

The Fearless Spectator

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ONE NIGHT early in November at Mooney's Irish Pub on upper Grant avenue I met Frank, a young naval lieutenant on the carrier Coral Sea who had just resigned his commission because he didn't like what he and the Navy were doing in Vietnam. Two other officers had done the same. Frank had, of course, to go back to Vietnam on his ship before his resignation could be processed.

I was curious to know how Frank would feel a few days out at sea, after his extraordinary decision. I asked him to write me. He did, and the following is what I received by delayed military post:



"This is the second day out from San Francisco. I am in the strangest situation I have ever experienced. Yesterday I was afraid to try and record any of my thoughts for I had never been in such a position.

"I spent several hours trying to find a literary parallel or some other vicarious experience to which I could relate and give me some idea of how I should act. At first the closest I could do was Dostoevsky's 'Underground Man.' I had read this in high school and it was difficult to remember the salient points. The primary difference was that he took great joy in his perversity towards society and separated himself from it, whereas I am not changed in my ability to perform work, but I am prevented from doing so for my beliefs.

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"I BECAME depressed because I couldn't find a copy of 'Notes from The Underground.' I was coming to the realization that I wasn't really an underground man. I related more easily to Pinocchio in the belly of Monstro. I have no control over my life nor am I even allowed to know when or where Monstro will be at any specific time. All I can do is wait for him to awaken and give me some indication of what will be my fate.

"I submitted my resignation on the 9th of November and today is the 14th. I was completely relieved of all duties and my security clearance was suspended. Since to perform my job I needed a clearance the suspension resulted in an inability to perform my job.

"A strange aspect to this, though, is that the places where I worked are also classified so now I am prevented from even going there after working hours. The only familiar aspect left of my previous life is my stateroom. There is a strangeness when I walk about. Everyone is wondering what will happen. It is difficult to talk to people when your action and reactions are the continual topic of conversation. The people that knew us before still are our friends but are a slight bit stunned by our statement. But I am moving away from them because of this experience. I am a passenger on a naval warship.

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"THE PURITY and inner strength is growing like a young tree. Each day I surprise myself by thinking that I actually stated what I believed in front of so many people. I know that I have begun to be an individual and each day is something entirely different from the last. Mentally each step I take is to self-realization and it is good. I am surprised at the feeling of knowing that I am doing the right thing for myself — for no longer do I question my existence and try to justify that existence.

"I feel like an eagle and every time I unfurl my wings I soar higher than the last. Possibly someday I will be wiser and capable of understanding my actions much better but now it just feels good.

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"SINCE I saw you I have settled down. I am no longer anxious for immediate action, just content to do what is wanted from me. I feel very calm inside — very silent while externally I am riding the crest of a wave of emotion. Inside I have a feeling of growing and cleanness, the sense of grace that is like a water drop the moment before it descends from the leaf.

"I realize now that I have just taken the first step towards really being honest with myself. I have the rest of my life to live it. It feels very good. Best, Frank Phillips."