

COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS

Tuesday

January 3, 2016

To the women dating a prisoner,

Putting aside, for just a moment, all of the horrors that go along with being incarcerated, prison's **still** an extremely difficult place to be, even on the "best" of days. You're locked up, for Lord only knows how long, separated from your loved ones by electrified fences, walls, bulletproof glass, armed guards, vicious attack dogs and who knows what else. You are, for all intents and purposes, socially dead, and worse, your death hasn't taken you to the "good place." Any visitors who come to visit you must deal with numerous indignities, seemingly designed to deter, not promote, healthy relationships between the incarcerated and those who love them. Searches are the rule, not the exception, carried out under barely disguised glares of contempt. Letters exchanged are done with the full knowledge that they're being read, and sometimes censored, by several people before ever even making it to your loved one, allowing for little, if any, real privacy, and yet, through it all, there are those in the free world who refuse to be deterred. They write, they accept the outrageously priced collect calls and they travel hundreds, sometimes thousands of miles, to visit their loved ones, knowing the severe limitations placed upon their abilities to get close. All too often, this quiet demonstration of love, in the face of overwhelming adversity, goes by without comment.

As you celebrate Valentine's Day this year, know that, despite not having heard it anywhere near the number of times you deserve, you're loved and appreciated. Your letters may not be as long as you'd like, but the fact that you even thought to send something, even a postcard, is more than most have done and shows you were thinking about him/her. You might not be able to make the trip to see him/her as often as you'd like, but (s)he knows that, when you do, it's only because you put in an **overwhelming** amount of time and energy into making it possible. You worked long hours for little pay, taking time off you really couldn't afford. You spent money you didn't have to pay for gas, food and lodging. Even the most seemingly insignificant letter is a treasure in here, capable of bringing a smile to the face of your loved one, and in an environment such as this, a place where everyone has a scowl on their face, a smile is a ray of sunshine, magnified by a thousand.

Sadly, things like manners and common decency are often times lost in here, hidden from prying eyes lest they be viewed as a weakness, but that doesn't mean you're not appreciated. This doesn't mean that your efforts aren't welcome and valued, treasured more than gold and diamonds. The next time you feel unwelcome, and sooner or later, it's bound to happen, even in the free world, speak out. Explain how you're feeling and give a gentle reminder, in no uncertain terms, about exactly how you're feeling, and more importantly, why. It might take a moment or two for your words to sink in, but when they do, know that your loved one, once they come to their senses, will move heaven and hell to make things right. We've lost everything else, the one thing we have left is you, and you're worth more than everything else we lost, combined.

Sadly, I'm a single man doing time, so my words are based on a combination of factors: my observations in here and knowing the true value of what others in here have, and sometimes take for granted. When my turn eventually comes, as I hope and pray it will, then rest assured that my woman will never lay down at night wondering how I feel about her, or why I feel that way. If she's willing to stand by me through my most troubling of times, then surely I can do whatever it takes to ensure she always feels the love I most certainly do when she writes, accepts my call of drops by for a visit.

Sincerely,

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