

GRATER FRIENDS

A Publication of The Pennsylvania Prison Society

Promoting a humane, just and constructive correctional system and a rational approach to criminal justice since 1787

Volume 39 Issue 7

July 2009

MRS. GE-6309: A PRISONER'S WIFE SPEAKS

By Reesy Floyd-Thompson

Six years ago, I stood behind my husband in a Pennsylvania courtroom and watched as my life changed instantly — and changed forever. At that moment, I knew everything would be different; everything would be difficult.

There was never a question whether or not I would keep my commitment to him; I'd made that choice years before when I said "until death do us part." For better or worse, I would never go back to being simply Mrs. Thompson. Now, I would also be Mrs. GE-6309.

The worst part was not the sentencing. The worst part was when I realized my previous title as *wife* hadn't adequately prepared me to take on the role of *prisoner's wife*.

At first, I hurdled over furniture to take his calls, sat all day in the window watching for the postal worker, and shuffled vacation days to visit him regularly.

But the butterflies in my stomach faded fast as I set out to run a two-income household on one paycheck. Alone, time seemed to stand still. Important news became old news because the one person I wanted to be the first to know was now always the last.

Absence did not make *my* heart grow fonder; it made *my* heart resentful. So I stopped listening to him — it was hard to hear him over the sound of my own voice in my head.

I heard myself shouting, asking if I was really going to make it. I marginalized him — staying connected meant I was plugged-in to the source of pain I wanted to forget. I demanded things he couldn't give: "Come home!" — an exclamation point at the end of each of my made-up arguments.

I'd even reasoned myself into believing that "until death do us part" meant *now* because my new attitude was surely going to be the death of our relationship as I once knew it.

I had a gut-wrenching decision to make. I could make us both miserable until he came home and then try to piece back together the scraps of our marriage. Or I could accept our reality and plan for his homecoming. That's when I realized that layered underneath the hours and days and months of this sentence I had already endured alone, the key to my survival all along had been my husband.

I stay because he survives from the strength, courage and protection my love offers him. I stay because he needs to know someone remembers him and wants to see him set free. I stay because I'm his reason to count down the days. I stay because too many men are losing their wives to this life. I stay because I refuse to let him languish in a cruel and uncaring system all alone. I stay because my voice can cry out for him with the emotion he dare not express. I stay because, to me, his love *is* worth it.

I believe that the greatest injustice of all would be our love *not* surviving this system.

And, with that realization, Mr. GE-6309 and I are stronger than ever and I am, once again, jumping over furniture to take his calls. ❧

Reesy Floyd-Thompson is an advocate for women standing by their men and standing up for their marriages during times of incarceration. She understands the hardship imprisonment can have on a relationship and urges women to be diligent in seeking and sharing the necessary resources to keep their families intact. Besides being a prisoner's wife, she is also a writer, marketing professional and personal trainer.