

Photographs

I recently saw a news story about a lady who got her wedding pictures back 13 years after she thought they were lost forever in 9/11. She was so happy, and the story was interesting enough to put it on the news, so it made me start thinking... people obviously recognize the importance of photos of special life events. They treasure their own, and they cheer when others are ~~are~~ reunited with theirs. Everybody understands, even if they've never given it a lot of thought, that having a picture of something is so, so much more than only having your memory of it. The picture keeps the memory alive, the moment real.

It makes me wonder why so many people are so blasé and dismissive, then, when it comes to making sure their friends and family who are stuck in cages have access to their photos. I know that many people do send prisoners photos, but so many do not, even when a prisoner (who is also a sibling or son or close friend) lets them know how much it means to him to get photos — memories — from the real world. There's no use pretending I'm not talking largely about my own experience here (or that I'm not a little bit bitter about it), but I know from the hundreds of others I've talked to here in the gulags that my experience isn't unusual. It's the norm. I realize people in real life are busy folks, and mostly, I realize that they often just don't understand the pain of this kind of living death — people value pictures of their "special" moments, but they've never experienced the loss unique to prisoners that makes EVERY moment special if it occurred outside of the cage. People normally never think twice about daily events, because they'll be experiencing those same things, and new things, tomorrow, next week, and next year. It's hard to imagine "living" a "life" in which there are no new memories, no experiences worth thinking about again, ever. I don't expect non-prisoners to fully get it, but they should at least fully get that something beyond their experience (and nightmares) is happening to their loved ones — so send them those old photos. New ones too, but the old are special, they bring back to life moments your friends actually lived. A photo of a pet, or a house, or some boring thing you see every day... for a prisoner, if he also saw it in person, especially if he took the photo, or is in it — not a studio portrait but a real-life scene he lived — you'll be shining a light back to him, brighter than you may ever imagine.

[End.]