

Writings by Jack Alderman

1. Poetry:

Christmas in a Cage

The halls are never decked with boughs of holly; colourful carols do not fill the air; there are no ornamented trees or decorative lights; beyond the concertina wire, behind the concrete, beneath the steel, there is feigned indifference. It is just another day. Maybe the attitude is a desperate act of self-preservation; maybe the mindset lessens the heartache; as if denial diminishes sadness and pain. Whatever it is, it is not just another day. Despite the efforts of Ebenezer and the antics of the Grinch, Christmas survives.

In many ways, the atmosphere here is closer to the original than the traditional. I wonder about the manger, crowded spaces, confused faces, dimly lit, poorly heated – it could have been called inhumane, were it not constructed for animals. It was difficult and demanding, yet the presence of God's Son insured it a holy and sacred occasion.

On Death Row, the past and the future, both precious commodities, collide in an unreachable unknown, while the present looms, too often dark and foreboding. Amazingly in this circumstance, grace abounds.

Cultural practices and religious customs struggle to find a footing here. Prison regulations and physical restrictions contribute to the frustration. We can receive little and give even less, The convention of gifting is challenged. Praise and worship must be structured to the system's convenience, testing the mettle of sincerity.

The emphasis ultimately centres on that which is truly central to the holiday, faith, hope and love. The beauty transcends the miles, penetrates the barriers and touches our spirits. Peace and joy are blessings gloriously wrapped with care and compassion. Our importance is celebrated.

This is intended to be a miserable place and the architects have experienced success; but there have been instances of failure. When Christmas is not just another day, we, the caged, triumph. It may be a small victory. But the rewards improve the present and insure eternity.

UNREST IN PIECES

Alone in a corner, dark, quiet, still;
Shadows invade, unidentifiable shapes;
Everything is dead, nothing more to kill;
The plaintive cry for help barely escapes.
Left, right, it is almost always wrong;
Up, down, somersaults across the middle;
Zombies collide, crushed by the throng;
Low-dive, high-five, puddle of piddle.
Head first into a newly discovered wall;
Brain busted, no one seems to notice;
Chest cracked, will the muscles now stall;
Or will there be prolonged insignificance.
Maybe there is life on a parallel plane;
Hearts and minds that actually operate;
Hide and seek is the nature of this game;
Around and about, a tragic mistake.
Who exactly am I to you or you to me,
Does it matter what is done or said
Does acknowledgement validate reality;
Or are we, in fact truly dead.

Jack Alderman

Letter to Simone Sandelson

March 3 2006

It is beneficial that you understand my position in the courts. I am amazed at how easily so many abandon principle.

There is no juncture where it is wrong to be right. To me you establish a value system and commit to honouring it. You are apt to fail but that does not distort or diminish those standards.

A few weeks after my arrest a 'deal' was proffered. It was instantly rejected. I was to plead guilty as an accomplice to the murder. There would be a ten year sentence, five to serve, five to be probated, "We will not oppose parole, you will not have to leave Chatham County, you can be free in twenty months.."

I looked directly into his eyes, it was the Chief Assistant District Attorney, he and I in a small conference room, across a table. My words flowed quietly, " Bubsy, would you like 10 years in prison?"

" No Jackie, but I didn't kill anyone."

I stood up and extended my hand, . He was shocked, "Son, don't be a fool! This can be ugly and dangerous."

I was not sure what I would do, only what I would not do

Insanely, the next month I was again asked to accept a life sentence with parole in seven years, to drop the appeal.

This does not lessen my hatred of prison, it does not quiet my ache for freedom.

I have one simple rule regarding intrapersonal relationship: I do not do anything to cause me to be ashamed to look into a mirror.

My mother and father taught honesty. I must have missed the class on when you slice it and dice it so it fits conveniently into a circumstance.

Am I proud to have a fanatical stance? No, I am miserable, but I had no choice, Simone

I have had a dozen attorneys through the decades. I was bankrupt in two years, my folks in six.

The relevance? none.. other than none of us had any experience

I was a boy Scout!

No, not a saint.

Not an angel.

Not a murderer.

March 23rd 2006

Hello Simone,

My spirit always elevates upon receipt of mail from you. Your impact may actually surprise you.

You are right in thinking DNA is beneficial to many, but not in every case.

I suppose there are numerous angles from which to view my situation; but it is literally” he said” / “ he said.”

There is only one man responsible for my imprisonment and that is John Arthur Brown. There are no witnesses, no evidence no motive, nothing to connect me to a crime but his testimony. I used my character as my defense and the basis for my appeal.

It would shock the average person even in cold callous America to read my trial transcript. In his own words Brown admitted to being an alcoholic and a drug addict. He was institutionalized on three occasions and told the court he had withdrawals from reality where he could not remember anything for up to 72 hours. He was disorientated and confused.

I took and passed 2 polygraph tests, but they are inadmissible, I was placed under regressive hypnosis twice, because the subconscious cannot lie; they countered that I was fooling the experts.

My attorney commented that I was his first client to be convicted for arrogance.

I was not arrogant, Simone, I was hurt and angered. I did not shuffle my feet and lower my eyes. I was defiant. I looked at each juror, I challenged the state.

I was on the stand for hours. Of course they badgered me and I did not object. They could not trip me or trap me because I told the truth. I did not deny mistakes or excuse faults. I merely denied any involvement in a murder.

The media referred to me as an 'emotionless statue'. The day the trial began, Dad said, "Jackie, I know your heart is broken but your neck is not."

So I probably did exclude the jury, I refused to apologize, there was no reason to.

The only two people who knew I had nothing to do with this horror were my wife, Barbara and Brown, they are both deceased. [Brown shot himself when released from prison]

I wish seances were admissible
Or judges were telepathic
Or there was an absolute truth serum.

People assume I am disturbed because I will not admit guilt to save myself, they think I must want to die. Poppycock

"What is a fair and just sentence for an innocent person?"
"Gee, there are none."
So why accept less?

May 15th 2007

We should never ask God to do what we can do AND we should never ask God to do what we would not do if we could. How dare I ask anyone to repair my Dad's worn out knees unless I will offer mine if parts are needed. "Will you pray for my second cousin's great nephew, Jack , he is dying of cancer?" I do not wish others to suffer, but I am not eager to die for a stranger. This would therefore counterfeit my prayer. May I appeal for those starving in the Sudan whilst I am aware of a neighbour with hunger pangs and I have a pack of crackers?

I am as concerned as all of conscience should be. I do honestly seek a humane existence, void of fear and unrest. But I do not see God as Santa Claus, the Salvation Army or the wizard of OZ. Let us do our best to eliminate the worst, then contact God.

I cannot physically ring you today, nor visit your studio. I cannot shout loud enough for you to hear me declare my appreciation. But when I perceived a friend lower than usual, I went to him and enquired about his welfare. We talked, he chuckled at some asinine remark I made. I did not acquire motivation from Jesus, I sought to upgrade another's lot for you, because you bless me.

I do not care how it measures up theologically. I shared a portion of what you have given to me.

To impact lives in a manner that stimulates development in another validates who we are.

My father is a good, decent man. I persuade people to meet him, hoping they will connect traits; maybe they will grasp my determination to honor him.

My mother was my biggest supporter, my closest friend, my glowing example and a principled parent. I do things this very day in remembrance of her. Is she watching? I've no idea. I feel she is and that constitutes an element of my faith; but what I do for her is what she has already done for me.