

'I was in prison for 2,192 days; she wrote to me almost daily'

Laure, 58 and Jerry, 62, survived his jail sentence for causing death by dangerous driving. They live in Alabama, and now run a support network for the families of prisoners.

Laure Jerry and I met in 1995 and married four months later.

I tell him all the time I would marry him again, but faster. We'd both been married twice before and dating was the last thing I was looking for. But he ticked all the boxes.

I had two daughters and he had one. We moved our family from Tennessee to Alabama, to raise them in the country. We were living the dream. But on 17 March 2003, it was shattered when Jerry caused a head-on car collision which killed a young mother. He had been driving drunk.

I felt rage, betrayal. When we met, we were both recovering alcoholics, so I had only known him sober. Now a life had been lost. I didn't want him dead, but I wanted him to hurt real bad.

We lived in a small town, and I grieved for that family. I felt embarrassment. I had to get to the forgiveness part quickly so I could get through each day.

Jerry spent 10 days in the ICU. He pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to six years in prison and 19 on probation. I was scared – emotionally, practically, financially, spiritually. I wanted to stay married but didn't know how. I didn't know what you do when someone you love is in prison.

I wrote to him almost every night. I could afford one dollaraminute phone call a week and petrol for the 100-mile drive to visit every two weeks. I felt a lot of anger in those first years.

I remember burying the cat, crying, saying, "This is a dad job."

I tried to experience the girls' graduations for both of us.

His first year home, we argued all the time. I'd put my hand on his shoulder and he'd push it away; he was still in survival mode.

We're grandparents now and enjoy our family immensely. We run a support network for prisoner families, called Extended Family. I started it six months into his sentence.

Jerry will still say, "You stayed with me all those years," but I don't think of it that way. I'm not going to make him do the dishes for the rest of our lives. We spent six years without each other; we don't want to spend another

minute apart.

Jerry On our first date, I took Laure and her daughters to see Cinderella at the theatre. When I got home, I wrote "She's the one" on the back of the programme.

We had a good life. I had a small engineering business, work grew busy, and we moved cities. But I was in a mess. I got into narcotics but hid it from my family. The night of the accident, I had stopped at a liquor store. I was in a blackout. Moments later, a young woman was dead and I was airlifted to hospital. I was shocked, remorseful, disheartened.

My wife has a big and kind heart. I tried to protect her from the police investigation and the likelihood of prison. I didn't want our girls walking around with the stigma of a dad who had killed someone.

In Alabama, incarceration is uncontested grounds for divorce, but there was never a question of Laure leaving me. On an early prison visit, I told her I wouldn't blame her if she wanted to leave. She looked at me and said, "I'd be more miserable than I am now." I'll never forget it.

I was in prison for 2,192 days and she wrote to me almost daily. There were guys that got nothing. I felt blessed and honoured. She would arrive every two weeks and I would put on a smile. But I pitied myself; I felt useless, unable to provide for my family.

When I came home, I was harsher than before. Meanwhile, this woman I loved had blossomed. I had to adjust. There's a not a day that I don't pay for my disastrous decision in some way, shape or form. We worked through the mess I made together, and we're closer because of it.