

Dead Whispers



If you look through the Authors List on this site, you should find the name William Goehler. He went by "Whispers". He's dead now.

I don't ~~mean~~^{mean} to sound callous; it's just a fact, and Whispers himself probably would've appreciated the unvarnished directness. In his honor, then, I'll continue in that vein.

Quite honestly, Whispers wasn't my favorite person. He had more than a touch of the arrogance, and though I'd stop short of calling him a "bully" (a much overused word these days), plenty of people would not-unreasonably disagree with me. No doubt he could sometimes use his 6'3" stature a bit coercively, and for sure he frequently abused many cellmates and neighbors by aiming and discharging his assault weapon (aka ghetto-blastar radio) directly at them. Sure, that's standard Prisonese selfishness, but I still hold all that unnecessary suffering against him. And even right here on this site, Whispers lobbed some nasty ~~at~~ attacks toward certain commenters for their religious beliefs and/or their negative opinions of his beloved Scientology, all of which seems pretty low to me... I wouldn't be surprised at all if he and Tenzin were buddies here, as they certainly shared some troll tendencies.

That said, Whispers never did me any harm, personally, though I fear I may have wronged him once or twice by failing to answer his letters to me. In my defence, those letters seemed to be little more than efforts to further involve me with his Scientology projects after I'd moved, and although I never especially dis-liked Whispers, I'd been happy enough to get away from his incessant recruiting efforts so I wasn't about to indulge his obsession through the mail. All in all though, he never treated me poorly and we even had some interesting conversations together... I suppose from my experience with him I'd mostly characterize him as "quiet", and not only because of the tracheal injury that gave him his nickname. My impression was of a certain aloofness that kept him from displaying much of that obnoxious bluster that characterizes so many Prisonese people ~~trying to~~ hide their low self-esteem. No one would've accused Whispers of low self-esteem, though who can say what frailties lurk in people's private hearts?

My view of Whispers (I think much like most people's views of most other people) was relatively one-dimensional. I saw and mostly accepted the persona he put forth for

public consumption, which was colorful for sure, but also kind of stoic. Whispers never seemed to need anyone or be moved by anything. He once mocked a little Buddhist aphorism I'd shared with him about the value of compassion and sympathy, saying something about the root of the word sympathy coming from the word "pathetic", and despite his dubious etymological analysis (or perhaps because of it), I still took him at face value. I should have known better. By all accounts, Whispers killed himself after hearing his son had O.D.'d. The loss was apparently just too much for him, and that reveals something about the guy I'd never seen because he went to such lengths to conceal it: Whispers DID feel, and did care. Of course he did; he was human. Prison encourages and sometimes even demands a level of psychological self defence, and Whispers was well-armored in this way but ultimately little different from anyone else, his very effort to be seen as such the strongest evidence belying his facade. I didn't give him full credit for his humanity, and I regret that.

I won't miss Whispers, and perhaps that's sad. He was a hard person for someone with my particular suite of imperfections to like very much, though I suppose better folks than I may have found him delightfully entertaining, and maybe more than that. Even if I won't miss him, I do appreciate him, both for his contribution to my perspective ~~as~~ ^{and} also just for that man behind the mask whom I now know did indeed feel deeply, so deeply that he was ultimately moved to throw himself from the second storey with a sheet tied around his neck. Though I can't much grieve his loss, I certainly grieve the tragic continuance of all the sickeningly unnecessary greed, cruelty, and cultivated weakness (in all of us) that led to it.