

## WORDS ARE INADEQUATE

With each gust of wind, the great sandstorms in the Egyptian desert pound away at the magnificent pyramids, slowly but surely grinding away these impressive structures. In like manner, the weight and severity of a death sentence, daily life on death row is both burdensome and it grows ever more wearisome with each passing day. Life on death row can be compared to a weight that bears down on your chest, suffocating and squeezing every ounce of breath out of your body.

The anticipation of death at times is more tortuous and anguishing than death itself. The uncertainty of when your number is drawn and you have to take that final walk down the execution chamber can paralyze many men into depression. Many who live without any hope are already dead, walking zombies who close themselves off to the world. What little of the world that does find it's way through these steel bars and concrete walls that are designed to keep us separated from the world.

"Family", what a precious word! Unfortunately, for many men on death row, it has an empty ring to it. They associate that word with pain and abuse. How many men in this place have never met or know their fathers? Father's Day is one of the most meaningless holidays in prison. The chaplains never attempt or bother to pass out any Father's Day cards the way they do for Mother's Day or Christmas cards. The word "family" even has an unpleasant ring for most inmates. How do you associate joy and happiness with that word when your memories are filled with a single mother struggling by herself at work all day, separate from her children for most of the day? Or a mother who is strung out on drugs, who has several different live-in-lovers who would beat you and your other siblings? How do you find love in the pain you felt when you saw your mother getting beat up by her boyfriend, your mother or father drunk, passed out on the sofa or floor?

Sadly, many inmates on death row never experienced a stable family environment. For many, the only family they have ever known is the prison-gang families. At times, it is humbling to realize that many people use a prison-gang family as the standard by which they judge the quality of every other relationship. In their broken lives, there is no other meaningful love with which to compare that emotion to.

Where there is no vision or purpose in life, all hope is lost. A person can draw hope by reflecting on past glories. What drives a broken country such as Iraq or Turkey is the past glories they once had. It gives them a vision for the future.

But what hope can be found by a condemned inmate, awaiting execution on Texas death row? For many, past memories are filled with pain, and the future is just as bleak... they have a date with the executioner!

What then gives these men hope?

The answer is "Love"! The love and kindness from wonderful pen friends who reach out and love these inmates who are just now experiencing this emotion for the very first time. Even for those who aren't experiencing love for the first time, the love they are now enjoying has never been experienced to this degree and with such intensity.

It's understandable why so many inmates are initially cautious and reserved that they have difficulty accepting this love. For many, their unfamiliarity has them asking, "What am I supposed to do now?". Sadly, for others, the reality of facing death on a daily basis and awaiting their execution causes them to harden their hearts, to build a hedge and wall around their hearts, in order to block out their daily pain.

It takes the patience and compassion of a loving pen friend to tear that wall down, one brick at a time. Fortunately, many have succeeded.

I see the pain and suffering, the loneliness and hopelessness of this dreaded place each day. How much worse would this place be, were it not for the loving kindness, compassion and tender love of so many wonderful pen friends and supporters of those who fight against the death penalty.

This is a word of encouragement to all of you and a few words of gratitude for each and every one of you who have opened your heart to all of us on death row. Words would never suffice and express the thankfulness that all of us on death row feel toward all of you. If your pen pal on death row has never thanked you or told you how much he loves you, allow me to express that gratitude for him. Be assured that he loves you more than words can say, even though he might have difficulty expressing it.

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