

# Maggie's Musings

## Visit to San Quentin

October 2006

In mid-October I was blessed with the opportunity to spend time each day for three days in San Quentin prison with Katie and a team of people interested in taking The Work into prisons. I walked away with gifts of awareness that are still unfolding inside of me.

On our last afternoon we met with a group of "lifers" who had chosen to attend a session in which they would be introduced to The Work. Before the session began I had the opportunity to talk with John, a 50 year old man who had been sentenced to life in prison 24 years ago. He began talking and I found myself just listening, curious and intrigued by this man who, I found out, had killed somebody while drunk.

Once he started talking he just kept talking. I may have asked a couple of questions but they didn't seem important. He talked about his mom and how she had died when he was in prison and I watched the emotion well up and tears fill his eyes as he told me that she asked him to get his life in order before he died. He told me that he might be getting out in a few weeks but nothing was certain. And while he was looking forward to life on the outside he was also very scared of what he would find and how alone he thought he would be. I tried to imagine what it would be like to enter this world after being locked up for 24 years. I couldn't, but I could see why there would be as much fear as joy.

He told me that he was surprised to find himself talking so much. He laughed at something we were sharing in together and then said he hadn't laughed in a very long time. I loved that we could laugh together here in prison and that he was willing to share it with me. I loved watching him laugh and become self-conscious and turn a bit red. We laughed again as he shared his embarrassment. I was just enjoying getting to know him, sitting and listening.

I learned later from his cellmate that he literally had not talked this much in years having remained silent for many years. He had begun talking just two years ago.

At another point he called Katie "sweetheart." She had, as she frequently does, said "sweetheart" to him earlier and he was returning the favor. The love that was emanating from him amazed me. Later he shared the one-liners he had written on his piece of paper out loud with the group and gave feedback to another prisoner who had just done The Work with Katie, saying, "It's nice to finally get to know you." I saw several turnarounds in that statement for him and for me.

For me, I just fell in love. He knows that if he would have been more sane in that moment he would have walked away rather than kill. I met myself in him. I discovered not long ago that I have held the belief, "I could physically do harm to another human being." In fact I had a knife in my hand at one point much earlier in my life with the thought that I might do just that. Some piece of sanity stopped me and he wasn't that fortunate.

The men I met during our visit thanked us for being there, for caring enough to travel long distances to visit them. It was I who felt more gratitude than I knew how to express.

I felt I was being served rather than serving. I understood why Kathy, Sara and Mary continue to take The Work into San Quentin on a weekly basis.