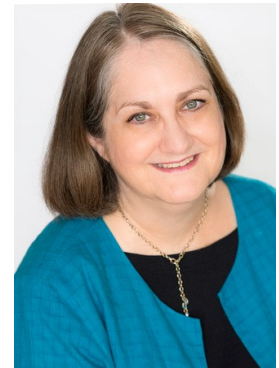


A PIONEER MOVES ON

For those of us in the Chicago area who work with the incarcerated and their families there is one woman that all of us admire for her tireless work in making a difference for hundreds of women over the past 28 years. Now she is moving on and leaving CLAIM, the organization that she build from the ground up.

Gail T. Smith founded CLAIM to provide free legal aid, client education and public advocacy for incarcerated mothers, their children and families. She drafted legislation to ban the use of shackles on women during labor and childbirth, and working with formerly incarcerated mothers, helped to make Illinois the first state in the nation to outlaw this practice. She has testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, the Illinois General Assembly and the Cook County Board of Commissioners. In June 2013 she was named a White House Champion of Change for Children of Prisoners. She received the Impact Award from Chicago Foundation for Women in 2012, the National Organization for Women-Chicago Chapter's 2011 Women Who Dared award, the 2005 YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago's Racial Justice Award, the 1995 Chicago Tribune Tempo/Woman award, and the 1991 New York University Public Interest Law Foundation award for courageous and untiring advocacy on behalf of incarcerated mothers. She earned her J.D. at New York University and her B.A. magna cum laude from Barat College of DePaul University, and taught high school prior to becoming a lawyer.



Gail T. Smith

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ANNUAL GIFT WRAPPING FUNDRAISER AT CHICAGO RIDGE MALL

Chicago Ridge Mall has agreed to allow volunteers from Companions Journeying Together to wrap Christmas gifts in the main lobby of the mall. We need individuals with a few hours to spare, retirees, students who have to do community service, and those who like to make boxes look lovely for the holidays. We do the wrapping for donations only, no set price, but people have been very generous in the past because they know we are wrapping gifts for them so we can provide children with incarcerated parents with brand new books. Come out and join us on any of these dates.

Saturday Nov. 30th	10am – 8pm	Sunday Dec. 15th	9am – 10pm
Sunday Dec. 1st	11am – 6pm	Sat. Dec. 21st	9am – 10pm
Saturday Dec. 7th	10am – 8pm	Sun Dec. 22nd	9am – 10pm
Sunday Dec. 8th	11am – 6pm	Mon. Dec. 23rd	9am – 10pm
Saturday Dec. 14th	9am – 10pm	Tues Dec. 24th	8am – 6pm

Send us an email at auntmarysvolunteers@gmail.com, to let us know you are coming.

PROGRAM NEWS

WHO IS AUNT MARY?

As you probably know our story book project was named after my Aunt Mary Best. My sisters and I started Companions with money she left. Aunt Mary loved children and was a superb elementary school teacher. When Sr. Pat conceived the idea for this project, we knew it had to be named after Aunt Mary. I thought you might like to know a little more about her.

Even after retirement, Aunt Mary found ways to educate. The children of her neighborhood often visited. She would play card games with them or take them to her garden to teach about the plants growing there. I can see her bending down showing a small child a caterpillar crawling on a side walk while explain all about this insect. She made learning fun.

When my children were young, she and her husband would take us to a park or sometimes a cemetery where they knew there was hickory trees so we could collect those goodies, and then she would give me recipes so I could use them in baking. How we loved the jelly rolls she would bring us periodically for our dessert (they were amazingly good). She grew beautiful flowers. I especially remember her zinnias, and I think of her whenever I see them. On my 11th birthday she gave me a copy of Little Women. I read it over and over. A few years ago, I realized it was missing and thought it was lost forever. You can imagine my delight when I found it this year as we were preparing for our annual garage sale.

To any of you who are worried about your children, talk to Aunt Mary. She will care about them too and do whatever can be done from heaven to reach out and meet their needs.

CHRISTMAS CARD PROJECT

By the time you receive this mailing, most of the Christmas cards we will send to people in prisoners will be in the mail. Over the years, we have posted the heart-warming thanks we receive from some of the recipients. We are so grateful to all who help us complete this project including:

- So many of you in near and far places who provide the cards, the messages and signatures and the postage.
- A group from a former Church Women United who not only collects these cards from people in their churches, but also gather ever year to help us prepare them for mail.
- A wonderful woman who has for many years gathered her friends in her home wonderfully decorated for Christmas to help address the cards. She always offers us great chili for lunch.
- And even another special who volunteer gathers people from her church and sometimes a few others to help. She, too, feeds us well usually with a delicious breakfast and wonderful lunch.
- This year a local church who will give its members the opportunity to help during an evening of volunteer service.



DEPAUL ARCHIVES UPDATE

We reported last fall that our program records had been sent to the John T Richardson Library at DePaul University in Chicago, to be housed with their special collections. The staff expects to have our materials archived in the next month. Then patrons of the library may have controlled access to them.

BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Gail T. Smith continued from page 1

Highlights of Gail's exemplary leadership include:

- Writing and championing legislation to ban the use of shackles on pregnant women. Thanks to Gail's efforts, Illinois was the first state to ban the practice of shackling during labor.
- Convening the Illinois Task Force for Children of Prisoners, Children of Promise, which won improvements including children's visiting center at Cook County Jail.
- Testifying before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, the Illinois General Assembly, and the Cook County Board of Commissioners.
- Receiving the Impact Award from Chicago Foundation for Women in 2012, the National Organization for Women-Chicago Chapter's 2011 Women Who Dared award, and the 2005 YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago's Racial Justice Award.
- Promoting community alternatives to prison for parents charged with nonviolent offenses to keep parents and children together.
- Working to reduce termination of parental rights and to promote restorative justice practices.

BOARD SPOTLIGHT: SISTER COLLEEN

Have you ever wondered how life takes you places you never thought you'd experience? Our incarcerated sisters and brothers live this experience daily in and out of prison. I have learned from them a resiliency that humbles me. I left home at eighteen to follow God's call to religious life as a Catholic Sister. My faith has sustained me in my ministry as an educator of children, and children have always been my teachers, too. About nine years ago I began a journey that led me to drive children, along with their caregivers, to visit their parents in prison. These wonderful, caring adults and children taught me ways to "give back" for all that life has given to me. Driving them to visit mom or dad was such a privilege and a realization of parents love for their children. Those smiling faces lite up the world after each visit! That "giving back" continued a new path forward in 2007 when I was asked by the Executive Director to consider joining the board of Companions Journeying Together, Inc. I knew I could be of help as an educator and in fundraising through my congregation.

The rest is history! I have received so much more than I have ever been able to give. I loved my one summer visit to a women's prison to work with Aunt Mary's Storybook Project. That hands-on experience has enabled me to speak to families in the parish where I serve. The contribution of books and donations for these beloved children enabled them to receive a new book and CD with mom or dad's voice reading that story to them. Through the goodness of our Companion donors the Aunt Mary Storybook Project lives on. Will you pass on the stories of real-life folks who need other voices and good deeds to spread the Good News that we are all sisters and brothers in God? Incarcerated parents are people, God's creations, and no matter what, they deserve dignity and a chance for their children to do well in school and in life. Some moms and dads will leave jail or prison but some are "lifers." Please pray for them and for their children. Help in any way you can to further our mission. I thank you in the name of the Board of Directors for our readers and supporters. God bless you.

PROGRAM NEWS

NEWS FROM OLIVIA'S JOURNAL: THE PARENTING TEACHER AT KENDALL COUNTY JAIL

In the past 10 weeks we have had I've had 21 ladies in the classes. Most are in their twenties, with a few in their thirties and two in their forties. Most are white women from Kendall County. Most are already mothers, but recently I opened up class to non-moms. I've had 2 who were pregnant.

For each class, I pick a topic of conversation to focus on. The first hour is for sharing/talking about that topic. Then I give them a handout/visual aide to keep for reference. The second hour we do some kind of arts/crafts project that relates to topic at hand. I'm limited in what i can bring into the jail, but we manage. Next, we discuss their creations. The last few minutes of class is a wrap up, Q & A, journal topics, requests for next week.

I've had 1 lady who has been with me since day one of class. Most are with me 4-5 classes, some only 1 class. All are there because of drug/alcohol issues and along with that robbery/forged checks, etc. I never ask why they are there, they usually just tell me. The saddest case I've had was a 45 year old heroin addict who has stage 4 breast cancer. Her husband, also a drug addict, was also in jail because they did a robbery together. While at Kendall County, her oldest daughter was killed by a drunk driver. She wasn't allowed to go to funeral or pay her last respects. She got released after all this for 30 days to get her affairs in order because she's supposed to go to state prison. I've learned from these women, probably more than they learned from me. I see myself as a facilitator, not a teacher of these classes. I always tell them these are their classes, not mine. They dictate the classes, not me. I look forward to helping more women in the future, especially when we start the aftercare project.



KEEP THESE FOLKS IN OUR COMMUNITY IN YOUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

- The young man who recorded a book for his baby born on the day of our taping. He expressed his fear that he would never be able to overcome his heroin addiction.
- All of the people in our country who are unable to receive the mental health care they need. We have seen in recent weeks the damage that under treated mentally ill people can cause.
- For all of those who help and donate to us that they will receive many blessings.
- For one of our storybook participants who recently received a life sentence.
- For women victims of violence who are living in fear without sufficient support.
- For the juveniles who were transferred from the now closed IYC-Joliet to other juvenile prisons in the state that they will find their bearings in these new institutions.

WE STILL NEED YOUR HELP

- We can only provide service to so many because of your help. Can you provide:
- Large envelopes, packing tape, C/D's and new soft covered books for Aunt Mary's Storybook Project. Maybe you know a group that would do a book drive for us.
- Christmas wrapping paper, gift boxes, bows, tape for our Christmas Wrapping Fund Raiser.
- Always postage stamps.
- It is not too early to start planning for our Mother's Day Project, 2014. We will need postage stamps, stationery and cards, gallon zip lock bags, simple pens (no click or metal on them), groups to help assemble the packets.
- Some of your time wrapping gifts as part of our Christmas Gift Wrapping Gifts Fund Raiser for donations to Aunt Mary's Storybook Project.

MEDIA & INMATE NEWS

A NEW SHOW ON NETFLIX EXPLORE WOMEN IN PRISON

“**Orange Is the New Black**” is based on an autobiography of a real-life woman who is sent to prison and is immediately in over her head. Piper Chapman (played by 29-year-old Taylor Schilling) has just been sent to a women’s prison for a 15-month sentence for carrying drug money a decade ago, when she was in college. Piper is an upscale yuppie, who talks about eating healthy and boasts about her liberal arts education. As an attractive, white, blonde girl, Piper is definitely a fish-out-of-water in prison. Almost immediately, a black inmate – dubbed “Crazy Eyes” and rightfully so – attempts to claim Piper as her “prison wife.” Also, on her very first day, Piper also runs afoul of another inmate who is the head cook, who orders that no one can share food with Piper. One of the neat things about this show is that while we enter the prison through Piper’s eyes, she isn’t necessarily the most interesting or heroic character. Fans are cheering for the sweetheart Latino who falls for a male prison guard, or the upbeat black inmate “Taystee” who earns her release mid-series. This show comes with a caution – it is funny at times, but quite serious. The dialogue is frank, and blunt with racist remarks and banter about stereotypes. The white women in prison are their own “tribe.” The African-Americans and Latinos also “stick to their own kind.” One Latino girl is repeatedly shamed by others because she doesn’t speak Spanish. Each episode has flashback scenes, focusing on one particular inmate, Viewers see short snippets on a character’s past, and frequently see what she did that caused her to wind up in prison. It is a good time for this show to be on television. With book clubs all over the country reading Michelle Alexander’s book [The New Jim Crow](#), states reconsidering the overwhelming costs of incarceration and the emergence of support more activists from the post incarceration community, this show has the potential to provide an impetus for increased conversation that may led to change in the attitudes about incarcerated persons.



WHAT ARE THE INMATES SAYING ABOUT COMPANIONS ?

Recently we asked some of the participants of Aunt Mary’s Storybook Project at Kane County Jail to express their gratitude to all of you who donate for this project. Below are a few of the responses.

“Thank you so much for your contributions. It means the world to me to be able to still read to my daughters despite the circumstances. It is my greatest wish that you continue to provide this opportunity to families going through difficult situations. It provides reassurance that everything is going to work out. Thanks for providing hope.”

Sincerely, Chiquita

“I just want to thank and let you know how much Aunt Mary’s Storybook Book Project means to me and my family. The opportunity to connect with our loved ones, the opportunity you guys provide for us is amazing. It’s greatly appreciated, who knew something as simple as a book would make a difference. It does, and it means a lot to me each and every time you guys allow us the privilege to connect with our families and loved ones. Thanks for this opportunity. And My God bless you.”

Jose

“This program is awesome because we can read books to our kids and in the same time we’re teaching them how to read, and they can hear our voice. So I thank you guys a lot for having this program for us.”

“I would like to thank those who have donated to support this program for us. It is one of the most uplifting, educational and caring programs I think there is. I love it and appreciate it as well as my family does too. Thank you so much. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.”

Justin

journeynotes



TM

Companions, Journeying Together, Inc.

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our goals • our vision • our commitment

- To bridge the gaps between the free and the unfree worlds in our society
- To implement programs that foster the personal growth of incarcerated people and their families
- To promote family literacy, lifelong learning and positive parenting techniques
- To recruit and educate volunteers about the criminal justice system and restorative justice

*Journeynotes is a publication of
Companions, Journeying Together, Inc.
amstorybook@sbcglobal.net
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Search: **Companions Journeying Together, Inc**

NEEDS

Postage stamps – if possible Forever Stamps - for Mother's Day Project, birthday cards and other correspondence – we need many thousands.

Do you know any businesses that would send from their mail rooms part or all of one month's mailing of storybooks for children as a donation to us?

Do you know any churches or companies who would be willing to make copies of 300+ for Mother's Day or Family Stories?