



## The pearl is the knowledge of the healing power of Forgiveness

By Bill Pelke, Alaska, December 2015

My name is Bill Pelke. I am a sinner saved by Grace! No more, no less. It is important for you to know that about me because it helps explain the path I have taken in life. To me it is all about God's Grace. And God's Grace is more than sufficient for me.

My education on forgiveness began on the night on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1986. I stumbled over a small stone that I soon came to realize was the pearl of great price. That pearl is the knowledge of the healing power of forgiveness. And when you find it you sell all to possess it.

I experienced that healing power when compassion touched my life for Paula Cooper, a fifteen-year-old girl who had murdered Nana, my grandmother. That compassion brought forgiveness, and that forgiveness brought healing.

My Journey since that unforgettable night has been quite interesting.

The next day, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, I wrote Paula Cooper a letter who was on death row in the State of Indiana. I wanted to share with her some things from the Bible that I thought Nana would have wanted me to pass on to her. I wanted to do whatever I could to help her spiritually and mentally, and to help get her off of death row. We developed a remarkable friendship.

I got involved in an international campaign to save her life that included Pope John Paul II asking the Governor of Indiana to have mercy for Paula and over two million people, mostly Europeans, signing petitions asking for Paula's life to be spared. In 1989 Paula's death sentence was commuted to a number of years in prison. We exchanged letters about every ten days while she was housed in the condemned unit and it was a great day of victory for me when she walked off of death row.

We maintained our relationship and we were able to visit over a dozen times throughout the years.

With encouragement from friends like Sister Helen, Rick Halperin, Magdaleno Rose-Avilla and others, I conceived an idea that gave birth to the [Journey of Hope ... from Violence to Healing](#) in 1993. The Journey of Hope is led by murder victim family members who oppose the death penalty. We know the death penalty has nothing to do with healing that murder victim family members need when a loved one has been killed, and that it continues the cycle of violence.

Not only does the Journey promote forgiveness as a way for victim's families to heal, it also promotes restorative justice as a way to live. I believe in a restorative justice that heals the victims, offenders and both of their families.

I learned during my friendship with Paula that “we are more than the worst thing we have ever done”. I also learned something about Agape Love.

It was eight years before I was able to visit Paula for the first time. I will never forget it. It was on Thanksgiving Day in 1994.

The thing that stood out most in my mind that day was the 3-hour drive home because the word wonderful, wonderful, wonderful kept crossing my mind. I had just met this person who had done a horrendous thing to my grandmother and who had caused immense pain to my family, and yet I did not have the hate, anger and the desire for revenge that it would have been so easy to have had, but I had the kind of love that God wants us to have for each of His children and to me that was WONDERFUL.

It was Agape Love.

If there is anything I can do for you, please let me know.

Peace,

Bill Pelke