

EXILED IN PURGATORY: RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

I am often surprised by the random acts of kindness by those on the street towards prisoners. Sometimes it may be life changing sacrifices, such as dedicating ones time and money to helping a wrongly convicted person gain their freedom or something as simple as buying a magazine.

In either case it is extremely rare. It has happened to me twice. The first time a friend I have wrote for over seven years sent me \$50 during the holidays recently. I wasn't expecting it. No heads up came. Having spent more than 20 yrs in prison it still took me by surprise.

\$50 may not sound like a lot — or maybe it does. To a prisoner that \$50 is analogous to being free with \$500. At the time I had not received money in years (not since my mother passed away in 2008). It allowed me to stock up on personal hygiene items — toothpaste, soap, a wash-wrap, shampoo (even though I'm going bald), some paper, envelopes and stamps.

I felt clean and rich. It made me remember people do care. I never asked for the money. I didn't expect it. It was a random act of kindness.

I know my name and address are floating around on the internet. I receive anonymous letters and cards from time to time. Sometimes it is someone trying to convert me to their religion when they learn my religion is not the same as theirs. Others send random holiday cards. These communications are rare as well, but they do happen.

I know I get these because my name and address are on websites like realcostofprisons.org and solitarywatch.org. Without my name out there like that I wouldn't receive them. I would be like the majority of prisoners, isolated and alone.

The ones I like best are the ones that I can share with other prisoners. For example, I recently received a notecard in the mail from "Rider Magazine", stating:

A GIFT FOR YOU! A magazine subscription to Rider has been given to you by
O Bell.

Who is this "O Bell"? I don't know any Bell's — or O'Bells if the gift giver is lucky enough to be Irish. I wonder to myself why O Bell picked me. What did I write? What cartoon did I draw? Where did O Bell find my name? I want to say thank you. I want to write a thank you letter, but, alas, O Bell is anonymous.

Then I think about Rider magazine. What is it? Is it motorcycles? Bicycles? Or maybe it is about horses? I have no idea. I won't know until I get the first issue. What I do know is O Bell was one of those random acts of kindness.

But O Bell's gift wasn't just for me. I can read the magazine and pass it on to another prisoner who doesn't have access to magazines. It will then get passed on to another prisoner, then another, and so on. It isn't, then, a simple random gift to me. It becomes a gift to many prisoners.

With a simple magazine a prisoner can keep

their mind positively occupied, educate themselves and possibly learn things about positive life changing activities available to them once paroled.

Whoever this mysterious O Bell was — he or she, helped more than just one prisoner with a random act of kindness.

O Bell, whoever you are, wherever you are — Thank You, on behalf of all the prisoners who will enjoy and benefit ~~the~~ from the gift you sent me.

Thank You!