

Sentence Commuted!

False hope?

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder has the authority to free deserving prisoners. The Governor can use his executive clemency powers to reduce a criminal sentence. And now that he's in his final term, inmates---especially those serving very long or life sentences---are hoping he'll in do just that.

A pipe dream?

Maybe. So far, the Governor has used these powers only to release inmates struggling with serious health issues.

A costly process?

It shouldn't be. Sensing a way to capitalize on this thin ray of hope, individuals and agencies are offering to help Michigan prisoners in preparing their application forms. For a fee, of course. It's not uncommon to charge several thousand dollars for this kind of assistance. The poor mother of a lifer last year forked over \$9,500 to an organization to prepare the application! It was turned down.

HFP to the rescue!

President Doug Tjapkes announces the appointment of a third member to the HFP staff! Holly Honig-Josephson has been named Commutations Coordinator. She and a panel of clerical volunteers will assist prisoners in the application process, from beginning to the finished product, at no charge!



New Juvenile Deterrent Program at Brooks

HFP blog gives it a jump start!

A prisoner writes HFP: Our first batch of at-risk kids showed up today for mentorship. There were 9 teenagers in all who came up today -- ranging from the ages of 16 to 18 years old. To me they just seemed so young, small, and fragile. It gave me another vantage point of how I must have appeared when I came to prison at the age of 17. Mentoring to these wayward youths today was truly a blessing and an honor. We were able to reach most of them according to their own accounts. I look forward to our next batch of wayward youths next month, and the opportunity to also impact their lives in a constructive and productive manner.

HFP President Doug Tjapkes says, in an online blog: I can be pretty quick to criticize wardens and prison staffers here in Michigan when I think that what they're doing is wrong. BUT. Then I darn well better be up front with praise when I think something is good. After explaining the program and its initial successes, Doug concluded: So today, a tip of the HFP hat to Warden Shirlee Harry, every member of her staff who is taking part in this project, and to the inmates who are serving as mentors. And this thanks extends all the way to Lansing, and Director Heidi Washington.

That same inmate responds to the posting: Your blog already has had an immense effect! The Inspector summoned us mentors, and informed us that, as the result of your blog, it has sparked heavy interest. We are now inundated with requests for the program. To accommodate the growing volume of demands, we are now scheduling two mentoring sessions each month instead of the prior once a month. In addition, the administrators have decided to recruit 3 more mentors into the program to accommodate the growing demand. We will then have 13 mentors instead of the former 10. This program is taking off spectacularly. I see God's hand all throughout the process. You have proven to be an instrumental figure in the growth & expansion of this program.

From the desk of Doug: Hope for Free

I'm thinking of dollars today. Our consultant says I should be thinking of dollars every day! But this time my thoughts are about prisoners and dollars.

This all began with Henry, a Michigan inmate. We received his gift today, a \$15 check. This donation probably represents a greater sacrifice than any other we have received so far this year. Prisoners are known to earn only 70 or 80 cents a day. Reminds me of Jesus' story about the widow's mite.



I opened that envelope while in the middle of a staff discussion about filing commutation applications (see our lead story). We've been disturbed by reports from prisoners whose families have spent thousands of dollars for assistance in preparing these applications. I get the reason: It's like playing the lottery... a very long shot that perhaps the Governor will pave the way for freedom.

Now, I realize that people in business must make a living, but I'm of the opinion that charging prisoners thousands of dollars to chase an elusive dream is criminal. So, with your help, we're going to do something about it!

I'm pleased to announce that we are taking immediate steps to provide this service at no charge to every inquiring Michigan inmate! Yes, it's partially in response to MDOC Director Heidi Washington's request that we advise prisoners NOT to spend money on commutation preparation. But besides that, it's where our heart is. Now I'm asking for your heart, and your dollars. Together we can offer the dream, the hope, without the expense.

Piper Kerman in Grand Rapids

Piper Kerman, author of *ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK*, appeared in Grand Rapids on March 7 as a fundraiser for HFP. Our friend and photographer Bill Klouw was there.



Lightning strikes twice

Late last year, 81 year old Willie wrote:
I had cataract surgery on my right eye on December 20. I was sent back for follow-up on the 21st. Things were looking good, but the transportation officers forgot me...left me in the hospital until 8:15 that night, in the cold bull pen all by myself. I happened to see an officer pass by, and stopped him. I asked him to check the Transportation Department to see why they had left me. I arrived back at my facility at 10 PM.

Early this year, another message from Willie:
I was due to return to the hospital on February 23 for biopsy tests. Will you believe that the transportation officers left me at the wrong hospital? All day long, from 8:15 to 3:15! I tried to explain to them that I was at the wrong place, but as you know, the police in the system do not listen to prisoners. I asked the police at the hospital to call my facility and find out what hospital I was supposed to visit. The police who left me at the wrong hospital returned, and I asked, "Why you didn't check the paper work before you drop me off?" No response. He just looked at me and said, "Things happen."

A Victory!

The problem:

Good Afternoon, My daughter is incarcerated in the Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility. She has a six-year-old son with special needs, he's autistic. The closed surroundings, noise, and strangers in the visitation area would affect him greatly. I have called the wardens assistant to ask if special arrangements could be made so my daughter can have visits with her son. Thank you, HFP, for any help you can give.

The solution (just one week later):

GOOD NEWS! The warden has approved special visits for my daughter and her son! We will have to call ahead and have a certain date and time as they are going to allow visitation in the attorney/client room. Visitation will be on the east side as that room is bigger! I don't know how this could get any better. I could cry! Thank you for your assistance!

Books R Us!

HFP received a call from an inmate at the Richard A. Handlon Correctional facility, who along with more than 20 other guys belong to a prison book club. They had an interested in reading Doug's book, *SWEET FREEDOM*, and having our president make a guest visit for a book review. That very same day a generous donor covered the expense! 24 copies will be shipped to the prison book club.