

ONE DAY AT A TIME



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NETWORK

*Writings on Facing the
Incarceration of a Friend or
Family Member*

Cover photo taken by Lloyd Withers, National Coordinator, Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN).

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One Day at a Time: Writings on Facing the Incarceration of a Friend or Family Member
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One Day at a Time is a booklet of writings voicing the strength of families and friends of inmates. It is dedicated to all who face the challenges of incarceration.

Behind the Fences

By Ann Graham Salpeter

For a first-time visitor, *a visit to a prison can be overwhelming*. There is a multitude of emotions involved. There is the primary desire to see the friend or family member who is incarcerated – the need to see the person and check that he or she is doing alright. As prison is a place that few of us know much about, *there is the need to know about his or her surroundings* – what about accommodation, work, meals – and does anyone care about his health? Can he attend religious services? Does he have clean clothes?

Prison is another world but a complete world.

Behind the fences and wire exist facilities that might surprise a visitor. A prisoner has access to religious services of his choice, many different sports facilities (though these vary from institution to institution), clubs like Jaycees, ethnic organizations and sports clubs. Sometimes outside speakers are invited to these clubs, and most clubs organize socials and special meals at Christmas and at other times during the year. An inmate can have his own television set in his cell but must save up and pay for it himself. Work is usually available within the institution in such areas as the kitchen, carpentry shop and laundry. Pay is meagre, to say the least, and much less than the basic wage on the outside. Income can be saved or spent in the institution's canteen on sundries such as candy, cigarettes, toiletries or reading matter.

Aside from the obvious restricted and regimented lifestyle, *inmates do face many frustrations*. These range from difficulties meeting with one's P.O. (Parole Officer), to an inability to access one's savings account (as only a limited amount is made available for day to day expenses), to not having enough time to accomplish daily activities before lock-down. Complaints about one's health and requests to see a doctor can be met with suspicion – is the inmate really sick or is this just a ruse to make a break for freedom?

From the visitor's point of view, visits can be fraught with fear and disappointment. The clanging of electronically operated gates can be a scary sound. Sometimes a visitor will feel that he or she is the criminal, such can be the treatment of CSC staff. A search of one's belongings can be considered intrusive. Very few articles can be taken into the V&C (Visiting and Correspondence) area and purses etc. must be stowed in lockers for the duration of the visit. Often there are soft drink and snack machines in V&C, and change for these machines is usually allowed to be taken in.

Everyone is suspected of being a potential drug carrier, and usually some article of each visitor is scanned for the presence of drugs. *The ability to "roll with the punches" is essential.* There is no point in arguing with staff members, but it has been my experience that a cheerful "Good morning, how are you today?" addressed to the dourest staff member will bring forth an improved manner. Waiting in line in a cheerless reception area while staff process visitors at a snail's pace is frustrating but there is nothing to be done so *one might as well relax.* There can be occasions when one has made a long journey to visit, only to find that the prison is "locked down" because of some misdemeanor and one's trip has been in vain.

Sometimes an item such as a ballpoint pen can be taken into V&C yet on the next occasion a different staff member will inform the visitor that such an item is strictly forbidden.

All potential visitors have to be screened and visitors must be on an inmate's approved list before they are permitted to visit. Collect telephone calls can be made by inmates after prior arrangement, but only to certain approved telephone numbers (not to cell phones) and visitors cannot themselves telephone inmates. The John Howard Society and Salvation Army organize bus transportation to most institutions from large centres such as Toronto and Ottawa. The bus makes the journey on a Saturday or a Sunday and visitors have to make a booking by telephone ahead of time.

These observations apply mostly to medium-security institutions. I have no experience with maximum-security. At minimum institutions, however, things are considerably better. Visitors are not searched and they can bring in food to be consumed with the inmate in V & C. Whole families sometimes visit to celebrate Thanksgiving or a birthday with their family member, complete with turkey dinners or birthday cake – but no alcohol, obviously. Microwave ovens are available for use, and until recently, gas barbeques could be used outside. Inmates do not have to wear prison clothes and staff members are not in uniform. The atmosphere in V & C is relaxed and there are no fences or bars, but it is still prison – albeit at a low level.

There are some inmates who have been abandoned by their families and who have no visitors. Shut off from the world, their “time” must go even slower.

Visit as much as you can, and write letters when you cannot. You will be the bright spot in their day, I can guarantee it.

The Effects/Affects of Incarceration *by L.L.M.*

When you are a friend, family member and/or loved one of an inmate, you often feel as though you're doing time too. When you look at the time, money, effort and most of all, emotional longing for that person, reminiscent of what you had before their incarceration, it's probably one of the most downhearted emotions which one can experience. Now imagine you've never known them on the outside, never had the chance to see them without their prison-issued clothing... Never been able to be able to touch them without the constant supervision of a camera or a guard asking you to "Please stop. That's inappropriate behaviour" ... or to enjoy the simple pleasure of going to a movie or grabbing a cheeseburger at McDonald's, all of these are things which many people had before incarceration, but some of us didn't...

This is my story.

I humorously took on the title of "Prison Bunny" and I've heard all of the jokes as well as all of the disapproving commentary regarding my relationship with a man who is currently incarcerated. Many times it has affected me, but they say love conquers all and sometimes I wish I could agree with the cliché.

I feel as though he is my soul mate without my knowing exactly who "he" really is... but the person whom I know from solely within a controlled environment is severely bittersweet.

The journey has been none other than a rocky one, filled with joy but also with its share of painful experiences.

I began as a volunteer within the prison system, offering up a few hours of my time each week to befriend men serving life sentences within a maximum level institution. As a young, impressionable girl of 19 years, this was **both scary and exciting** to me, and in hindsight, I probably wouldn't have done it.

Do I regret it? Absolutely not.

The screening process for volunteers, especially young women, should have been far more stringent, because here I am, in my mid-twenties, **hopelessly in (what I feel is) love** with an inmate serving a life term. I would love to be able to tell those teenage girls, those girls who have somewhat low self-esteem and crave the attention of men to heighten their self-worth, that prison is no place to find a boyfriend. Hopefully this piece will reach them and make them aware of what they're getting into and allow them the strength to not take the path that I did. Again, do I regret signing up for the organization, attending meetings, encountering this man and working towards building a relationship with him? At the risk of sounding repetitive, the answer is, again, absolutely not.

The question is... what do I hope to get from this relationship?

What first must be examined is what I have already received. I've received a gentler manner. I've learned that I can't always get what I want.

Most importantly, I've learned that if you put in the effort and love someone enough, they'll give it back to you, not necessarily in the way that you expect it, but in a deeper, more cosmic manner which can only be achieved through acquiescence; the art of patience.

When you are dealing with a loved one who is serving time, the effects

affect. I continue to serve my life sentence alongside of his, and ***i am confident that, with mutual commitment, we will get through it and both be stronger, happier individuals together.***

I've discovered that you ***appreciate the little things*** that most people take for granted. From watching television together while on the telephone to being in the visiting room and having a white flower handed to you (because it's your favourite) and being told it's the best that he could do for right now.

Dear Son,

By Linda Love

I will always remember the day you were born. It was a beautiful fall evening in 1971, and your father and I, your grandparents, and family and friends waited for the wonder of your arrival. You were our first child and your birth made us a family. I could not believe that something so wonderful and joyous could come from such pain.

You truly were a child of love. Wonder and delight marked your early years. The birth of your sister was as joyous for you as it was for the rest of us, and in every way you were her big brother. You watched over her and you loved her with the same gentleness and care that you displayed to the world around you.

As you grew into a young boy, you continued to bring joy to all of us and we reveled in the gift of being a family. I have often looked back to those early years and questioned whether it was really as wonderful as I remembered.

Have the events of the last decade caused me to view the past through rose coloured glasses? I do not think so. Our memories are true and they are real. We were a family who cherished our life together.

*So the inevitable must be asked.
Where did it go wrong for you my son?
When did our love and our joy
in being a family stop being enough for you?*

In truth, my search for answers has ceased. This is now my reality. Your teen years took you away from us, from the values we had instilled and from the circle of protection we fought so hard to surround you and your sister with. It was not enough for you. You wanted to try it all, have it all and live in the moment. You could not wait until you were grown and you made choices and took risks you were not ready to handle. You chose not to listen, to heed our counsel and that of others and we all live with the consequences of your choices.

The day I came to accept that you had committed murder, taken the life of another human being, will forever be the day a part of me died. My head knew that the murder was real long before my heart came to accept the truth. You were my child. You were not just the fruit of my womb; you were the child of my heart. If part of me could commit this heinous act, how could I go on? How could I still love you? I have never been able to put myself in the place of the mother of your victim because to go there is to know the end of all that I believe and love of life.

The long trial, the camera crews who chased us down the street and recorded our tears, the daily front page newspaper stories and the curious who judged me with you, have forever changed the way I view the world. The harshness and indifference of the legal process has caused me to be cynical and I do not trust. I remember crying in the Remand Centre at seeing you behind glass, disheveled, confused and frightened. I remember the man who

told me to get used to it. I would be judged as a criminal because you were a criminal and you were my son. You gave me these gifts but I do not thank you for them.

Somehow we survived those first years, we fought to keep you alive and to bring you to prisons closer to home. We didn't know how to do anything else. You were our son and our love for you did not die the day you committed murder. The first five years you spent in prison were about survival. You surviving being in prison and us surviving you being in prison.

*I have learned
humility, patience and perseverance
and I have given up things like
dignity, arrogance and judging others.*

We learned “the system” and how to use that system to get what we wanted: having you in a place where we could provide the support needed if you were to come out of prison a whole person. We learned about which prisons were the worst and which were better. We learned what it would take to get you closer to home and we used every lesson and all the resources we had to do what we believed was best for you. We learned that our life will forever look different from that of our friends and their families. We do not make new friends because we do not trust what will happen when strangers learn about you. We plan our weekends around visiting hours at the prison. It has been a long eight years in prison for all of us.

Through it all we knew that we really had no more control now, over what you were doing, than we did when you were a teenager. Ironic isn't it? If you had accepted our support and help when you were a teenager, perhaps you would not need it now.

But really my son, we do only what little we can and we know that you are really the one who does it all. While all around you, ugliness and hurt prevails, you make the best of the worst. You continue to grow and learn despite the best efforts of the world to keep you down. You take every opportunity to continue to become the wonderful whole human being you have always had the potential to be. You have not lost your gentleness and your wonder with life. You have accepted responsibility for your actions and you are moving forward. You challenge yourself to reach higher and grow stronger. You continue to amaze us with your openness, your willingness to risk and your self-evaluation. You do not always choose the easy road.

It may seem strange to many, but I am proud of you. You are a person worth knowing and I am glad that you allow me to be a part of your life. Who would have guessed that again, something so joyous and wonderful could come from such pain?

I love you son,
Mom

My Way of Coping...

By Debbie Caulfield

My name is Debbie Caulfield and I'm a clerk at Nova Institution for Women in Truro, NS.

It was during my first aboriginal 'sweat' in Big Cove, New Brunswick (Feb. 2002, very cold) that was part of the New Employee training that a new 'way of coping' came to me. During the 'sweat' each person had an opportunity to pray for someone, or ask our God to help or watch over someone that we felt needed a prayer said for him or her.

Well, it was almost my turn and I was drawing a blank! I thought: how could it be that I'm a thoughtful person and I care about the people around me but for some reason I cannot get past the fact that I want to ask for help for myself???

I've been going through some really stressful events in my life and had been for some time, these events consumed my every thought and I could not get past these feelings of self-pity. Then, it came to me, surprised me... just as I was expected to say something; some spirit or God gave me the only gift that could really help me. These words came out:

"I realize why God has given me more than my share of problems, it is because some women can't handle dealing with what was dealt to them, so God gives this extra burden to those women who are stronger and can carry that extra load. This is how God intended for me to help, so those women are able to continue living, and be OK. Maybe one of those women is at Nova, in which case I'm now ready to handle more. AMEN"

When I left the sweat I felt like I'd experienced a very life changing experience. When I feel like I'm starting to carry more than my load I just remind myself that it is for women who would not be able to and I somehow get stronger.

“Standing Strong through the Years”

By David J. Dobson

I have been incarcerated for 20 ^½ years and am serving 25 years to Life for First Degree Murder. *I am not alone in my incarceration and am blessed to have the continued support of some of my family members, and many friends.* Since my incarceration began in 1982 both of my parents have died, my grandparents have passed away, my siblings have all grown older and I have many new nephews and nieces whose faces I have yet to see. In sharing this, I am thankful for the support in the early years of my incarceration from the elderly in my family who provided stability and for the younger generation that is now becoming interested in my release from imprisonment.

I would like to encourage other families to stand by their incarcerated loved ones. The journey is far from easy with the initial demands of phone, visit and private family visit contact as family members attempt to make sense of the correctional system and the actions of their loved one in prison. *I found that as I shared openly with my family I explored areas of my life that I was responsible and accountable for, and through a lot of pain, I was able to gently involve others in the process of healing.*

I found myself seeking reconciliation with my family for the shame I brought upon the family name, for the community stigma that befell them through media accounts, for the embarrassment they felt when being identified as related to me in the grocery store line ups. My early years were full of a lot of remorse, guilt and apologies.

Not to use God or spirituality as a crutch was a necessary decision I had to make so that I didn't become disillusioned with my ability to balance my personal accountability with the perception of forgiveness I experience through the human interaction of making peace with myself and others I had effected. Though I remain actively involved in several chapel programs and weekly worship, I have not lost myself in a “religious experience”. My incarceration has been a spiritual journey from which I have gained valuable moral enrichment, blessed friendships, grace to help others on their journey, and the ability to openly share my strength and hope for a future with my family. As much of my family “has done time with me”, so to

speak, I have been given a vital opportunity to enrich their lives through my increased understanding of the human condition.

I encourage mothers, fathers, grandparents, wives, girlfriends, children, aunts, uncles and friends to remain involved with their incarcerated loved one. I encourage those on both sides of the gates to pace themselves for the journey that will lead them back into the arms of one another.

Reconcile with one another where and as often as needed to keep the mutually supportive bond flexible. Be open-minded to the changes in corrections and let your frustration with the system take a back seat to being in the company of your loved one. Most of all, lean on your faith to keep going when all else seems hopeless. Though the years may elapse, life is ever changing and no circumstance is so permanent that your love won't overcome the obstacles between you. Persevere through the situations, compromise where necessary, and overcome the hurdles. Keep your love strong despite the struggles.

Stand Strong.

CHILDREN HELPING
CHILDREN
BY TELIA SMART

My name is Telia Smart and I've grown up with a unique perspective on life, having to go through unique and trying times.

As a child of barely seven years old, *the unimaginable happened*. A man I loved, and, who was the only man who stepped up to the role of a positive and caring father figure, was put on trial and imprisoned. He was taken away from me and I didn't know why. I couldn't understand how a man who brought so much love and joy into our family would ever be put in a prison. That's where the bad guys went, not him.

I am 17 years old now and I'll be turning 18 in two and a half months. I still visit my step dad and *have never left his side*. Even though my mother had only been dating him for one year before he was incarcerated, we decided as a family that he was a part of our family and we would stand by him through it all. In some ways we're grateful for this experience because it has brought us closer together, and stronger as a family. *You learn to communicate, a gift not all families share, because in a visit room setting it is all you have to do.*

There are many things that still surprise me today. A child going through such a devastating experience as incarceration of a parent should not be subject to questioning, ridicule, and/or be outcast over a situation that is not of their doing.

Children are not guilty of the crime their loved one was convicted of. Many people seem to forget this fact.

I can guarantee the following statements will go hand in hand if people in the community hear about a child with a parent or loved one who has been incarcerated. People like to ask as many questions as they can, to find out about that person's case, making it a very difficult and stressful situation for a child to be faced with. Others are curious to know what it's like to go inside a prison and what sort of things go on in there.

One of the questions that may upset a child the most, because they visit someone on the inside, is if any sort of criminal acts have been forced upon you. ***These questions are understandable if asked by police officers, lawyers, or judges. But when it's your neighbours, teachers, classmates, and friend's parents, it is not acceptable.*** Questions like these can make a child feel intimidated, and worthless. As a child, you feel you have no voice against an adult. They are the ones in charge and you have to listen to what they say, and talk to them even if you don't want to.

Ridicule is another factor that comes into play. Many people will try to sway the child to hate the person that's incarcerated and disapprove of the parent bringing you up to the prison to visit them. ***This can make a child feel like there's a boundary up between the society and their family, because of a prison wall.*** A child shouldn't have to feel like they live in a prison themselves. Other people may make crude jokes and taunt them about the child's family, or situation as a whole. Both child and family may be perceived as something below "proper society level" because they choose to remain a constant support for a loved one.

To be outcast is a difficult issue for anyone to deal with, but imagine a child who has lost a loved one by imprisonment and that has been ***outcast for that reason - and that reason alone.*** An example of this is when other mothers will distance their own children from the children who's family member is in prison, because they feel that they must be bad, and do not want such an influence like that on their own children.

In the visiting area a child has to learn some proper prison etiquette very quickly. These are some things a child should never have to learn, but they must know for visiting inside the prisons. They must always be cautious of what they say; perhaps a meaningless joke can lead to separation of their loved one because their visits have been revoked. You learn who sits where and you never sit at someone else's table. You don't whistle and you do not talk about other people's cases unless you have permission from them. I know some of these examples may seem like minor things, but if you don't follow these rules it may be taken as a hostile act and may result in threats of physical harm toward the person who is incarcerated.

A child who has to live through this life feels very alone and cautious of everyone around them. They may feel that society is teaching them that to love and support someone who's done something wrong is not proper and will have consequences. It

can build strong emotions such as depression, anxiety, rage, regret, guilt and a sense of worthlessness.

Society is only beginning to see the possible harmful effects that having a loved one in jail can bring a child. So they are beginning to bring in programs for children who have a loved one in prison: counsellors, youth care workers, and summer camps. There are also other programs to help support the family with care packages on occasion and some newly developed programs for families as a whole, or just spouse relationships support groups. ***These ideas are a good step in the right direction.*** As a child going through this for almost eleven years now, I have taken part in some of these programs and have found that they are good ideas but are somewhat inadequate. I have needed someone who understood me, and what I was, and am still going through; those workers have no experience with this kind of life and so there was no way they could understand where I am coming from.

The most healing work I have ever done
was when I was with other children facing similar situations.
We would discuss events we had gone through
and understand each others pain.
We were not outcasts with each other.
We were not judged.
We were just simply kids
who had a loved one in prison.

I am glad that more and more services are becoming available to children, but ***I don't believe any true healing will begin until children of similar situations can be brought together to heal each other.*** The foundation of such a program would be run by adults, with the involvement of young adults who have gone through this sort of experience during their childhood and have ideas that can help children feel safe, wanted, comfortable, and able to communicate about how they feel. The programs can be overseen by children (ages 16 and up) who have experience with incarceration. This program would be about children with more experience helping younger children; but even the older kids would meet others of their own age and start healing themselves as well. From life and self-experience I have realized that children will often share their feelings and get to the roots of issues if they are just talking to other kids. This program can be proven to be a very healing and informative process for everyone. Perhaps a committee can decide events a group of children may be able to do together such as: movie nights, games night, arts and

crafts night and a night where you can receive help for your homework. These are just example ideas of some of the things that could be done to help bring children together.

People are always saying that children are our future. Well it takes a community to raise a child, let's not leave any of them out. To better ourselves, and our community, we must better the situations for our children. We all share a role, what will yours be?

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING MY PROPOSAL
AND HEARING THE VOICE OF A
CHILD.

Never Give Up

*Based on an interview with an inmate family member,
written by Heather Holland, CFCN Research Assistant*

** not their real names*

Anne* said that she fits ‘the profile’. She’s 10 years older than he; she’s a professional; **she fell in love with a lifer**. She says that it’s reassuring to read about other women who’ve married inmates...to know she’s not the only one in her situation. Perhaps in a year or so, if Brian* gets parole, they will be living together for the first time. Their relationship has been fostered within the walls of his penitentiary and in time to come will be fostered within the walls of their self-built home. **Walls meant to comfort instead of contain.**

He’s learned about woodworking in prison; among other things she tells me, he now has his G.E.D.. His woodworking skills will be put to use in constructing the home they will share on land that they plan to buy when he gets out. She says that “if it wasn’t for his prison term he would be dead by now”; that **he has taken every opportunity he can to re-evaluate, rebuild and straighten out**. She can relate to addiction to hard drugs and to re-evaluating, rebuilding and straightening out. She’s been clean for 7 years, she quit smoking, she’s **built a solid reputation from nothing**. And she’s scared to lose what she’s built. It’s not him that she fears, but the stigma attached to being with him....

Myth: professionals don’t fall in love with inmates.

Myth: all inmates lie, do drugs and take their families for all their worth.

Anne has to deal with the ramifications of these myths everyday in her work. Some of the people she has to network with won’t even speak to her. They accept the information she provides; they know their organizations have similar goals and that they need to work together, but they reject her because of her personal life. Anne says “that’s their problem”, their loss. But she knows that it’s her problem too, that community stigma and judgment can prevent her from putting her skills to use. That is why she holds back sometimes. When pressed to talk about him, she tells a potential employer over lunch that her boyfriend lives in Halifax, he’s a carpenter and she’s hoping he’ll be moving to her area soon. She stretches the truth to protect herself. Word of mouth could prevent her from achieving her professional goals; **gossip must feel like a weapon to her**. The stress in her life is incredible.

Yet I listen to the **determination in her voice; evident in everything she says**. Anne tells me about a barrier she faced to visiting her husband; and how she overcame it. The prison ion scanners continually got her in trouble that she didn't deserve. She would be denied visits because of the faulty machines and she decided not to put up with it. She wrote letters defending herself and she went to regional headquarters with her concerns. Eventually, a correctional investigator was brought in and the scanners were tested, those of a particular make were declared defective and removed from all of the prisons in the region! Her name was cleared. She says to carefully choose your fights after much consideration, let the 'small' stuff go, fight for what you need to and **"never give up, never"**. That you have to **"stand up and fight for what you believe in, and that if you don't give up you probably will win"**.

One Day at a Time

By Jeanette Bugler Johnson

I was a victim of attempted murder by my companion, but I was devastated when he was swallowed up by the Canadian federal prisons system.

I was not to have contact with him ever again. I did not know what to expect. I felt abandoned and left out in the cold – not only me but also my five children. Economically I was in despair. The man who had been my hunter and provider no longer had the ability to care for us. It was a very cold time in my life with **no warmth and no light**. I felt lost, hopeless and very scared. I fell apart day by day. I was in total denial and in shock. **Sometimes the grief swallowed me up**, for days on end...

I found that **I had to return home to myself**.

Traditionally my rite was to seek the elder's advice for direction. I, as many First Nations people who experience family crisis, sought out an elder while in crisis. I presented the sacred herb of tobacco to the chosen elder, knowing that once I bring tobacco to the elder I must take whatever direction I am given to heart. The elder explained to me that this is the time to pray for the person that hurt me. I prayed along with the elder for my companion and for the system that held him.

For whomever I was angry at, the prayer helped. **I felt humbled**. The elder said, **“Take the time to know your spirit, know your heart, feed your spirit with song and dance. Go to ceremonies**. A good place for a person who is starting to embrace his pain is ceremonies”.

Ceremonies are a whole part of native culture. The healing begins with embracing one's pain. In order to do this, **one must acknowledge the problem and talk about it**. Once one has done this they **earn respect for themselves as an individual. Respect for family and community and mother earth universe**.

When one respects oneself they acknowledge Creator God in their heart to do that I had to attend the sweat lodge, sundance, pipe ceremony, round dance and any other healthy gathering place that would restore my energy. The elder said that **“the sun always rises in the morning... today's a new day”**.

My companion has been in prison for 3 years and I still visit. We've had good days and bad ones. Healing and growing will take one day at a time.

Jessie's Story

By Tina Boudreau

Hi! My name is Jessie and I'm a six-year-old lab chow cross. I am gentle like the lab yet fiercely loyal like the chow and if I do say so myself, I'm a fine looking canine....

I was sitting here cyber chatting with my Akita friend in British Columbia when I noticed a piece of paper on my owner's desk inviting submissions from friends and families of prisoners. I simply could not pass up the opportunity so I opened up Microsoft Word and proceeded to create my story.

My human companion, Tina, has been visiting her husband Rick for seventeen years. Her two children grew up in the system. I must say that with my help they've faired quite well, although I don't quite know why anyone would want to visit a prison. I've had some friends who have been in the pound who have nothing but horror stories to share about being caged.

Throughout the years my owner Tina has depended on community support such as her group at the Salvation Army. However, when all is said and done, it is me to whom she confesses to when she is frustrated about the prison. It is me she cuddles up to at night when she is all alone and it is me who licks the tears away from her face when she cries with the sadness of not being with her husband.

Now the kids, Chrissy and Jon, have grown up and are living their adult lives. Chrissy is still living at home, but she attends college. Jon is living with his girlfriend and their baby Kassandra who was born this past summer. I don't know what all the fuss is about this baby. She cries a lot, sleeps a lot, and when she gets older I just know she is going to pull my tail.

So the next stage in my owner's life sees her moving her mother in as she is getting elderly and it is company for them both. I don't mind her mother at all. She buys me pepperoni treats all the time and she moved in a lazy boy chair that I've taken over as my own.

Pretty soon from what I hear, Rick will begin the parole process. My owner has waited a long long time for this day. ***Without the support of her church community, her friends at the Salvation Army Correctional Services, her friends and family here in Kingston, and most of all me, she'd not have made it through all these years.*** The final reward of her husband coming home is something she dreamed about for what ***must seem like an eternity.***

I just hope that it is clear to Rick that when he comes home he'll be sleeping on the floor. I am not giving up my side of the bed for no one. As long as he understands this, he and I will get along famously.

Jessie Boudreau,
canine companion
and best friend
to Tina Boudreau

Standing Beside and Reaching Out

By Jen W.

Standing beside a family member or friend as they go through a prison experience is a lonely journey. When my husband was first incarcerated, I was incredibly thankful to have strong support from our church, my Al-Anon group, friends, and our families. Unfortunately they knew nothing about the rules and regulations that one must learn to cope with. What a frightening experience.

It is crucial to first take care of yourself, so that you have the strength and courage to in turn take care of your children (if that is your situation). For myself this meant unfailing attendance at Al-Anon (my youngest son spent the first six weeks of his life at my meetings, being passed from one set of loving arms to another), church, and a single parenting group.

I know it is very hard
but we must **reach out**
and not be tempted to hide. There are
other families like us out there, everywhere.
We need to find each other
and support each other.

Thank goodness that the John Howard Society, in partnership with Canadian Families and Corrections Network, is working to **implement ways to make the journey through the prison system an easier-to-understand one** for the friends and families of prisoners (for example, a signboard in the visiting areas with rules and regulations, numbers of people to contact for assistance, etc.). Think of how families new to the system will benefit! It is so exciting.

Only when I began writing research papers for my university studies did I discover **support and friendship** for people like myself with a family member in the prison system. Conversations with Sylvia Griffith, e-mails with Lloyd Withers, visiting with the Denaults, the Doug Irelands, the list is long (thank you, Lord), - suddenly people cared and understood. And then last year an angel fluttered into our lives (actually, the word flutter does not describe Cathy “Beam-me-up Scotty” Clark). Those of you who know her will understand what I refer to. The miles she sometimes covers in a day helping out prisoner families are unheard of). This woman, Co-ordinator of Family Matters First, is there for us at all times. She has

been a devoted friend and assistant through all of our dealings with the prison system. She has come over to dry my tears, talked to my husband's IPO to ensure things were progressing according to schedule for his day parole hearing, took wonderful care of us through that day parole hearing, etc., etc. She is very important to us.

There are not enough Cathy Clarks out there. Please send her some helpers! For my family, the end of frequent contact with the institutions is coming to an end as we begin our journey through day parole and eventual release. We are fully aware that we still need assistance, and have a safety net and support group in place. It is essential that we not forget where we came from, and where others are going to be. We need to work to make this an easier, less frightening journey for the friends and families of prisoners. **These people do not and should not need to feel alone in their struggles. Let us all do what we can to ease the pain of the journey for the prisoners and for their families and friends.**

Ex-Convict Wanting To Be Free!

By Jean M. Foote

I am telling this story for anyone that has been through something like what I have. I was first in jail when I was 14 for 7 ½ years in the USA and then I went back to jail at 21 in Canada for 10 years. When I got out of jail I felt lost inside myself and I felt cold and hard. The prison could not stop anyone from having visitors. When I was doing my time I saw some of the girls' families visit. It made me feel numb. *One thing they can't take away from anyone is their feelings and their minds.* The main idea about doing your time is to understand what you did and what put you in prison in the first place.

I can't explain to anyone that has not been incarcerated how to see things the way that I did and how being in prison took my life away from me. There are some things that they can't take away from you, like how you feel. Being in prison makes you cold. They can take our freedom away from us but as long as we have a heart we will be okay. If anyone has any faith in the person who is incarcerated, then they will have that faith to keep them going. I know this firsthand because I wasn't ready when I got out. I was trying to deal with my life after I did my 7 ½, I was out two days and I knew I wasn't ready, so I started doing drugs and ended up back inside.

In prison, *I got to read and write and I learned a lot of good things* that I didn't know before the time I did. I made the most of it and prison became my home and I tried to help other inmates. When you are doing your time the best advice I can give is to **MAKE THE MOST OF IT**. When you get out, think about what you have to go out to – reality is not the same inside.

I didn't have a Mom or a Dad that cared about me a lot. I was on the street a lot when I was young. My Dad died when I was 8 years old and my Mom drank and now she is dead. I had 8 brothers and 8 sisters in my family but they didn't care about me.

My siblings didn't care about me when I was prison because they didn't come and see me. They thought I was a bad person. One brother took one phone call from me, but that was all.

When I was inside, I had a lot of bad dreams about all the bad things I did and all the drugs and alcohol I consumed. I also dreamed about having a good home and getting myself back. *I needed my self-esteem and respect but most of all I wanted my heart back.* I didn't have much hope when they took my life away when I was in prison but I did my time and now I know that I did a bad thing. I wish I didn't do those things.

If I could, I would tell your friends and family to stand by you if they cared enough about you. No one should walk away from the one that is hurting inside – *the one that is doing time has feelings just like everyone else does.* I just hope that the women and men that are doing time can *find it within themselves* and try to do the best they can.

When they get out I hope that they can try to do the right things so that they won't end up in jail or corrections places where they can't be free. I know if they can do what I am doing now they will be okay. I have a nice home now and I get money every month. You can do the same as I did if you put your mind to it. I get paid every month to pay my rent and get some food and now I can walk anywhere I want and be happy anywhere I want within me and around me. It has taken me a long time to get what I have now. I just hope what I said helps other inmates to find their soul and their freedom inside them. *Please keep your freedom when you get out.* What I have said, comes from my heart

The Prisoner's Gift

By Phyllis I. Simon

I remember **the first time I saw him**. It was Christmas Eve. The atmosphere in the church cracked with anticipation. I wondered at my own excitement. After all, I was no longer a child and I was not expecting any special gift that Christmas.

The carols were joyful, the trumpets triumphant, the familiar scriptures filled my mind with imagery of that night long ago when a star stood over the manger where a very special child lay - a child who had come to set the world free.

Flickering candles reflected against the stained glass windows. The scent of pine wafted across the room from time to time. A baby cried. **In moments of quiet I could hear the giddy whispers of children** discussing what presents might be under their tree. Somewhere near the back of the room I could hear a man's deep voice with an unfamiliar accent. He seemed to talk and laugh during prayer times. I wondered why he had come to church this night and I wondered who had invited him.

Later in the foyer I greeted my friends and their guests. I listened for the sound of the man with the strange accent but could not hear him in the noisy din of the crowd.

As I prepared to leave **I noticed a stranger** standing quietly by the door. I noticed that he needed a shave and a haircut. I extended my hand to him while wishing him a "Merry Christmas". He did not respond but kept his hands thrust deep into his jacket pockets. Thinking I may have caught him off guard by my gesture, I kept my hand extended and looked directly at him. When our eyes met I was startled by the

blueness of his eyes. It seemed like I was looking at my own reflection - into deep blue eyes, not unlike my own.

Reluctantly he removed his hand from his jacket pocket and shook my hand. I repeated my wish, "Merry Christmas. I am glad you have come. Do come and join us again."

Little did I know that within a few short weeks my husband and I would be inviting Luc to come and live with us and complete his parole requirements from our home instead of the local halfway house. **Our application stated that we would treat him as a son.** Parenting was the only qualification we held for such a task.

Luc brought a great deal of joy to our household. Dinner times often stretched for hours as he told us funny stories of his life. **We laughed until our sides ached.** Some times he shared stories of pain and abuse which made our hearts ache. Stories of events in prison were too painful for me to listen to and I would beg him to spare me those details.

Luc challenged every value of my life. I learned to take a second look at everything I held as important. I looked at things from a perspective I had never before considered. Luc challenged my life of privilege. I had come from a family that valued me as a person. I had lived my whole life being encouraged and praised for every achievement. I believed there was no goal I could not attain through disciplined effort. **I noticed that Luc was often defeated before he began. His belief system was set to failure** and his thinking often became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Luc's presence in our family was a gift to me that is almost impossible to explain. Due to some medical complications I had never experienced the joy of giving birth to a child. For many years I had struggled with

the pain and mental anguish that comes from being barren. Somewhere in the years that Luc shared with our family, and worked in our family business, that pain left me. I was not aware of the day the pain left but I do remember the first time I noticed the pain was no longer with me.

Perhaps the pain left the first time Luc called me Mom. Maybe it was the time he said, "I'm sorry, I'll never yell at you again.". Maybe it was the times he made lavish meals for us. Perhaps it was the night **we found a card on our pillow that talked about people who teach angels to fly again when their wings no longer remember how to fly.** Or was it the summer's day I watched him and my husband wrestling on the lawn like playful puppies.

Could it have been when I saw him face to face with a naked four-year-old, fresh from the hot tub who had slipped out of her bathing suit too quickly. He gently wrapped her in a bath towel and scooped her up onto his shoulders and said, "Hey, little lady, you can't be running around the house naked."

Perhaps the pain left me when he gave me my birthday present in a five foot high used refrigerator carton wrapped in sparkling red and gold paper with a huge red bow. After much searching inside among balls of wadded up newspaper I finally found my gift - a gold heart-shaped pendant with the word "Special" on it.

I do not remember when Luc became a son or when I felt the pain of being childless for the last time but I do remember the first time I met him. **I never expected on that starry Christmas Eve I was to receive a gift that would forever change my life.** This man, who had been a prisoner, came into my life and **set my aching heart free.**

NOT A FAIRY TALE BY SANDY

For as long as men and women have lived on this earth, they have tried to be equal with each other, especially in the work place. At home, women want the work shared equally.

However, when it comes to picking men, women can make very foolish choices. They find men by answering computer and newspaper ads. When they find men in prison they become completely captivated with the man's charming and slick words. All types of women get involved, from all aspects of life. The relationship is doomed from the start. After all, no history has ever existed between them and they have never had the chance to date. They basically know nothing about each other. You can check their criminal record, but it tells only the surface. Men know all the right words to convince you how wonderful they are. For many women whose past relationships were abusive, **this new relationship can appear to be a safe haven.** Women who haven't dated much are suddenly showered with attention. Men will say anything you want to hear. In return they ask for money and whatever else they want. You give all you have and get nothing in return. You are just someone for them to use. In the end the only loser is you.

Don't get involved with someone on the inside unless you have a relationship with them before they are sentenced. The best advice I can give is "Run like Hell". Believe me, I wish I had.

One Day at a Time

By Bonnie Garrison

Hi friends, my name is Bonnie Garrison. Nearly 2 years ago I met a fellow that is doing a life sentence...

We did not take the time to get to "know" each other and the relationship ended after one year.... he picked up a drink/drug and went about his merry way....

I remained sober and prayed for him daily.... Last June my Mom passed away and in August I received a phone call from "Pat" and he just wanted me to know that he had heard about Mom....

In October my friend Pat celebrated a year sobriety.....**I am so proud of him...**

After having no contact with him for close to a year, we agreed to meet in a public place with a group of people...for the first time since I have known him, his eyes were twinkling.... an honest twinkle....I knew immediately upon entering the room and looking into his eyes he was a different person all together....

Today, we have a fun, compassionate, understanding, "no expectations", kinda friendship.....

I cope with him being in the situation he is in "today" by praying for him, letting him tell me how he "really" feels... and telling him how I "really feel"

I also cope by "**listening to and hearing**" what he is saying.... there is **a line of communication between us** that was never there in the past...

We used to try to "push each others buttons"....there is very little of that happening today and if it does occur we are able to stop it at once, then laugh about it.....

I go and spend "quality" time with Pat every night....he **has taught me so much about "acceptance"** in the last 5 months....we also attend a meeting together every second Monday evening and I have been welcomed by the others and I feel comfortable and understood.

Advocating for his innocence...

*Based on an interview with Denise Kowalski,
written by Heather Holland, Research Assistant, CFCN*

Denise Kowalski's name may not be as well known as Guy Paul Morin's. Morin was convicted in 1992 for the murder of nine-year-old Christine Jessop. Morin was cleared of the conviction in 1995 by new DNA evidence. Denise did her own share of time while Morin was wrongfully incarcerated. Denise is Guy Paul's sister.

Denise did all that she could for him – she **advocated for his innocence**, she visited him and she stood by him. She said that her family stuck together through the whole thing; some family members made financial sacrifices in an effort to clear his name and others worked on petitions calling for a review of the evidence.

As for friends, Denise said that she **learned who her friends really were... those who stood by her not because he was guilty or innocent but because he was a person who was important to her**; “We're all *people*” she said, “guilty or innocent”. Living half way across the country Denise dealt with traveling back and forth and staying at places like Bridge House in Kingston while Guy Paul was at Kingston Penitentiary. Some of the women she met at Bridge House had quite an impact on her; she says that although she knew that Guy Paul was innocent she can relate to and feel for people who have loved one's who are guilty.

Denise dealt with a great deal of stress throughout Guy Paul's conviction and incarceration. She didn't feel that he was safe at K.P. and was terrified that he would get killed on the inside. She felt overwhelmed by the stress of it all. She made an effort to take care of herself and took stress leave from her job. When she did go back to work it was a welcome change; she said that she loves her job and that it really helped her get through some tough points. I asked Denise what got her through the experience and her answer was simple, yet powerful...**“you have to think positive... just hang in there”**.

The experience of incarceration has not left her. Denise also supported a friend through incarceration who is out now on full parole. She said that she told her friend to get help from The Association in Defense of the Wrongfully Convicted (AIDWYC), who is now looking into his case.

More information on The Association in Defence of the Wrongfully Convicted can be found on their website at <http://www.aidwyc.org/>

ONE DAY AT A TIME

By Linda Linn

What's getting me through the experience of having my son incarcerated? My faith in the God of my understanding that He will not give me more than I can handle.

Our lives were changed forever on May 7th, 1997. My oldest son came into the bedroom early in the morning, almost on his knees. He had heard on the radio that my third son "L" had been involved in an armed robbery the previous night and two women had been murdered in the prairies. Sources informed us that my son was still at large and there was a manhunt going on. Even the "sources" couldn't get it right. I called the RCMP in my hometown and they said they didn't know anything; I was to call the radio station where it was reported.

We learned later that my son had surrendered earlier the previous night and the co-accused was still at-large. My thoughts and feelings were all over the map. I was angry that "L" had lied to me the previous weekend. "L" was supposed to be going to Vancouver Island to look for work. How did he land up in the Prairies? How could one of my children take another life? He wasn't brought up that way. Where do I start to find out where he is? I needed to talk to him. I wanted to know that he was okay.

I found out over the next few days who were my friends and who weren't. I had over 200 phone calls in 2 days, from friends and family who were expressing their support for our family and a few who didn't. People sent cards and food. Most people didn't know the whole story. People believe everything they read in a newspaper. That was a really big lesson for me. Now I read the paper with the blinders off. I had to finally grow up and find out what "unconditional love" was all about. I had rediscovered my faith a few years earlier and I feel today that I was being prepared for that day. I wasn't filled with shame, I could hold my head high as I knew I had done everything I could to help my son.

An RCMP officer was assigned to the case in our hometown. There were search warrants, and interviews. There were meetings with Government officials to review the case, as my son had been involved with Youth and Family Services. Where had Youth and Family Services broken down? What didn't I do? "L"'s father was

living out of the country but he had heard about the incident before I did and was on his way home. The questions kept coming.

I was on a research mission. Who do I talk to about what was happening with my son? What were my son's rights and what was I allowed to do? I did not want to jeopardize my son's case so I spoke to lawyers in my hometown. I asked for releases from my son so I could speak directly to the doctors, nurses and lawyers involved in his case. The more questions I asked the more I learned about the Justice System. I feel that I was able to cope with people because I immersed myself in the case. I feel that I was my son's advocate. "L" had never been in trouble with the law and we learned some very hard lessons. Everything you say will be used against you in a Court of Law. No one could give me a book to read.

*The Victims Services Program has **nothing to support the accused families**. Since I was out of the province they provided a female worker during the trial, but couldn't explain what was in store for me. When my son was sentenced, it was recommended that he be moved to his home province. It took a year and a ½ before he could be moved "home". I had a Private Family Visit with "L" while he was out of the province. It felt "normal" for us except for the head counts. When he was transferred he was so happy to "come home". We were ecstatic. We could see him more often. I hope to be able to move to the Lower Mainland so that I can be closer to my son.*

I've also talked to people who have been in my situation. They gave me information about what to expect when I go to visit; the questions I had were common. I went on the Internet, seeking information about Corrections Canada. I contacted the John Howard Society and they informed me about the Canadian Families and Corrections Network. I am a member and read the Newsletter regularly. I want to stay involved.

I have made it my priority to include "L" in our family. I write as often as I can when he doesn't call. I try to have contact at least once a week. I take pictures of our family, pets, and hometown to keep him involved. We still love him, and we need to show him. I travel hours to see my son, and I become anxious until I get there, as I don't want to disappoint him. He has had enough disappointment in his life. I pray to God every morning and thank him every night for my courage and strength to carry on.

Supportive Websites:

Canadian Outsiders

Canadian Outsiders is an internet support group for wives/partners experiencing incarceration of a loved one. You can find Canadian Outsiders by going to <http://www.egroups.com/group/canadian-outsiders>

Dearest Mom

by Angelgirl

DearestMom is an on-line Support Group for moms who have a grown child in the prison system. The site was started in May of 2002 out of Ontario. Currently there are 34 members and rising more each day!

Moms come together to support one another by posting their messages to one of the many multiple boards available to them. The site includes information links, photo albums, a prayer board, a happy thought for the day message board and much more! Some moms have had their grown child return home and needed extra support. Other moms have requested prayers. They are all concerned moms wondering how you are doing and giving genuine support! Moms do not ask any questions and you may hide your e-mail address. Complete privacy to you!

The MSN Group-DearestMom web site was founded by Angelgirl; she manages the site on a daily basis. Her son is currently in prison and she created this site for that reason - to communicate with other moms in the same situation. She failed to find a site that would fulfill her particular need - therefore, she created her own! Now that she has been managing the site for nine months, she has gained new friends

that understand what she is going through and she also has found that by helping the member moms, she strengthens her ability to cope with her grown child in prison. She believes that the best thing she could have ever done was make DearestMom a reality. To member moms... it is! There are days when they are depressed and frustrated. Knowing that moms can come to DearestMom On-line Support Site and post an emergency message for help gives them a warm feeling of hope and with caring support they gain strength to go on with their daily activities! Moms will find complete understanding here at the site. No more explaining to do like other message boards, forums or chats! In a short message "We know what your talking about and how you're feeling!" - a member mom

Some group members go by an alternative name for privacy reasons.

DearestMom is a free On-line Support Group. You can find DearestMom by going to: www.groups.msn.com/dearestmom or you can view their home page at: www.toybx.tripod.com