

For Dehoco Lifers-- New Hope, Friendship

By KATHY MORAN

They've been arrested, tried and convicted, but now they have been sentenced to hope.

Women serving life sentences at Detroit House of Correction now have a line to the "outside" world -- a line of communication and a line of hope.

It's in the form of a club called the "Lifelines" started by a few women in the Plymouth branch of the American Association of University Women who are interested in prison reform.

And it's the first program at Dehoco for lifers and the first time they've been given any attention, say the inmates.

"We were always pushed in the background," one inmate said.

"If a lifer wanted to get on job training before, they always said 'she'll be here'... That was the attitude."

"What they don't recognize is that most lifers don't serve life. They are eligible for training a few months before parole, but if you've let your mind deteriorate for the nine years before..."

Lifelines have started to change that by giving lifers an activity to look forward to, a friend to talk to and someone to share their troubles or complaints.

Launa Wakenhut of Plymouth, chairman of the club, said Lifelines started out as an arts and crafts group. The women would crochet, knit or do art work. AAUW women would try to market it.

"We soon found that the inmates big need is just to talk to somebody," she said. "They talk about their personal problems, concerns about their families or whatever they are interested in."

"I think it has been valuable for them and valuable for us -- we've learned so much."

Anyone looking for "hard-core criminals" during a Lifelines' visit to Dehoco would be surprised. The lifers being visited are, for the most part, women who have made mistakes.

Most have committed murder in a moment of passion and have no prior criminal record, Mrs. Wakenhut said. And judging from the pattern of the last 35 years, it seems a safe bet they won't commit other crimes.



and her self-respect than anything in her last several years of imprisonment.

"It's people caring," she said. "I think this is the best thing that ever happened to us."

"We needed someone to talk to, someone outside the institution," another said.

"I feel this is like Christmas," another said. "To me every Tuesday is Christmas -- I feel so joyful."

"If it wasn't for these ladies, we would be deteriorating. They give us hope, something to look forward to. There aren't enough words to describe these ladies. We're really grateful to them."

The AAUW women check on the inmates' families or act as a liaison with the prison officials when they can. Since Dehoco is Michigan's only women's prison, inmates are from all over the state and sometimes from other states. Consequently, many are alone on Sunday during visiting hours.

Their AAUW friends often go to Dehoco, too, so the inmates won't be alone. Recently one visited a lifer while she was in the hospital. The inmates point with

pride to the fact that two lifers soon will be allowed to start on a training program at Plymouth Center for Human Development to learn how to work with retarded children.

Before Lifelines, they say they would have been pushed to the bottom of the list. Women convicted of lesser crimes would have the opportunities even though they frequently return to prison time and again.

One from their group is attending high school classes and getting tutoring from AAUW women. Lifers are now eligible for keepunch training and some of the clerical and better jobs within the prison.

That's happened since Lifelines started also, they claim.

And on Dec. 18, they will have a Christmas party which will include two former inmates who are on parole.

"Even though they are out, they're still part of our club," one explained.

The women inmates feel that regardless of their past offenses, they now are being treated fairly and have gained friendships.

As one put it, "It's just having someone care."



IT'S A LONELY LIFE for a lifer at Dehoco, but a friendly visitor from the AAUW can make things look brighter. (Observer photo by Kathy Moran)

m. m. memos

I read recently about a couple who had every bit of Christmas preparation complete by Thanksgiving.

Then a fellow - worker remarked with apprehension that she had purchased Christmas cards two weeks ago and still hadn't written any of them.

These were disturbing, but before - Christmas panic really threatened to set in when a card from an organized friend arrived the day after Thanksgiving.

I had been feeling I had done pretty well -- bought a few presents last summer and accomplished before Thanksgiving what had to be done by then.

But most family presents are still to be bought, most of the cooking and a lot of sewing is still ahead and there will be a mountain of Christmas cards and notes to write when we get the cards well ordered.

So it occurs to me that where Christmas preparations are concerned there's a law as immutable as the ones that say there will always be an extra sock in the wash and there will never be a pencil by the telephone.

I can be sure that no matter what preparations I make when, I will always have exactly enough time to do what I really need and want to do before the big day.

And not a minute more. It's the law. That legal knowledge should make my favorite season less worrisome this year.

-Margaret Miller

It's Back Home To Tokyo For Madonna Art Graduate

By MARGARET MILLER

Keiko Motoyama is completing her two-year art course at Madonna Dec. 15. By the end of the month, she expects to be reunited with her Japanese family for the first time in nearly three years.

She's learned here to paint

in a style quite reminiscent of the French impressionists, and she's learned to appreciate the freedom and independence that American coeds enjoy.

Daughter of art dealer Chochiro Motoyama, Keiko came to Madonna to study

because "my father's opinion is to send children abroad for schooling." Her older sister studied in France and a younger brother also will travel after he completes work in a French school in Tokyo.

Madonna was chosen, Keiko added, because she has an aunt and uncle living in Garden City and because, "though my parents are Buddhist, they like Catholic schools."

At Madonna, Keiko studied under Sister Angeline to earn her associate degree in art.

"She kept saying that I should show my Japanese background in my work," this visiting student said.

"But I have learned oil painting and that is a Western art form. Japanese art is not in oil. It's black and white, charcoal or pen and ink."

One of Keiko's charcoal works has some Japanese flavor, but the oil painting of colorful flowers seems definitely of the Western world.

Keiko came to Michigan in 1971, and attended the University of Michigan to learn English before enrolling in the Livonia school.

"I think I have learned so much here," she said. "I have visited many museums."

Last summer, traveling with a Japanese friend who attends Boston University, Keiko toured the western part of U.S. by bus.

The trip gave her a taste for travel and she hopes to visit Hawaii on her way back to Japan, where she expects she will join her father's art business.

But her two years here also have given her a taste for the American life. "Everything here is very free," she said. "At home I have depended on my parents for everything. But her students live free and are so independent. I like that."



KEIKO MOTOTYAMA shows some of the paintings she did during her two years of study at Madonna College. (Observer photo by Harry Mauthe)

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