

T H E R E ' S T H E R U B

(Chapter two)

In the first chapter we explored the kindness, and generosity that men in prison exhibited in their donations and participation in the Walk-for-Hunger and Toys for Tots fundraiser's. The positive feedback that was generated from those events inspired Boston sports columnist Gordon Edes, to author an article about it on the ESPN Boston website. It is truly inspiring to know that those on the outside can have such an objective and unbiased approach when it comes to prisoners; one of the main points of focus I hope to get accross long before we reach chapter twenty.

In prison, days can appear longer than they are. However, during the holidays, those days become even longer. For those of us who live with the regrets of their past deeds, the holidays have a special meaning. Each day we live with the fact that are actions have affected those around us in profound ways. Children celebrate without their fathers, mothers enjoy the holidays without their sons, and the victims family tries to make sense of it all as they try to move on with their lives and enjoy what's left of thier holiday. For the prisoner, he tries to accept the fact that all this is his doing. A tough and bitter pill to swallow.

In an enviorement that is designed to rob an individual of his individuality, trying to celebrate anything in prison is tough. Especially on Christmas. I remember years ago sitting in my cell and listenning to Christmas carols on the radio. At some point all the staff at the radio station had pre-recorded Christmas messages to their listeners. I sat there on the edge of my bed thinking to myself that if not for these strangers, I would have had another Christmas without anyone saying, "Merry Christmas". It is a gloomy prospect, that elven months of the year you hope never happens again, but three years ago I made a promise to myself that it will never happen to anyone I know.

Three years ago I started decorating my cell for Christmas. I used thermo socks for stockings and I made a Christmas tree out of white paper. I cut the paper into strips $\frac{1}{2}$ way down the page, so that the paper looked like it had tassles. Then when I had cut enough of them, I rolled them together with the tassles facing upwards. Once it was stood up the 'tassles' would begin to naturally droop downward, resembling a tree.

The next thing on my agenda was to wrap presents, make cards and try to make the holiday a bit more enjoyable then previous years. That first year included seven prisoners, the second years included 14 and this year far outpaced both years combined with over 35 prisoners receiving presents, stockings and cards. Some prisoners donated close to \$100.00 just to make sure that those less fortunate would receive a gift. Two other men contributed over \$20.00 each, while close to 25 put in \$10.00 each. In the end the event was a resounding success. Men who have been in prison well over 25+ years said that they have never had a Christmas like this since they were children. That means everything to me.

Of course the Christmas would not be complete without giving some of that cheer ot the men in the HSU. The same time I started decorating my cell, I started to put together gift packages for the men in the HSU. Unlike the convential gift of something tangible, the gifts to the HSU are a bit more special. They receive personalized Christmas cards and letters addressed to them from the men in the general population. These are why I enjoy Christmas. Close to 20 men from both the catholic and protestant communities donated their time to write letters to every single man housed in the HSU. One prisoner wrote 40 letters by hand! Even the seminarians from Saint Johns Seminary wrote letters! Each of the men got several cards and letters which all stated that they are being prayed for and that they are not forgotten! An unfortunate reality that happens once an individual is housed in the HSU. It is a place where you go to die alone without the benefit of friends and family being around you. So, having

the opportunity to give these men the knowledge that they are not forgotten, gives me more joy than words could ever express. It provides the prisoner with the very thing prison takes from us...humanity. Without that we are doomed to repeat the failings of our past. There's the rub, prisoners seeking redemption. Who would have thought.....