

Love story: Three women want to marry prison lifers

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Donna Daugherty is shown at the Iowa State Penitentiary on a visit to Bill Holland, whom she hopes to marry.

FORT MADISON IA. — This is a love story — sort of.

Last October, Donna Daugherty left her Pennsylvania home and moved to Fort Madison to marry Bill Holland, who is serving a life sentence for murder at the Iowa State Penitentiary here. Prison rules prevent inmates from marrying, so Daugherty and Holland did it their own way.

One afternoon, they joined hands across the table in the visiting room at the prison, repeated self-styled marriage vows and exchanged gold rings engraved with their initials.

According to Daugherty, "We feel married in our hearts. Now we want to make it legal."

Daugherty, 42, who soon will move to Cedar Rapids to live with Holland's ailing parents, isn't the only woman who has her heart set on marrying a "lifer" at the prison.

Her daughter, Darlene, 18, also has requested to marry an inmate serving a life sentence for murder. Her boyfriend was advised by his lawyer not to get involved publicly about it. And Betty Langston, 37, of Dundas, Illinois, was asked to marry Warren Nutter, 39, who was convicted of the 1956 killing of an Independence police officer. Langston and Nutter were high school sweethearts and she was traveling with him the night of the shooting.

Three women who want to marry lifers — who would be in it for them?

"When you love somebody, you just don't think of anything else," says Daugherty. She met Holland, 42, through her daughter, Darlene, who was his pen pal. Holland, in turn, introduced Daugherty to the inmate she wants to marry.

Daugherty, who is divorced and has three children, first visited Holland in

August. "Naturally, I was scared to death; I'd never been in a place like that before," she recalls.

But when I walked into the room and saw Bill, that was it. I knew I loved him."

She is convinced that Holland, convicted of the 1958 shooting of a Clive man, is rehabilitated and should be released. "I'd bet my life against his that he'd never be in trouble again," Daugherty says.

She plans to petition Governor Robert Ray for a commutation of Holland's sentence. "With a lot of prayer and the good Lord helping, Bill will be free someday and I'll be waiting," says Daugherty, who has been consulting with a Lutheran minister about their predicament.

"All I do is work and stay home. I don't have anything to do with other men," she says. "I don't care who knows about this. I am not ashamed."

How does Holland feel about getting married?

"I'm just like anybody else. — I want to love and to be loved. Just because I'm locked up in here doesn't mean I feel any different," he says. "Donna and I can talk about anything from the birds and the bees to ice skating. We get along as good as anybody on earth can."

What if he never gets out of prison? "Realistically, I could be here until I die, but Donna says she's willing to live with it."

Holland is in the process of crocheting a bedspread for Daugherty, who times around at prison rules allow "lifers" to take to free him." She writes to Holland every day and visits him four times a month at prison rules allow.

Nutter and Langston, both of Illinois, have known each other since childhood. They were driving through



Bill Holland, left, and Warren Nutter, both serving life sentences for murder, have asked permission to marry women they have been corre-

sponding with on the outside. Nutter is holding the photo album filled with pictures of Betty Langston who is "waiting for him."

Iowa with three friends the night Nutter shot and killed a policeman.

Langston, who makes the six-hour drive to the prison at least six times each year, recalls, "I was sent to a girls' school for 11 months and held a material witness because I saw the whole thing. I'd never condone the killing of a person, but I feel that Warren has paid plenty for what he did. He's spent the best years of his life in prison.

"After all, he was a boy, not a man, when it happened."

Langston, married twice before, has two teen-age children who know Nutter and approve of the marriage. "My other marriages were for all the wrong reasons," Langston says. "This time, I'm sure it's right. I've had at least seven marriage proposals since I was divorced five years ago, but I didn't even consider them."

"Very few people know about Warren and me, those who know are sympathetic. I've been writing to him since I was 17."

As for her social life while she's waiting, "I go out on dates, but Warren knows it," Langston says. "I feel that I owe myself a little fun."

Nutter, who is seeking a commutation of his sentence, realizes there aren't any "real" advantages to getting married while he's still locked up. "But we want to marry now because we love each other. Very few people remember that I'm here, but Betty sticks with me. I want to belong to her and know she belongs to me."

Nutter keeps a thick red photo album filled with pictures of Langston and her two children. He describes her as "affectionate, feminine and very sincere."

Funds to support volunteer program

The Junior League of Des Moines is donating approximately \$15,000 over the next three years to establish a volunteer program for the Fifth Judicial District Department of Court Services. The funds will help to pay the salary of a program coordinator.

The league also has agreed to provide volunteers to work with both men and women in the areas of job therapy classes, education, recreation, tutoring and employment monitoring.

In 1974 a group of league members helped form the Impact in Corrections board, composed of community volunteers, in addition to league

members, who promote the Residential Corrections program at Fort Des Moines. Sponsored activities for clients include a physical fitness program, birthday parties, medical lecture series and tutoring.

The local league is one of 233 in the Association of Leagues, Inc., which over the past three years has sponsored a LEAA (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration) funded program called IMPACT. It is designed to develop awareness and skill training in the area of criminal justice with the intent of training leagues to initiate or assist community efforts to reduce crime.

Open Epilepsy Center

A statewide Epilepsy Information and Referral Center has been established by the Iowa Chapter of the Epilepsy Foundation of America to provide information and assistance to persons with this illness, their families, friends, employers, and human service providers.

The center will help callers explore their problems and select the most appropriate service to meet their needs. Areas of concern include employment opportunities, educational

programs, low-cost drugs and social services.

Individuals with questions or problems related to epilepsy can contact the Epilepsy center by calling the toll-free number 800-275-6434 or by writing to Epilepsy Information and Referral Center, Epilepsy Foundation of America-Iowa Chapter, Westtown Box 200, Iowa City, IA, 52242.

All requests for information will be answered promptly. Office hours are Monday through Friday from 8 a.m.