

Jane didn't want to be pen pals. She just wanted Mom to come home.

THE BEST Pen Pal Ever

By Sydney Squires
(Based on a true story)

DEAR MOM, Jane wrote.

She paused and tapped her pen against the table. She looked at the fridge, where the newest picture of her and Mom hung. They both had the same chin, the same dark hair, and the same wide smile.

What could she say? Jane wanted to sound happy and strong for Mom, but nothing came to mind. Her heart hurt so much that it was hard to write anything at all.

Jane, Dad, and her siblings had come back from visiting Mom two weeks ago. Mom was in prison, and they had to drive for almost a whole day to see her. Because of the long drive, they didn't get to see her very often. Mom had been in prison for over a year, and they had only seen her twice.



This time, when Jane had visited, Mom had suggested that they become pen pals. But Jane didn't want to be pen pals. She just wanted Mom to come home.

Mom's first letter to Jane had arrived yesterday, written in neat pencil. At the bottom, she had drawn a picture of the two of them having a party together when she got home.

Jane wrote a few lines, then scrunched up the paper. She put her head on the table and squeezed her eyes shut, trying to hold back tears.

Dad came in with the groceries. "Jane, are you OK?" Jane shrugged.

Dad sat down and put his arms around her. Jane leaned into his chest.

"How much longer?" she asked.

"Until what?"

"How much longer until Mom can come home?"

Dad was quiet for a long time. Then he said, "It'll probably be at least three more years, Jane."

Jane thought her heart would explode. Three years! The last year had been so long and hard. How could she live for three more years without Mom?

"Every single day, I wish your mom was here," Dad said. "It's really hard with her gone, isn't it?" Jane nodded.

"It's OK to feel sad," Dad said. "Sometimes it helps me to remind myself of what I'm grateful for." Jane sniffed a little. "Like what?"

Dad smiled. "Like how we get to call Mom every week. And we're able to send her supplies she needs—and letters." Dad patted the paper pad on the table. "And . . . ?"

"And . . ." Jane thought about it. "I have lots of teachers and friends I can talk to. And Ashley's mom took me to a Mother's Day activity. And I've been learning to be a better friend and help others."

"Yes, you have," Dad said. "How about if we say a prayer, and then you can keep thinking about what you want to write?"

Jane folded her arms. She thanked Heavenly Father that she had been able to see Mom and that they had driven home safely. Then she asked Him to help her know what to write.

She sat at the table, thinking and thinking. Then she started writing something she didn't expect: a list of things she was grateful for. She listed all the things she had talked about with Dad, plus a few more, like her siblings and her neighborhood.

When she finished, Jane drew a picture of herself and Mom playing board games together. Her heart still hurt a little, but she had one thing to look forward to—for the next three years, she would be the best pen pal ever! ●

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALYSSA TALLENT

