

# The Birdman of Alcatraz

After numerous violent crimes, a man was doomed to a life in prison. For months he lived a mean, narrow, pitiful existence. His hate festered and anger continued to dominate his life.

Then one day a sign of hope and life came into the desolate environment of his cinder-block cell: a tiny, injured bird fluttered in. The helpless creature somehow touched a seed of compassion within the inmate, and he began to care for it, nursing it back to health. A capacity to nurture and love began to sprout and take root within him. Another bird came to rest at his window. He fed it and it returned. Soon he was talking about his birds with other inmates. He learned to control his temper and relate more agreeably with the guards – at first to gain favors for his birds but more genuinely as time went on.

More birds came and he gradually built up a small aviary in his cell. When some of his birds began to die, he learned everything he could about bird diseases. He experimented with treatments and found those that worked. He learned to write more effectively so he could communicate his passion for his birds. He published articles about his methods of caring for them, corresponded with a woman who was a fellow bird-lover, and even developed a relationship with her that resulted in her visiting the prison.

As his story unfolds it becomes clear that the more time he spent with his birds, the more human he became. While this is a tragic story, in a sense, it is also a story of great hope. The changes in the Birdman began when a visit from a small bird ignited a small spark of gratitude. This feeling opened the door for a sense of purpose to swell within his heart and displace the elements of darkness.

*(As told in "Willpower if Not Enough" by  
\_\_\_\_\_ Chamberlain)*

*Discovery of  
purpose is like a  
dose of sunshine  
that propels men  
and women  
forward to new  
heights of  
achievement.*

*When we are deeply  
involved in a  
positive purpose,  
our souls and even  
our bodies it seems,  
resonate with the  
power and energy  
of God.*

