

Finding a Friend Who Cares

Pamela Belcourt, Ellen Green and Amicus One to One

by Pamela Belcourt

When my prison caseworker told me to sign up for the Amicus One to One program, I did not want to do it. The last thing on my mind was making a new friend and sharing my life. I came from a life 200 miles away from prison, and the possibility of family or friends visiting me didn't exist. I had burned those bridges long ago.

When I was 34 years old, in 1990, I also had to do something I didn't want to do. I buried my only child, my beautiful 17-year-old son, Cordell Jr. He was 5 feet 11 inches tall, weighed 180 pounds, and had brown hair and brown eyes. He was the best of everything in my life. I had jumped many hurdles and accomplished so much because of him. What love will make you do!

I wanted him to have a good life, and I raised him in a different way from how I had grown up. Cordell and I loved each other, our family, friends, and our community. When he was killed, my soul and spirit died too. Everything that had meaning lost its value. I turned away from God, and for 15 years I ran.

I drove drunk many times during that period, and I always believed I was a safe driver. But then I earned five DWIs in seven years. For my fourth and fifth offenses—now felonies—I received 42 months for each—seven years total. I would have to serve at least three years and nine months, after completing almost a year in county jail. I wanted to die; I couldn't understand not getting another chance at probation.

So, I spent my first year in prison thinking of ways to leave. To leave early I had to prove I could listen and follow rules; I applied for One to One. The first step was a tearful interview, in which I shared my life. I came from an abusive home, married at 16, became a mother at 17, graduated from high school, and began to work for the phone company at 18. By choice I soon became a single parent, and for 11 years I loved that life—and hated it.

Then Amicus chose a mentor for me. She wrote me a letter and I wrote back. It was apparent we would become friends; I enjoyed our first visit and invited her to my graduating ceremony (I had taken a course in office work) at Shakopee. After that, she was there almost every Saturday. Even when she broke her foot, she came, with her walker. Her intelligence and nurturing personality helped dissolve my anger.



Pamela Belcourt and her Amicus One to One Friend Ellen Green

She helped me with my disease of alcoholism by listening to me and offering her life experiences. She supported me and easily understood my beliefs, traditions, and faults. She sent me a postcard from the places she traveled to. I was astonished by her commitment. All my life, I had had no one I could trust or depend on. Then came Ellen!

The day I was released was Christmas Eve, and I planned to take a cab and then the bus to northern Minnesota. Ellen offered a second choice, volunteering to drive me home. I'm so glad she did. It was the last time we would be together for a while. Little did we know there would be a blizzard—Ellen again stepped up, getting approval for me to stay at her home until the weather improved. It was a beautiful Christmas present.

One to One was very helpful in preparing me for my future. Ellen's weekly visits increased my perception of prison staff and officers as a positive element. And no one, not even my parents or siblings, cared for me the way Ellen has. I love her.

Today I'm doing well. I am five years sober, renting a two-bedroom house, caring for my dog, and becoming a member of my family again. Ellen and I talk about once a month and will be friends forever.

Thank you for Amicus, and God bless you all.