



That Bird Has My Wings: The Autobiography of an Innocent Man on Death Row

Jarvis Jay Masters

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That Bird Has My Wings is the astounding memoir of death row inmate Jarvis Masters and a testament to the tenacity of the human spirit and the talent of a fine writer. Offering scenes from his life that are at times poignant, revelatory, frightening, soul-stirring, painful, funny, and uplifting, *That Bird Has My Wings* tells the story of the author's childhood with parents addicted to heroin, an abusive foster family, a life of crime and imprisonment, and the eventual embracing of Buddhism.

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From Reader Review That Bird Has My Wings: The Autobiography of an Innocent Man on Death Row for online ebook

Monty says

I started reading this book thinking I would never finish it because it sounded so trite--subtitle: the autobiography of an innocent man on death row. Well, I plowed through this book because it was so compelling. It's mostly about his youth from about age 4 to age 19 or so when he was sent to San Quentin. Only the last part of the book describes his experience in San Quentin, death row and his experiences with Buddhism. He describes really horrible experiences of abuse and neglect at home and in various institutions in CA. It wasn't all bleak for him as he tells of his mother's love, of some really kind foster parents, and friendships he made.

Jean says

Good story of strife and redemption without over dramatizing. I had hoped for more lucid application of Buddhist principles.

Paula says

This is one of the most beautiful and thematically relevant book titles I have ever encountered. It speaks to my soul.

Jarvis Masters' autobiography is a must read.

Our system is horribly flawed. Unfortunately, he is a victim of that flawed system.

He admits to his past violence and indiscretions ... but of equal or more paramount concern for us as readers should be looked and scrutinized from what Jarvis experienced growing up with witnessing domestic abuse, addiction, abandonment, foster family abuse and school abuse, and so much more.

His self-awareness and emotional intelligence are inspiring for us all to witness and learn from and to be always mindful that all of this writing was done from death row.

Namaste Jarvis.

Shanae says

Absolutely amazing!!! A must read for all. One of the best books I've read this year and one of the best autobiographies I've ever read.

Amy says

WOW!

Although I'm an avid reader I rarely write reviews. This is one of the rare books I had to put down a few times before picking it up again hours or a day later to either calm my heart beat and/or nerves or ruminate on his life story. Beautifully written and heartbreakingly honest book. The inner peace and strength of this man, especially after being placed on death row, is beyond inspiring. Set this gentleman free NOW!

Tommy says

This is a fascinating story of a man who never really had a chance at growing up to live in freedom. Not to excuse his crimes, but it helps one understand how generations of children are raised in an atmosphere of hopelessness, an environment that dares them to survive. How they have to do so naturally leads to a life that risks life and freedom.

For Jarvis Jay Masters, it was a series of experiences - an abusive father who disappeared early in life, an abused mother who was addicted to heroin, a group of siblings who had to help raise each other alone until they were placed in foster care. Foster care became even worse, moving from family to family - from one household that gave Jarvis a taste of actual love to one where he and other foster children were abused and kept only for the money they brought in to the cruel caretakers. He soon felt safer inside walls: a boys' home, a military academy for boys (where he was abused constantly as well), and eventually, prison.

He tells his story with heart and great detail. Once inside San Quentin as an adult, the story hastens through details of his conviction for a crime most believe he didn't commit (conspiracy to kill a guard), his conversion to Buddhism, and his experiences inside one of America's most notorious prisons. This is the only disappointment in an otherwise riveting book. I'd have loved to learn more about how he manages to sustain his practice inside a federal penitentiary, what death row is like for him, and how he is seeking to have his death sentence revoked. He touches on these in the final 50 pages or so, but after a riveting ride through the fine details of his life in the first 200+ pages, it felt as if the rest of the book was edited down, or he just felt the story he needed to tell was what led him to this point in his life, rather than these more current chapters in his adulthood.

I'm grateful for his story. As one who volunteers with incarcerated youth - teaching meditation - it helps me understand just how traumatic the path is that leads many young people into detention centers. Masters helps me better understand how one's value of their own life - and the lives of others - deteriorates over time, slowly eroding through harrowing experiences of violence and cruelty, and how - for many - crime is the only way they can see to survive, to escape, or in many cases, the only behavior they've been raised to understand. When you're raised in darkness, it's hard for a child to understand the promise of light.

Through it all, Jarvis Jay Masters hung on to the tattered pieces of his humanity and found a way to reconcile the road he journeyed that led to San Quentin with how he could find the most hopeful approach to emotional and spiritual freedom, even in solitary confinement.

This is a very good book, told with no punches pulled. I'd have loved for more about Jarvis' life as an adult, an inmate, and a Buddhist, but perhaps it's more compelling to know about the years that brought him where

he is today.

beth says

I've always thought of becoming a CASA volunteer... this book kicked my butt into motion... It's the story of Jarvis Masters, who, like many kids in the foster system, has so many tragic and disturbing experiences and so few people who come into their lives for to help them shine.

It's well written, quick to read, and will move the reader to thinking, wishing, or feeling for the children who deserve so much better than what life hands them.

The link to CASA is below in case anyone else is interested....

<http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c...>

eb says

I forget books almost as fast as I read them, but I THINK I'll remember this one forever, or at least details from it: Masters and his sibs, abandoned by their drug-addicted mother, eating food left out for them by a kindly neighbor; Masters cleaning a series of stinking jail cells until they shine; Masters strapped and scared, standing guard behind the door while his older brother sells drugs. This guy has been through it, and he's able to tell his horrifying story in a restrained, calm voice that never veers into self-pity or melodrama. Back cover copy always throws around the words "moving" and "powerful," but this one really is.

Kris says

I could not put this book down. It is the memoir of a death row inmate who becomes a Buddhist meditating in his cell every day. But we don't hear those stories until about 80% of the book has passed. Most of it is about his childhood as a foster kid struggling to survive. We see how he slowly hardens his heart as more difficult circumstances come his way. No doubt he - and all children who face such things - deserved much better than he got... And yet he did have love, compassion and wise folks in his life... Though not enough of them. He deserved a much better childhood.

I am so glad I read this book! Am supporting the anti-death penalty cause, as NH has a real shot at eliminating it... If so, it will become the 19th state to do so. The death penalty is simply barbaric.

Maureen says

This is one of the best autobiographies I have ever read. I picked this up at the Library randomly and thought it might be average and/or 'readable but predictable'. I can't even describe how good this book is. Most of the book is the first 19 years of Jarvis's life. He was a smart and talented kid who lived with unbelievable

neglect, briefly thrived under the care of loving foster parents, and then was pushed back once more into a corrupt foster care system that pushes many inner city youth ever closer towards neglect and eventually prison. It is a story of missed opportunities, misguided decisions, and wrong turns taken: by the authorities, by well-meaning family members; and by the author, who blames no one but himself. Jarvis's upbringing is so sad, especially the stories about his mother..a woman, who loved her children yet couldn't stop hurting herself and them with her heroin addiction. Reading this book allowed me to think of how many are in prison today because of the same experiences and to not be so judgemental or allow myself of stereotypical thoughts toward others who are incarcerated. Yes Jarvis committed armed robbery and did a lot of horrible things which brought him to prisin and nothing justifies it but this book sees how this all began as his 'options' in his cruel life. Jarvis is an amazing writer. I keep thinking about this book. When I was 80 percent done with the book I slowed down on my reading it because I didn't want it to end. This is a powerful unforgettable book!

Darlene says

Excellent writing with grit n courage. Jay tells his story with all the horror and abuse that explains the rage and twisted ways the system when it goes terribly wrong (not to mention his family) results in crime, imprisonment and damage to the person and all he (she) contacts. Fortunately some find their way thru and out of hell with mentors, a spiritual path and many caring supporters once the person can trust again and accept the hands reaching out and stop not caring and being w/o hope. Bless Jay and I hope some day spirit will decide his karma has been paid and he will be released. The part about when he got out for a few days to go to a Dr and saw the new world he had left behind was so very touching. And I thank Chris Grosso his friend for leading me to this book.

Lorena Murati says

A look into how a little boy grew into a young man who always wanted to do right. Sometimes, he got into doing some wrong things, at the wrong time, with the wrong people. And the cycle is close to impossible to break. Jarvis Masters, thank you for sharing your story.

Cathryn Wellner says

So many times while reading this book, I had to stop and let my heart heal.

"Innocent" is not the right word to describe Jarvis Jay Masters. He is a casualty of a family and a care system so broken it would be no wonder if he murdered someone. Assault, theft, yes. He is guilty.

But he played no part in the crime that put him on death row, and that's where the pain of his imprisonment becomes almost too much to bear. That he was getting his life in order, finding his core through Buddhism, makes his wrongful conviction all the more heinous.

Follow his life in a tattered family, his love for his druggie mother, his hope and ultimate betrayal in the foster-care system, and understand the many beautiful children who end up surviving as best they can. Masters drew an impenetrable barrier around himself, but there were chinks in his armor. And those chinks

gave him the spiritual strength to write this memoir.

MJ says

insightful - well written especially considering Jarvis Jay Masters spotty formal education. To personalize what is unfortunately the upbringing of many makes this story stick with you....was the bookclub pick for January. Interested in the discussion to follow.

Elyssa says

The author of this memoir has wonderful insight into his tragic upbringing and how it lead him to death row. Due to his commitment to Buddhism and meditation while behind bars, he is also forgiving and accepting. He is also a skilled writer and I am grateful that he has shared his story.
