

GRATER FRIENDS

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ON THE RIGHT PATH

2010 PRISONER OF THE YEAR HONOREE

Stanley Washington, CE-1247, SCI Greensburg

The Prisoner of the Year Award is presented to individuals in recognition of their constant efforts to improve themselves and the world around them, the hope they ignite in others, and the positive and effective leadership they provide.

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for guiding me in the direction of seeking peace, being remorseful, and for meeting Debra Germany, Prison Society Official Visitor Cconvener at SCI Laurel Highlands/Somerset.

I read a newspaper article about her in which she held a violence prevention forum in 2005 at Columbus Middle School on Pittsburgh's northside. Reading the article pulled at my heart because I had committed a violent crime and I understood the effect of committing that crime.

Because Mrs. Germany is a mother who had lost her only child to violence, I could imagine how tough it must have been for her to do what she was doing. And I thought I should (as well as others in my shoes) be paying attention to the Debra Germany's of the world.

Before reading the article, I had thought of myself as being remorseful. But after reading it, I said to myself: "Who other than me knows it?"

So I leaped out on faith, wrote Mrs. Germany a letter, and told her that I commended her for being brave enough to go forward and to do what she was doing. I also told her that her remarkable work was not going unnoticed. And Mrs. Germany responded to that letter.

She wrote: "When my son was killed, I asked God to give me the opportunity to help a young man who had

committed a homicide, who was truly remorseful; someone who truly wanted to give back. Someone who had a testimony that would touch the heart of another young man not to travel down that same road." And, she stated, she believed that young man could be me.

I had already been whispering to young men and telling them that we could do better. But she inspired me to speak out loud to anybody and everybody who would listen. She inspired me to shout that we were more and we owed more because of the crimes we had committed.

Mediocre is something I've never wanted to be so I accepted her challenge to make a difference. And, I am diligent in doing so.

I never thought about awards or recognition. I only thought that it was a duty to myself, Mrs. Germany, my mother, and mothers of young men who had succumbed to violence to touch as many lives as I possibly could.

So today, I am humbled to be the recipient of an award of such distinction and prestige. Because of Mrs. Germany, I am a product of her belief in me, due diligence, and faith.

I would like to thank the Prison Society, its board, staff, and supporters because you believe in prisoner rehabilitation and in second chances. And, I would like to thank Mrs. Germany; the staff of Divine Intervention Ministries; my mother, Joanne Washington; and Jackie McCrommon for their unwavering support.

By no means is my work done, nor is my debt to society or my community fully paid. I will work at this for the rest of my life; this is just the beginning. And being the recipient of this award has reenergized me and reaffirmed that I am indeed on the right path. ■