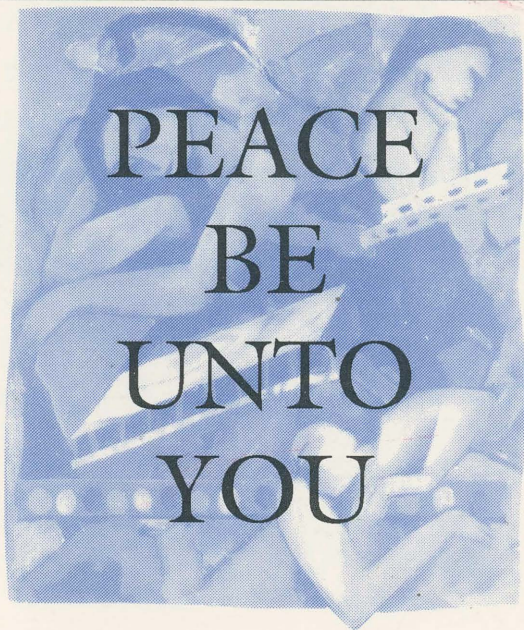

DEE FARMER & ASSOCIATES
PROJECT PUBLICATION



BY : D E E F A R M E R

DEDICATION

This booklet is dedicated to my mother, who has loved me just for me. And to all my friends and family members that have been by my side throughout the years. Finally, I dedicate this writing to all of the people in the world who have compassion in their hearts to give their time and resources to the fight that improves human rights and demands humane treatment.

GREETING

This booklet is being presented at the
1st National AIDS/HIV In Prison Roundtable.

Dee Farmer & Associates Project thanks
Judy Greenspan, and the many others who have
worked so hard to make this roundtable possible.
Today, we are taking the steps to demand that
AIDS/HIV prisoners be recognized as part of the
AIDS epidemic and receive humane treatment.
Prisoners throughout federal and state prison
systems unite their souls and hearts with yours in
the fight for life.

INTRODUCTION

For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came unto me.

Matthew 25:35-36

I have traveled the road for better or worse, and on that road I have befriended alot of my brothers and sisters. Yes, they were my brothers and they were my sisters because even though AIDS caused other people to hate them, I loved them. I held their hands, wiped away their tears, and with them said their last prayer for another chance in life. Many had hope and determination but few had peace. Those without peace screamed at God, prison medical staff, family members and me. It was not hard to understand their pain. Though I wrapped my arms around them and said,

"everything is going to be alright," I had held too many hands, wiped away too many of my brothers' and my sisters' tears, and witnessed too many of them leave this life to really believe that peace could evolve from a disease so misunderstood. Still I asked God to comfort them and give them the peace to be free within themselves, and to be free from the bonds that betray. I was sure that with this peace they could have overcome the walls that confined them, the prisoners and staff that taunted them, and the pure hatred of it all. Surely, these prisoners, ill as they were, needed the Peace of God to carry them through the valley of the shadow of death.

If I could only give this peace, my brothers and my sisters would have it and my mother would have it too. I would give it to you and prisoners everywhere.

Peace be unto you.

PEACE BE UNTO YOU

While I watched and listened, he sung:
"Troubles in my way. I have to cry sometimes. I can't sleep at night but that's alright, Jesus, He will fit it after while - - after while. . ." I nodded my head in agreement and thought about the peace that this prisoner must have to be able to stand and look out a prison hospital window singing praises to God, while dealing with the death and AIDS that haunted and surrounded him.

He reminded me of the blind lady who proclaimed she didn't need to see to know that God was her "bright and shining star." She said, "I may not be the best of anything, in fact, sometimes I feel like I am the least of all. But I am happy just to know that I am Jesus's child."

As the prisoner at the window brought his singing to an end, I looked around at all the prisoners with AIDS. Some of them were being fed intravenously, a few were being monitored by machines, and quite a number of them were wearing surgical masks. The majority of them just laid in their beds for weeks at a time - - unable to move and unwilling to talk. Others screamed, threw their food, and blamed the world, God and everyone they could think of for their affliction, pain, and suffering.

The prisoner singing at the window seemed to be oblivious to these things. The beeps of the machines, the screams of the dying, the blaring of the television, and the frequent announcements over the prison's public address system did not once interrupt his singing or threaten his peace. "This peace I have the world didn't give it to me and the world can't take it away."

I could understand why he preferred to gaze out of the window rather than concern himself with the sights in the room. Looking into the eyes of the dying is no easy task. Seeing the turmoil, pain and terror that these prisoners were living with elucidated how devastating AIDS is to human life. Everytime, I looked into their eyes I felt compelled to take their hand and wish the "Peace of God" to be with them. The hell that I witnessed AIDS bring to these prisoners moved me to want to help them, care for them, and heal them. I wanted to do things that I was incapable of and I did everything that I possibly could to bring peace, comfort and love into their hearts. I could never abandon them or forsake them. Depressing as it was they could at least rest assured that they had a friend in me. I went to them as often as I could to offer encouragement, support, and prayers of hope, peace and faith.

I will never forget the day that the prison chaplain called and asked me to come and comfort the prisoners because one of their fellow prisoners in his battle against AIDS had died. I arrived around seven in the evening, and by midnight four prisoners in the AIDS ward had died. I could tell that none of the other prisoners wanted to be a witness to this kind of death. When I looked around to see their response, it seemed that everybody was preoccupied with television, sleep or a book. It was unusually quiet - - nobody screamed or threw things. The television was only showing pictures without sound, and with less activity even the beeps of the machines seemed to dissipate. A few prisoners were moaning. Whether they were moaning because of their own physical pains or because of deaths of their comrades I never knew.

Around 10:00 p.m. when the third prisoner was announced dead and another sheet was brought in to be placed over him all the prisoners on the ward seemed to ask at one time: "Are we all going to die?" Neither the prison medical personnel or I could answer their question. Apparently, the prison doctor had tried some type of surgery on a number of them earlier that day which was turning out to be fatal. When the fourth sheet was brought in to cover yet another prisoner it was suggested by the prison medical staff that last requests be taken from the remaining prisoners. Some simply wanted to call their mothers, wives and children. Others requested prayer and not to be left alone. It is my guess that most were too shocked at their own impending death to request anything.

The prisoner that generally sung at the window offered this prayer:

"God, it must have been you that called for our souls. It must have been you that ended it for us in this place which resembles hell. Wasn't it you, God, that promised to deliver peace? God, you said "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil: God is with me; His rod and staff they comfort me. . ." (Psalms 23:4-6) He ended his prayer with this question: "God, are you there?"

That night tired and exhausted I wrote these words in my journal:

"If I could only be the you that don't feel the pain of the uncertainty of today, tomorrow, and the days after. The you that aren't locked away from friends and loved ones' by the slam of the cell door. The you that have not cried when another sister or brother has died. The you that are not stripped against your will and humiliated out of hatred, fear and selfishness. When I think

about you, I think about those who said, 'he got it, she got it, and watch them die as a result of it.' They called it the bug and sometimes the package. I think about those who spat on them when they were alive and condemned them with one word: AIDS. If I could only be you I would have wiped away their pain, granted them the unconditional love of others, and hopefully abolished AIDS altogether. The I would have filled them with peace."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dee Farmer is the Executive Director of Dee Farmer & Associates Project. She has worked in the prison reform community for about seven years. Ms. Farmer attended the University of Wisconsin and is currently a student at Penn State. She is the author of a number of writings about AIDS/HIV in prison, including *God Why?*, and *AIDS Has A Face of It's Own*.

