



## From the Editors

In an effort to save on printing and mailing costs, we have had to make *Graterfriends* a 12-page newsletter. As of January 2012, only prisoners will receive printed newsletters. All other subscribers will be sent a digital version of *Graterfriends* via email. If you are a current non-prisoner subscriber, please ensure that we have your current email address by sending it to Mindy at [mbogue@prisonsociety.org](mailto:mbogue@prisonsociety.org).

In this issue, you'll see some submissions regarding support for SB 1153. We encourage you to write letters supporting the bill, which calls for changes to the 60-Day Rule in the PCRA (Post-Conviction Relief Act). Currently, that bill is in the Senate Judiciary Committee, but we hope it will move forward soon.

In our September issue, we asked for stories regarding your education and that of your children. One response is a letter (page 8) from Larry Stephenson, who has earned his own degree and encouraged his sons to do the same.

Don't miss Executive Director William DiMascio's column (page 12), where he reviews the recently released Report from the Committee on Wrongful Convictions. It probably comes as no surprise that the most important factor leading to wrongful convictions is witness misidentification.



## Spotlight

### AS SEEN ON TV: FIFTEEN MINUTES OF SHAME AND THE EFFECTS ON THE PRISONER'S WIFE

By Reesy Floyd-Thompson (Mrs. GE-6309)

You can turn on any television to see the scope of our criminal justice system — caught on tape — from the suspicion of arrest, through the question of the trial, to the reality of incarceration. Entire networks are devoted to this ultimate reality show. Viewers have a choice of seeing criminals locked up, locked down, arrested in the first 48 hours, DNA tested, almost getting away with a crime, and — though rare — released. America has a twisted fascination with those who commit crimes and end up behind bars. Audiences chant the criminal's anthem: *Bad boy what you gonna do when they come for you?*

Prisoners are put under the glare of a producer's camera and subjectivity of the editor's cut, and thus a new reality is born. Alongside the four 'R's of incarceration (restitution, retribution, rehabilitation and redemption) our voyeuristic world has added a fifth and more dangerous 'R' — ratings.

Criminal justice that serves as amusement for rat-

**(See As Seen on TV, continued on page 11)**

# GRATERFRIENDS

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*Graterfriends* is a monthly publication from the Pennsylvania Prison Society. The organization was founded in 1787 and works toward enhancing public safety by providing initiatives that promote a just and humane criminal justice system.

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We reserve the right to edit submissions. Original submissions **will not** be returned. We **will not** print anonymous letters. Allegations of misconduct **must** be documented and statistics should be supported by sources.

Letters more than a page in length (200 words) **will not** be published in their entirety in Mailroom or Legal Chat Room, and may be considered for another column. All columns should be no more than 500 words, or two double-spaced pages.

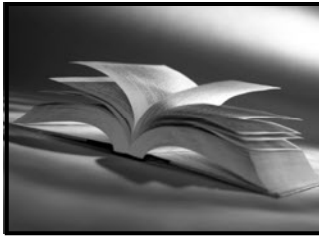
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If you have a question about *Graterfriends*, please contact Mindy Bogue, Communications Manager, at 215-564-6005, ext. 112 or [mbogue@prisonsociety.org](mailto:mbogue@prisonsociety.org).

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## Literary Corner

### STRENGTH OF SPIRIT

by Diane E. Schindelwig

#36582177, Metropolitan Correctional Center, NY

A spirit cannot be taken, broken nor smothered  
By any force, no matter who is at the source?  
The spirit is mine and lives deep inside  
Is driven by my own strength that keeps it alive.  
No one but no one can halt such a class  
They can take and take  
Tear your world up like trash  
Treat you like dirt to boost their own self-esteem.  
I deem it impossible from what I have seen.  
I just sit back and grin to myself  
Fools they all are to attempt such a feat  
In the end it will lead to their own defeat.  
Three cheers must be said to all that will hear  
My strong spirit will live on for years  
To all of my family and friends that surround me with  
love  
And save the grandest for last to the best trait a  
woman could have.

### As Seen on TV, continued from page 3

ings' sake is big business that comes with too high of a price tag; a price that robs society of its sensibility, sense of humanity, and objectivity; and a price that slowly erodes the presumption of innocence. Accusations are truth. Perception becomes reality. Even when a person prevails in the criminal justice system, 'not guilty' is quickly redefined as 'not innocent.' The images fed to the world are the worst of the worst. These images are cleverly ingrained in our subconscious minds, attaching to our sense of not-giving-a-damn while turning up the volume on fear. Women whose partners are in prison must contend with society's negative response to their circumstances. It's a society that is filtering its reaction through what has now become a *true* representation of men behind bars. Criminal justice that serves as amusement for ratings' sake has successfully influenced our society — all men in prison are bad. Herein lies the problem for the prisoner's wife/partner.

*Reesy Floyd-Thompson is the founder of Prisoners' Wives, Girlfriends, & Partners (PWGP).*

### Eyewitness, continued from page 12

- interrogations and confessions.
- State rather than county funding of defense services for the indigent with adequate compensation for attorneys.
  - Electronic recording of statements made to law enforcement by informants.
  - Requiring a hearing in capital cases before admitting testimony from an informant that the accused has incriminated himself.
  - Extending the length of time from 60 days to one year to petition for post-conviction relief.
  - A law requiring the accreditation of forensic laboratories and governing the preservation of biological evidence.
  - A statutorily created forensic advisory board.
  - A law allowing claims for damages to be paid by the Commonwealth to those wrongfully imprisoned if their actual innocence is established.
  - A statute to enable automatic expungement of the criminal history record for those found eligible by Commonwealth Court.

In the 1760s, jurist William Blackstone articulated the well-known and much older principle in criminal law: "*better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer.*"

Ironically, the people you might expect to cling to such foundational precepts seem too often caught up in their own denials to recognize what is in their own long term professional best interest.

### SB 1153, continued from page 3

that it takes years, not months, to put together complex post-conviction petitions and appeals, and to determine if fragments of new facts and withheld evidence are enough to construct a case. Legal experts agree that it is unrealistic to require inmates who are ignorant in the law to do in 60 days what experienced lawyers need years to accomplish.

As one who tutored illiterate inmates and prepared other inmates for GED testing, I can assure you that the majority of Pennsylvania's prisoners are functionally illiterate, and that another large number of them have mental disabilities. Additionally, Pennsylvania prisoners are afforded two hours of law library time, three days a week; there are only 15 law computers and five typewriters for over 2,000 men. And if you happen to be a weak or timid prisoner, you get neither!

Due to this fundamental unfairness, denial of due process under the law, and blatant denial of equal protection under the law, Pennsylvania prisoners who are actually innocent are rotting away in prison while having been wrongfully convicted.