



„Name and number?“

By Robert Pruettt, November 2014

On every prison cellblock I've ever been on there's always a buzz, a mounting anticipation and hope leading up to mail call each night. Even if you aren't one to get a lot of mail you can feel it, you can hear it in the voices of those who are expecting word from a loved one.

Mail call is after shift change on 2nd shift, so once you see the new guards come on there's an immediate shift in the ambiance on the cellblock: Dudes start talking excitedly, you might even hear some singing, and there's just this change in energy as dudes try to distract themselves until the guards get around to sorting and passing out the mail.

Then, once the guards hit the runs with the mail dudes announce it so everyone knows, "MAIL CALL 1 ROW!! - MAIL CALL 2 ROW!!"

At that point, those that are hoping (expecting) mail are usually at their doors, waiting anxiously for the officer to get around to their cells. Some might pretend to be cleaning or reading or listening to their radios so they don't seem overly anxious, but if you are one who gets mail with any kind of regularity, you know you're aware of it just as everyone else is at mail call, and you're hoping the guard stops and knocks at your door and says, "Name and number?"

When I first arrived on the row in April of 2002 I didn't get much mail. The only people I wrote were my family and a few friends in prison. (Yeah, back then they allowed non-family prisoners to write each other, and many of us who'd known each other awhile wrote once we were split up.) I was in a very bad place internally back then. I'd been freshly sentenced to die after having been in prison already for nearly 7 years for a crime I didn't commit.

I felt hopeless and abandoned, and mail didn't mean anything to me.... then I received my first letter from someone asking to be my pen pal. The emotion and exhilaration I felt reading that letter is something I'll never forget.

She was a bit older than me, from Switzerland with a family, a nice garden and beautiful countryside, and there was no mistaking the genuine compassion and empathy she exuded. This was clearly someone who cared about people, and she was offering her friendship to me. For the first time in a very long time I felt rays of light and hope filtering into my world, and it came in the form of Ines Aubert.

Ines and I remain close friends to this day. She has experienced me through many phases. We've had ups and downs, have challenged each other often, and have grown together. Through it all I have felt her love and loyalty, her patience, and I have always know she is someone I can count on.

As many of you know, Ines is a member of lifespark. I wanted to reach out and personally thank your organization for all that you have done and still do for us inside these walls. It's the movement in general and your organization in particular that has attracted souls like Ines's and compelled her to reach out to people inside like myself.

All of us here appreciate your love and compassion, for spreading awareness at rallies and through meetings against capital punishment, and even through the efforts of people like Ines and the various members of lifespark that enable those of us in these prison cells to get excited when the guards at mail call stop at our doors and knock, "Name and number?" You might not always see it, but I assure you all that the fruits of your labors are felt in this dim place, and we love and thank you all.