

Self Analysis

This is the self-analysis of John P. Alexander, MDOC # 30021. I am a 56 year old white male who has been in the Mississippi Criminal Justice System since 1975. I have been through a five-day trial before a petit jury where I listened to numerous psychiatric and psychological expert witnesses analyze me. This is my own self-assessment.

Childhood

I was born on December 30, 1954 in Jackson, Mississippi. I was the second child of a married couple. Both of my parents had bachelor's degrees. I have one older sister and two younger sisters who are identical twins. My parents were children of the Great Depression who had carved-out an upper-middle-class existence in post World War II America. My father was an entrepreneur, land-developer, home-builder and real-estate broker. My mother was a stay-at-home mom until her older children entered junior high (middle) school, at which time she resumed teaching school.

The memories of the first five years of my life were very happy! At age five, I started to school, where I had difficulties. My birthday is in late December and I was always one of the youngest students in my class. Looking back, I probably was not developmentally ready to start school at age five. When I resisted going to school, my father responded by whipping me repeatedly with a belt. I mention this to state that I was not spoiled as a child by my parents. My mother was very nurturing and my father was a high-

maintenance kind-of-guy. He was the disciplinarian in the family. Corporal punishment was an accepted practice in the 1960s.

When I was a child, the summertime was my favorite season of the year. Our family took vacations on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, where my father owned houses and rental properties which we used as summer residences. We owned a cabin cruiser, which we kept in the marinas. We went deep-sea fishing and water skiing. We often visited the barrier islands off the Gulf Coast, including Ship Island. During my early childhood, we took a trip to California, where we visited Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm. In the summer of 1964, *Anno Domini*, our family also visited Washington, D.C. and the surrounding area.

Our family home was a nice mansion, custom-built by my father. It was on the edge of the Jackson city-limits on two acres of land. We had horse stables in the back yard, where we kept two horses. Our house was the largest house in the neighborhood in a subdivision which my father had developed.

At age seven, I took piano lessons where I was classically trained. I took swimming lessons, springboard diving lessons, trampoline lessons, karate lessons, gymnastics lessons, etc. My mother sponsored a Girl Scout troop, so we had lots of girls over at my house when I was a child. I was one of the few male children in the neighborhood. My father had season tickets to the college football games which were played in Mississippi Memorial Stadium in Jackson. Dad was a pilot, and he often flew me in single-engine airplanes to football games on the college campuses. Dad and I also attended college basketball games during Christmas season, and occasionally went hunting and fishing on rivers and lakes. Mom attended all of our band performances, and took us to movies at

the theaters. She also chauffeured us to all of the lessons we took. I attended public schools which had good regional and national reputations. It was a life of privilege! However, since I had no frame-of-reference, many of the advantages were unrealized by me at the time.

As a child, it is very likely that I had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. However, at the time, there was no awareness of this disease. The only treatment which I received was my father's belt.

Adolescence

I entered high school as a sophomore in the fall of 1969, at the height of the Civil Rights movement. In January of 1970, the public schools were desegregated. This was a time of change and upheaval in the South, and many of my peer-groups and childhood friendships were upset and broken because of the "white flight" to private schools. I chose to stay in the public schools!

During adolescence, I became very interested in popular music. At this time, I began in earnest to study piano and guitar. My music teacher is the organist and choir director at the downtown Episcopal Cathedral, and, through his influence, I became involved in the Church, although I did not have any fervent beliefs. The music was more than likely my attempt to soothe my depression, which struck me around age 15 and lasted all throughout high school. Actually, it lasted up until the time I was 35 years old!

During school seasons, I spent most of my time being depressed; and, during the summers, when I was involved in the competitive swimming and springboard diving teams, I felt happy. This may have been a seasonal affective disorder. Basically, I felt

adrift and directionless, with no sense of my place in the world. I had a peer-group of male and female friends, which mostly were centered on swimming activities. In the summers, I had a full social calendar, going-out on dates with girls and other normal recreation activities. During the school season, I was pretty much of a loner!

Without really trying, I got admitted to Vanderbilt University with an academic scholarship. At Vanderbilt, I made good grades and was a varsity athlete on the swimming and springboard diving teams. I had very little social life, however!

While I was at Vanderbilt, a staff member for Campus Crusade for Christ witnessed to me. He told me that God had a wonderful plan for my life, and all I had to do in order to activate the plan is to accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I signed up for the program!

During the summers, I worked as the swimming coach at the country club. While I was working at this job, I met a married woman who had a history of having serial love affairs with a variety of younger men. We became romantically involved, and I fell in love with her. After our summer romance, I went back to school at Vanderbilt. She then exposed the affair to her husband in an attempt to obtain revenge on him. I became depressed and dropped out of school. He threatened to hunt-me-down and to kill me. Someone turned my automobile over on its side in my front yard, so I bought a pistol, which I carried with me everywhere I went.

Medically, I lapsed into a deteriorated mental condition. The doctors whom I have counseled-with in later years, told me that my schizophrenia had set-in, which centered on a chemical imbalance in my brain which was a product of my genetic inheritance. My appearance became disheveled. My thinking patterns became confused and disoriented.

I lost faith in God and hope in the future. One day in early October, 1975, I had a chance encounter with the woman. In the heat of passion, I committed murder. I was in a great deal of emotional pain, and I committed an irrational act in order to get rid of the pain!

I have been incarcerated for almost 34 of the last 36 years. However, I can honestly say that I have lived a good life. I have known great sorrow in my life, but I also have known great joy! I believe that I now am a good person, as I have been through almost every rehabilitation program offered by the Mississippi Department of Corrections. I have seen things that many psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians and historians would have liked to have seen.

Post Incarceration

As a defense to the charges of homicide, I entered an insanity plea. The sentiments of the good citizens of Hinds County at the time were that I should not be punished for my actions. No one condoned my actions, but, at the same time, not too many people wanted to see me cast into prison.

The local media gave a lot of coverage to the legal proceedings. On a small scale, through this media coverage the people of Mississippi got an education in abnormal psychology. I went to trial in 1976, and at that time, there was a burgeoning awareness of the medical aspects of psychological conditions. I received a large number of visitors, and many of them told me that they too had dysfunctional issues in their backgrounds which were brought out into the open, partly, because of the media coverage of my case. This reinforces my belief that “all things work together for good to them that love God.” (Romans 8:28)

I was certified by the November 1975 Term of the Hinds County Grand Jury as being insane and not responsible for my actions on the day of the homicide. In separate proceedings in May of 1976, I was also found guilty of murder by a petit jury. In 1978, I was weary of the publicity and the legal struggle, so I dropped my appeals and chose to accept responsibility for my actions. At the time, both of my parents told me that, in the long-term goal of building a future life, I would fare better by accepting responsibility for my actions. The reality of the situation in 1978 was that the quality-of-life in the prison camps was superior to the quality-of-life in the state-operated mental institution!

Shortly after I made this decision, I was given the opportunity to confess to the murder in a wrongful-death civil suit. A few months after the civil trial, back in prison, my spirit was broken by my realization of the degradation and humiliation of prison life. I experienced what the doctors termed a “decompensation;” and the prison psychiatrist placed me on psychoactive medicine. Thirty-three years later, I am still taking this medicine!

In the years since, I have made several attempts to get off of this medicine. All of these attempts were made with the knowledge and cooperation of my doctors. There is a medical term for a supervised discontinuation of psychiatric drugs known as a “drug holiday.” Every time I have taken a drug holiday, I have had a relapse and been hospitalized. The last time this happened was 25 years ago, and the results were that my parole got revoked. I have been taking my medicine uninterrupted ever since. I also have been incarcerated ever since!

In 1990, I began taking the same medicine (Haldol) in injectable form. (I am given a shot every 28 days). This is a long-acting version of the drug, which is suspended in

sesame oil, thus giving it a timed-release effect. The result of my taking this injectable medicine is that my diagnosis changed from schizophrenia to bipolar disorder. From the time I was fifteen until the time I was 35, I was in a controlled state of depression. From the time I was 35 until the time I was 49 (when my wife died), I was in a controlled state of "joy." This is a medical term in the diagnosis of bipolar-condition for a continual state of well-being which is independent of circumstance. On the manufacturer's insert to the Haldol medication, it states that one of the side-effects of the drug may be an exaggerated sense of well-being.

There is an adage that "life goes on." Since I have been in prison, I have played in a musical show band for 14 years, traveling all over the State of Mississippi as a community trusty with little or no supervision; I have been a clerk/typist in sensitive security and management areas of the prison; I have given motivational speeches to middle and high school aged children who visit the prison; I have received an Associate of Arts degree from the prison college program; and I now am enrolled in the Parchman Branch of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

I have been engaged to three different women, and married once. One of my fiancées was a medical doctor who helped me tremendously in my journey toward healing and wholeness. My wife and I lived-out our married life by going on four-day conjugal visits three times a year for the seven and a half years we were married. She died tragically of cancer in 2003. My third fiancée was a computer wizard who built me a Web site. My father died in 1992, but I am still very close to my mother!

I now am emotionally balanced. On an average day, I experience a broad range of emotions. My current existence is very stark, as the prison has become quite punitive

over the years. In 2004, I was commissioned by the Episcopal Bishop as poet-in-residence at Parchman. This commission expired in 2010. However, in 2011, I was appointed by the Roman Catholic Bishop as Minister of Music and commissioned as Ambassador for Christ. This is the commission which I am living out today!

During my entire incarceration, I have had the sense that I was on a “mission from God.” This was once interpreted by the psychiatrists as delusional, but it has now translated into a secure sense of my own place in the world!

As poet-in-residence, I became a “voice” for the prisoners. I believe that I have several messages which are being played-out as I live my life. One of these messages is that there is no situation which cannot be redeemed by the saving love of Jesus Christ. Along with this message goes the corollary that there is no crime---no matter how horrible--- which cannot be forgiven!

Another message which I believe I have for the world is that, contrary to the message of the “Left Behind” movement, Jesus Christ is going to return at the time of humanity’s triumph: not at a time of our tragedy: the final chapter on the history of humankind is going to tell a story with a happy ending!

My future is uncertain. I believe that I am on the metaphorical battlefield for Jesus. My adversaries are principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12).

I spend a lot of time these days thinking about my life as a child, because I draw a great deal of comfort and strength from those happy days of childhood. As I stated, I believe that I am a good person. Most people like me who know me well. I believe that, if I am remembered at all 200 years from now, the fact that I have spent over three

decades in prison will be a little-known fact about me that someone like Paul Harvey will highlight in a “rest of the story” broadcast format.

My current goal is to get a Governor’s pardon. Considering all of the conflicting rulings which have been handed down by the Mississippi courts in my case, I have the judges tied up in a legal knot. I believe that a pardon is an altogether appropriate way for me to be released!

May God, who has given me the will and imagination to conceive my expected end, give all parties involved the will and the grace to live it out!

“In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:”

John Peyton Alexander, II
aka John Apple
Ambassador for Christ

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