

Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine

Volume 9
Issue 4 *Voices of the Incarcerated*

Article 3

October 2024

Them

John Adams

Susan Scheckel
SUNY

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/survive_thrive



Part of the [Medical Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

John Adams and Scheckel, Susan (2024) "Them," *Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine*: Vol. 9: Iss. 4, Article 3.

Available at: https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/survive_thrive/vol9/iss4/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Repository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine* by an authorized editor of The Repository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact tdsteman@stcloudstate.edu.

“Them”
by John Adams

“There is no crime, absolutely none, that cannot be condoned when it is committed by our side.”
– George Orwell

I first realized that I was the enemy of society when I was a homeless child sleeping on the roofs of steaming laundromats and eating the abundant varieties of food thrown into business dumpsters (this was before grocery stores defeated the homeless by installing trash compactors we couldn't access).

I was homeless by choice. I'd been offered the hospitality of thirty to forty foster homes, which I impolitely declined. Instead, I ran loose until the courts gave up and legally emancipated me at age sixteen.

It's possible that one of those foster homes I escaped from would have provided me with security, nurturing, or possibly even love, but I refused to gamble. I despised authority; I saw it as a disease that mutated ordinary people into monsters. Four decades later, rotting in a former slave state prison for a crime I didn't commit, my opinion about authority hasn't improved much.

Before I reached age fourteen, I had been assaulted three times by police officers; once so severely it took me more than a week in the hospital to recover. They hurt me not because of criminal acts, but ostensibly because I lacked respect. Yet the truth is that my irreverence didn't provoke them nearly as much as my disparity. I belonged to a different tribe. I was a powerless divergent unable to retaliate. The establishment and its police have always victimized people without status or property; they were the proverbial “us” and I was “them,” enemies from the dawn of mankind.

As individual people, those cops may have had empathy or children my age, but as a group they were evil, able to suppress the slightest compassion and unconsciously dehumanize outsiders.

When I grew up, I almost joined their number, not as a cop but maybe something even more antipathetic: a patriot. I enlisted in the military and surrendered to their indoctrination. They tried to instill the capability to murder innocents without conscience by convincing me that they and their children were my enemies; less than human because they weren't Americans. Much to my shame, I believed that for a while.

We invaded Iraq to “protect democracy,” to bomb their wicked establishment into submission. But a war between governments is a farce of the rich; the privileged always initiate wars, but it's the underprivileged youth that fight and die in them; it is the poor and their children who pay the direct price.

I never did get good at following rules, and it wasn't long before my military career ended. Once again, I was relegated to one of “them,” a disenfranchised human with no money or status, who lacked the hive worker skills necessary to acquire any.