on the envelope to your inmate. Leave Someone Cares off altogether. Please, also tell us what you use as a Pen Name. Don’t put Joyce, Jim, Lee, Rachel, Carolyn, Alice, etc. If you use a Pen Name, make it a first and last name. We have 18 Lindas!! Also, we have a lot of you who wrote, got no answer, and quit. Please write again or request a new friend.

Being summer, probably as I write this, half the prisons are locked down. Gangs, violence, overcrowding cause many problems.

We are going to attempt to put an ad in all the Christian magazines we can afford to get into. Two different large ministries promoted Pen Pals and then referred all the responses to us! I called both organizations, asking to please put a plug in for our ministry in their publications or bulletins so we can get writers for the inmates they referred. They refused!!!

A reporter once asked us what is the key to our success? Well, Jesus was not good enough for her, so we told her from the very beginning of this ministry that we were willing, in fact had offered, to work with all ministries. We still are willing. Most are afraid to, as they think they will lose some funding, and they will. But God is in control — in a mobile home in Aptos, to a house in Paso Robles, to an old home in Kentucky, to an old school house in Michigan, and then to Indiana. God has provided the increase. As long as He stays in control, we will keep growing.

MY LOVE, MY FRIEND, MY WIFE

For the last eight months, Yvonne has really gone through it. Her arm was the worst fracture three doctors had ever seen. Her hand had the thumb torn from the socket. Thank God a specialist was on call when she arrived in the Emergency Dept. After the first surgery, she wanted to know if she would play the piano.

She is now driving, playing the piano and organ, and has recovered 45% usage. Keep her in prayer.

My torn rotator cuff (shoulder) has not been a bit of a problem and as of now, no surgery is in order.

Satan tried, God denied. We do serve a wonderful God. I have even been rapping with our
BIG PUSH TIME

Summer is here; the economy is in trouble, as are the general conditions of the world. Between postage going up and gas, it did put a bit of a burden on this ministry. We also have a dozen Pen Friends that write a bunch of inmates that we pay the postage for them. If you are not a Faith Partner, please consider a one-time donation. God will grant the increase. All of you connected with Someone Cares have provided a blessing for many inmates, and us. If you feel a little tingle on Friday night, it is God answering our prayers for you. We will overcome and you will be blessed.

YVONNE’S CORNER

I just want to praise God for all his blessings! Since I have been in a healing mode with my hand and arm, I decided to read letters and requests for applications. Wow! For the most part, the letters have been great.

What can be more exciting than to see our God change lives, and that is happening. I want to share this letter with all of you, as I have permission from the inmate:

“I received this pen friend application in my Voice of Prophecy Bible Study that I was doing. I did not think that anyone would care to write a 31-year-old, two-time loser, but I filled it out anyway. I used my very last stamp to mail it.

After a month I got my name called out. I instantly thought it was another Bible study lesson. Boy, was I surprised when it turned out to be a lady that was old enough to be my Grandmother. I read and re-read her letter. I kept thinking, what in the world could a 31 yr. Man and an 80+ year old lady possibly have in common???

Not a whole lot, was my answer. Thinking that she was nice enough to write me, the least I could do was reply, so I did. That was eight months ago.

The one thing we did have, one thing in common, was a deep, innermost being love for our Lord and Savior. Through this ministry I’ve not only found a true Christian friend, I’ve found a new “Grandma Betty.” She will forever be in my heart, she has helped heal some of the painful hurts from my past.

(The inmate is Wyatt Stout, and thank you, Grandma Betty, for your Godly persistence in his life. We sure need a lot more Pen Friends like you.)

PEN FRIEND LAID TO REST

Do you remember Mr. Lawrence Krug, the inmate who was dying of cancer and his family abandoned him? His ashes were taken to a Pen Friend’s family burial site in Wisconsin, where he will await Jesus’ return.
JEAN’S JOTTINGS

We are so blessed, as volunteers to have an inmate group that is knowledgeable about the Bible, whose leader is about my age (which, I’ve discovered, is about the same as Don’s!)

We’ve been so blessed to see the beauty of Michigan’s spring and summer months. There is always a surprise around the corner and care must be taken when going outside, to avoid being speared by the long beak of a fiercely territorial hummingbird. Their aerobatic battles are neat to watch.

Shirley, my partner, just discovered this week that the giant hibiscus donated to our church by the prison we serve, have actually begun to put out shoots. We were overjoyed to see the tiny leaves, and they are fast growers. We thought they were dead at first, as there is a dead stick from the previous year, but we must use patience to discover that the new plants come up from the roots. Isn’t God wonderful?

Inmates are kinda like the hibiscus. Some of them are like the dead sticks—gotta be tough so no one gets to them.

After getting acquainted with Jesus and their Pen Friends, they begin to grow into their full spiritual height. They put out spiritual leaves, and with encouragement, watered with God’s Holy Spirit, they develop buds that become huge flowers the size of dinner plates. bursting into huge, happy, colorful blooms of blessing to those who pass by.

This has been a special season out here in the country. Lucy Dog has settled in, knows her boundaries, and springs through the tall grass to the field to greet the farmer who is preparing the land this year. She has saved the house from any more damage by varmints, and would love to share a bed. That would require a weekly shampoo, She’s one of those special creatures sent to dispense happiness and joy, but also guardian of the castle, which gives me peace of mind.

Even the birds seem more friendly this year. A splash of brilliant orange and black in the canopy outside my room, announced a gorgeous oriole!

God has given us so much beauty to offset the drabness that Satan throws our way.

Don surprised me last evening, to see how the newsletter was coming along, We were catching up on my son’s progress. I was blown away when he said that by 9:00 p.m. every evening, there are about 6000 people in 537 prayer groups from Australia to France, and north to south, around the world remembering my son, praying for his spiritual needs! No one told me this was happening, but the change taking place is surely the Lord’ working in his heart and mine.

I believe that Don and Yvonne bloom all year. I know that they are a huge source of encouragement to me.

Even in a prison, inmates need someone they can trust (Jesus, a Pen Friend, and a trustworthy fellow inmate). One who doesn’t make friends easily, from any of these categories, seems bound to be targeted to become someone’s victim. As a Pen Friend, you can be that trusted one, to teach him or her how to not become a victim.
Thank You, Jesus, for this ministry and those within it. Guide our humble efforts to Your honor and glory. Thank You for guiding our paths.

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