

STATE ISSUED SOCKS

THE HOLIDAY SEASON IN PRISON CAN BE VERY MISERABLE AND QUITE DEPRESSING. BEING SEPARATED FROM FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS THIS TIME OF YEAR IS ESPECIALLY TRYING. I OFTEN FLASHBACK TO MY CHILDHOOD TO RELIEVE THE PAIN OF MY CURRENT SITUATION. THE SMELL OF A FRESHLY CUT TREE, THE HUNDREDS OF COLORFUL LIGHTS AND OF COURSE, THE PRESENTS IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES BRING BACK FOND MEMORIES. THE HANGING OF BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS WAS A HIGHLIGHT FOR ME. SANTA WOULD FILL THEM WITH MANY SMALL TOYS AND VARIOUS CANDIES. AFTER WAKING MY PARENTS, I REMEMBER RUNNING TOWARDS THE FIREPLACE AND REACHING FOR MY STOCKING. DUMPING OUT ALL THE GOODIES PUT A SMILE ON MY FACE. THE COMBINATION OF TOYS AND CHOCOLATES COULDN'T BE BEAT.

AS AN ADULT WITH KIDS, SANTA AND I STUFFED THE STOCKINGS EACH YEAR TO THE BRIM. THESE CHERISHED STOCKINGS BROUGHT HAPPINESS TO MY CHILDREN AS THEY DID FOR ME.

AT PELICAN BAY STATE PRISON IN CRESCENT CITY, MY ROOMMATE AND I HAD AN IDEA. WHY NOT SHARE THE JOY AND CHEER UP OTHER INMATES THROUGH THE GIFT OF GIVING. HOW? WE INVITED EVERY MAN IN OUR BUILDING TO DECORATE A STATE ISSUED SOCK WITH A HOLIDAY THEME. WE SUPPLIED THE COLORFUL MARKERS. KEN AND I EXPLAINED THAT EACH WOULD BE RETURNED ON CHRISTMAS MORNING FULL OF TREATS. THE RESPONSE WAS OVERWHELMING. WE HUNG DOZENS OF THE BEAUTIFULLY DECORATED EMPTY SOCKS ON OUR WALL. AN ASTONISHING DISPLAY OF ARTWORK! EVEN THE GUARDS FROM OTHER BUILDINGS CAME TO SEE THE SPECTACLE.

THEN, ON THE EVENING OF THE 24TH, KEN AND I WENT TO WORK. WE HAD PURCHASED AN ASSORTMENT OF THINGS FROM OUR QUARTERLY PACKAGES AND THE

CANTEEN EARLIER THAT MONTH. SHOWER SHOES ARE AN ESSENTIAL ITEM IN PRISON. THOSE WENT IN THE SOCKS FIRST, FOLLOWED BY A SODA, BAG OF NUTS, A RICE KRISPY TREAT, A PASTRY, HARD CANDY, AND A VARIETY OF DARK AND MILK CHOCOLATES. THAT'S ALL WE COULD JAM IN! FILLING THE SOCKS GAVE KEN AND I MUCH DELIGHT. WE STAYED UP LATE LAUGHING AND TELLING CHILDHOOD STORIES. KEN HAD ASKED THE GUARD WHO WAS WORKING CHRISTMAS MORNING IF WE COULD PASS OUT THE BULGING AND OVERFLOWING COLORFUL SOCKS. SURE ENOUGH, OUR DOOR OPENED BRIGHT AND EARLY. OFF WE WERE ON A MISSION OF SPREADING JOY TO OUR NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS. KEN AND I STARTED AT ONE END OF THE BUILDING. THE GUARD OPENED THE FIRST DOOR FROM HIS SECURE TOWER. WE WERE GREETED BY SMILES AND IN SOME CASES HUGS. THE WORDS "MERRY CHRISTMAS" ECHOED ON THE TIER. EACH DOOR WAS CLOSED BEFORE THE NEXT ONE OPENED FOR SAFETY REASONS. AN HOUR LATER, KEN AND I RETURNED TO OUR ROOM TIRED, BUT CONTENTED. WE HEARD SODA CANS "POP" ALL MORNING!

WE PERFORMED THE ANNUAL EVENT FOR FOUR YEARS BEFORE BEING TRANSFERRED TO CORCORAN STATE PRISON. THIS SIMPLE ACT OF LOVE DEEPLY AFFECTED THESE RESTLESS AND HOMESICK MEN. THE KINDNESS AND COMPASSION SHOWN BY KEN AND MYSELF MAY HAVE HELPED OTHERS, BUT IT CHANGED OUR LIVES FOREVER.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND GOD BLESS YOU ALL!

LARRY