

My name is Patricia - hello!

Hello - Today is gloomy, wet and windy here but signs of spring are evident with crocus and daffodils giving a touch of soft color along the sidewalks and roadway that winds through the area. I enjoy hearing the song of the robins, seeing a flash of bright red as a Cardinal calls for his mate and see the bobbing heads of the doves when I am walking to work early in the day.

Maybe this evening after work the weather will be nice enough to take Gilda, one of the service dogs I volunteer to help train for a brisk walk and run through of her commands. I need to catch up on some letter writing, work on the knitting I do for community service projects and make notes for my spiritual study group. Do I sound like a neighbor or a relative that lives down the street or someone you know from church or see in the grocery store? I could be that very person, except for the fact I have five numerical digits after my last name indicating I am a prisoner at the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, Ohio and have been here since 1976.

Please, don't turn away because I am just another prisoner, an outcast of society, someone not deemed worthy to draw breath. I am still a human being, with a heart, soul and conscious that will forever remind me I made poor choices, inappropriate decisions and the outcome impacted others so negatively. If I could, I would change what took place over 30 years ago. Sadly, I or no other mortal have that power and we all have to live with our past mistakes. I pray that people will look at the person I am today, what I have accomplished and what I can give back to society. Alas, the Ohio Parole Board chooses to forever punish us and not recognize anything positive we accomplish, ignoring the fact many out in society are willing to give us a second chance and welcome us back into their communities.

I spent 1975 in the county jail awaiting my trial, was sentenced to death in November 1976, had my death sentence commuted to life in 1978, saw the Parole Board in 1995 after serving 20 full years and was then given a 20-year continuance. During the first 20 years I saw the Parole Board for commutation hearings and was even told by a board member "Ms. Wernert we know you did not kill anyone but you were found guilty by a jury of your peers and therefore we too must view you as having committed the crime you are sentenced for." I have also been told by Board members that first purpose of my incarceration is to be punished. I always thought my being sent to prison was the punishment but obviously that is not how the Ohio Parole Board looks at things.

I have an excellent prison record but I have never been given consideration for following the prison rules, not going to the hole, living in merit housing, completing programs, educational and vocational training and graduation, or any other positive contribution I have accomplished. Yet, I have seen countless women who did nothing, went to the hole and pretty much caused problems from the day they got here go home, come back, go home, come back many times over. Seeing this type of preferential treatment for over 30-years gets pretty discouraging yet I seem to "do my time" much as I lived in my community and that was trying to do what is right.

Does keeping me here, as if I had been sentenced to life without chance of parole honestly serve any constructive purpose? It costs the Ohio tax payers roughly \$25,000.00 per year to keep me here and with the passage of time my health and that of approximately 5,000 other old law prisoners worsen and ultimately costs the Ohio tax payer's about \$66,000.00 per year to keep us here. Did I mention I have a sound psychological profile and am not deemed a danger or threat to anyone. The many people in the free world who support my parole, give me a place to live, a job and introduce me to their friends and family do not consider me a danger or a threat either.

I realize that the publication my letter is printed in has their main focus on stopping executions due to their being cruel and unusual punishment. Yet, being made to serve the amount of time I have already done is equally cruel and yes, unusual. Had I been paroled in 1995 I would have been working, paying taxes and contributing to the well being of society instead I continue to be a burden.

The United States has some of the most archaic laws and practices for their incarcerated in the world.

I try my best to maintain the hope that I will receive a parole, but with each passing year my resolve gets a bit dimmer. The human mind and spirit are strong, yet there is need for nurturing and growth if one is to remain positive and not allow the darker vistas of despair, anger and hopelessness to encroach.

It is hard when you are housed with women bemoaning the fact they have six (6) months to go and they are devastated. I try to keep my mouth shut and not say something about "hey, how would you like to trade places with me." I also struggle when I see the same woman coming back on her 9th or 10th number not to be rude when they wave and say "you back too?" I so, want to say "no, I haven't been given the first chance at freedom." Yet, I know saying those words would be a waste of breath and effort.

The mindset of corrections has changed drastically over the years I have been here. Gone is the humanization of the prisoner and in its place is the indifference, disdain and treating of all prisoners the same. It matters little if you are 16 or 65, black or white, just arrived or been here over 30-years - you are nothing but a nameless face that is being warehoused.

Prisons are a billion dollar a year business and the prisoners simply the commodity traded in. So many prisoners with drug and alcohol addiction could be better served in a rehabilitation facility, not a prison. The same thing applies to the many mentally disabled persons that are in prison simply because there is no other place for them. I see and live daily the things I have written about and these are facts not something made up.

I hope what I have written will give pause to someone out there with the voice and power to look at someone serving life but not sentenced to life without the chance for parole.

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