

Book Report

"Papillon" by Henri Charrière
Autobiography written in 1968. 544 pages

This book is one of the best I've read in my life. Henri Charrière A.K.A. Papillon. Magnificently captured the reader and instantly placed you in his life. Along with the adventures of his "Cavale's" (Escapes). Along with the mental strength of overcoming torturous solitary confinement. Papillon takes you on the ride of a man transforming from a criminal into a reformed human being.

Papillon was a small time criminal who was well respected in the underworld of Paris, France in the 1920's and '30's. In 1931 Papillon was framed for a murder of a pimp he did not commit. Being a low-life in Paris, he didn't stand a chance against a Prosecutor looking to make a bigger name for himself. On the false word of another low-life drug dealer. Papillon was sentenced to Life of Hard Labor at the "Bagne" (Penal colony) of "Iles du Salut" (Salvation Island), on the coast of French Guiana. Iles du Salut comprise of 3 Penal Islands, "Ile Royale", "Ile St. Joseph" and "Ile du Diable" famously known as Devils Island.

Papillon takes you deep into the life of a "Bagnard" (convict). The dangers of living amongst murderers, thieves and the like. Also the strong and close bonds of friends — even amongst these kind. Driven by: revenge upon those who wrongly convicted him; by: the need to escape from the injustice placed upon all bagnards; and simply by: the strong urge to be free. Papillon lives for one thing and one thing only... Cavale.

Papillon attempted several cavales. Taking him to the high seas with little supplies, makeshift boats, ~~and~~ bagnard ingenuity, help of loyal friends and the strong desire to be free. The things he had to overcome all seem to just be obstacles in the way of freedom. However, turning out to be steps shaping him into becoming a better man. Papillon and his surviving friends met new people in new countries. The kindness, welcoming and hospitality of these people who embraced them even knowing about their past. Humbled the heart of Papillon. Helping him to get in touch with his own morality and find in himself the peace he searched for his whole life.

As a prisoner myself. I can relate to Papillon's endurance in solitary confinement. Although I've not suffered the horrendous treatment as Papillon. I know all too well having only the memories of love ones and the want to be with them, being the strength to get one threw all the hardship and injustice inflicted upon one. Also how being a victim allows one to empathize with the people you once victimized. Finding in yourself that you are inherently good, even if you're forever judged solely by your past evils. Then to have people judge you justly and treat you kindly instills a want to pass the kindness on.

Papillon endured the loss of dear friends in the most horrific of manners. Showing that prisoners are still human beings. We love and befriend and grieve at the loss of such true companionship. Papillon skillfully depicted his friendships and enemies in his scripts. I am impressed and inspired. When I am free and can write the struggles and triumphs of my life. I pray I can do so, half as superbly as Papillon has.

I found out a movie was made of this book in the '70's. It no doubt will be the 1st movie I rent upon my release. In my life, as in Papillon's. I have risen above the evil deeds of my past. Those I inflicted and one's inflicted upon me, and have become a better man for it. I could take weeks to describe such transformation, however, Papillon has already written the words. I hate to divulge more of the book, but it is becoming of me to quote his words in my conclusion.

On one of Papillon's cavales. He and his friends ended up in CURAÇAO. An Island country off the coast of Venezuela. They were detained by the chief of police DR. NAAL until the Governor decided what to do with Papillon and his friends. While in Jail they met Irénée de Bruyne the Bishop of Curaçao. He comes to accept the confessions of the prisoners. He took the confession of Papillon's friends. Papillon not knowing how to make confession just laid out his entire life to the Bishop. All the way up to his present confession. After he finished. The Bishop said Powerful, wonderful, true words to Papillon. Words I will quote for you in my conclusion.

CONCLUSION

"Sometimes God wills for one of his children to experience human wickedness so that he will emerge stronger and nobler than ever. Don't you see, my son, that if you hadn't had this calvary to climb, you would never have been able to raise yourself so near to God's truth? Let me put it another way: the men, the system, the cogs of the machine that ground you down, the

evil men who framed you and tortured you, have rendered you the greatest service possible. They brought forth a new man, superior to the first, and if today you recognize honor, goodness and charity, and realize the energy you will need to surmount the obstacles and become someone superior, you owe it to them. Your idea of vengeance of punishing everybody according to the injury inflicted on you, goes against the grain of your character. You must be a savior of men, and not live in order to do evil, even though you think the evil is justified. God was generous to you. He told you, 'Help Yourself and I'll help you.' He helped you in so many ways. He even allowed you to save other men and lead them to freedom. But most important, don't make so much of your sins. There are many people in higher positions who are guilty of much worse. Only they haven't experienced the weight of man's idea of justice and therefore have missed the opportunity to rise above it as you did."

"Nuff SAID!!