

Synopsis of The Shawshank Redemption from The Greatest Films Website
<http://www.filmsite.org>

Tim Dirks

The Shawshank Redemption (1994) is an impressive, engrossing piece of film-making from director/screenwriter Frank Darabont who adapted horror master Stephen King's 1982 novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* (first published in *Different Seasons*) for his first feature film. The inspirational, life-affirming and uplifting, old-fashioned style Hollywood product (resembling *The Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962) and *Cool Hand Luke* (1967)) is a combination prison/dramatic film and character study. The popular film is abetted by the golden cinematography of Roger Deakins, a touching score by Thomas Newman, and a third imposing character - Maine's oppressive Shawshank State Prison (actually the transformed, condemned Mansfield Ohio Correctional Institution or State Reformatory).

Posters for the film illustrate the liberating, redemptive power of hope and the religious themes of freedom and resurrection, with the words: "Fear can hold you prisoner, Hope can set you free." Darabont's film is a patiently-told, allegorical tale (unfolding like a long-played, sometimes painstaking, persistent chess game) of friendship, patience, hope, survival, emancipation, and ultimate redemption and salvation by the time of the film's finale.

It was nominated for seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actor (Morgan Freeman), Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Editing, Best Original Score, and Best Sound - but it failed to win a single Oscar. And the film's director failed to receive a nomination for himself! In the same year as *Forrest Gump*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Speed*, they received all of the attention. Only through positive word-of-mouth (following cable TV and broadcast airings, and then video releases) did the film do well - although its original reception at the box-office was lukewarm. The film was the precursor for another inspirational and popular film (and a similar adaptation of a Stephen King story by writer/director Frank Darabont) - *The Green Mile* (1999).

In the prologue before the film begins and pre-title credits play, a scratchy car radio (on the soundtrack) plays the romantic song: "If I Didn't Care," performed by the Inkspots:

*If I didn't care, more than words can say,
If I didn't care, would I feel this way,
If this isn't love, then why do I thrill
And what makes my head go round and round
While my heart stands still...*

To economically compress events during the credits sequence, a scene outside a cabin is intercut with a courtroom trial scene. [The year is 1946.] A Plymouth is parked outside a cabin [belonging to a golf pro engaged in an affair with an adulterous wife]. During a dark, quiet night in the wooded area near the cabin, the driver (the woman's husband) reaches for his oily, rag-wrapped gun in the glove compartment where bullets are also concealed. To fortify himself, he takes a swig of Rosewood bourbon from a glass bottle held in his lap. In the courtroom, the driver is identified as Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins). He is interrogated by the D.A. (Jeffrey DeMunn) and charged with murder: "Mr. Dufresne, describe the confrontation you had with your wife the night that she was murdered." The well-dressed, mild-mannered defendant calmly speaks: "It was very bitter. She said she was glad I knew, that she hated all the sneaking around. She said she wanted a divorce in Reno...I told her I would not grant one." The D.A. rephrases Andy's response with his actual words:

'I'll see you in Hell before I see you in Reno.' Those were the words you used, Mr. Dufresne, according to the testimony of your neighbors.

Obviously, Andy's wife (Renee Blaine) was having an affair with Glenn Quentin (Scott Mann), the golf pro at the Snowdon Hills Country Club. According to Andy, he felt confused and drunk, loaded his gun with bullets and intended to commit the crime, but then after quickly "sobering up," he had second thoughts. On his way home, according to his testimony, he discarded his gun: "...I stopped and I threw my gun into the Royal River."

The next morning, the bullet-riddled bodies of Andy's wife and her lover - in bed - were discovered. Andy's "very convenient" (acc. to the DA) testimony and unbelievable profession of innocence, coupled with the fact that "the police dragged that river for three days and nary a gun was found," seem rather suspicious to the D.A. The water washed away all evidence of his alleged innocence.

The D.A.'s closing summary to the jury, illustrated with a brief flashback-montage of the adulterous couple's passionate lovemaking (and obvious 'sin'), also points to Andy's undeniable guilt [it looks quite likely that Andy is guilty of the crime, although he has trouble remembering]:

We have the accused at the scene of the crime. We have footprints, tire tracks. We have bullets strewn on the ground which bear his fingerprints. A broken bourbon bottle, likewise with fingerprints. And most of all, we have a beautiful young woman and her lover lying dead in each other's arms. They had sinned. But was their crime so great as to merit a death sentence?...A revolver holds six bullets, not eight. I submit that this was not a hot-blooded crime of passion. That, at least, could be understood if not condoned. No - this was revenge of a much more brutal and cold blooded nature. Consider this. Four bullets per victim. Not six shots fired but eight. That means that he fired the gun empty and then stopped to reload so that he could shoot each of them again. An extra bullet per lover, right in the head.

The "icy and remorseless" man is sentenced by the Maine judge (John Horton) to "serve two life sentences back to back - one for each of your victims." The gavel marking the sentence pounds the screen to black.

The next scene, another scene of judgment, commences with noisy, iron bars sliding open, and another door opening into a room where five men sit at a table. An unexpected scene, this is the parole hearings room of maximum-security Shawshank Prison, where a black prisoner/lifer (#30265) named Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding (Morgan Freeman) - the real hero of the story, after serving twenty years of his sentence, receives his cursory annual review [in the year 1947]. He religiously vows his rehabilitation has been accomplished - and swears - "that's the God's honest truth":

Reviewer: You feel you've been rehabilitated?

Red: Oh, yes sir. Absolutely, sir. Yeah, I've learned my lesson. I can honestly say that I'm a changed man. I'm no longer a danger to society. That's the God's honest truth.

A mechanical stamp marks "REJECTED" in red ink on his parole records. [The picture in his parole document is that of Morgan Freeman's own son, Alfonso.] In the prison's exercise yard following the "same ol' s--t" review, Red begins his ubiquitous voice-over narration (of his recollections) - a world-weary, resonant voice-over that continues for the remainder of the film. He is the prison's respected retriever - who sneakily passes contraband from hand to hand:

There must be a con like me in every prison in America. I'm the guy who can get it for you. Cigarettes, a bag of reefer if that's your thing, a bottle of brandy to celebrate your kid's high

school graduation, damn near anything within reason. Yes sir, I'm a regular Sears and Roebuck.

Prison sirens blast as a ritualistic prison event is heralded - the arrival of fresh, new prisoners (termed "fresh fish") in a drab-gray school bus. Red recalls back: "So when Andy Dufresne came to me in 1949 and asked me to smuggle Rita Hayworth into the prison for him, I told him - 'No problem.'" A well-orchestrated, helicopter/aerial shot, one of the most acclaimed shots in the film, moves up from the arriving bus, ascends the main tower of the gothic prison, and peers down into the prison courtyard where ant-like prisoners scurry toward the fenced-in arrival area to gawk, size up, and jeer the new arrivals during their disembarkment:

Andy came to Shawshank Prison in early 1947 for murdering his wife and the fella she was bangin'. On the outside, he'd been vice-president of a large Portland bank. Good work for a man as young as he was.

Andy, dressed conspicuously in his banker's suit, is seated in the back of the bus. As the bus turns the corner into the prison, there are five blue-uniformed guards waiting there - the chief captain of the guard, Byron Hadley (Clancy Brown) motions the bus into position. Chained together, the prisoners exit from the bus, walk in single-file, and are lined up for inspection. Andy appears tormented and terrified as he nervously walks into his new surroundings while surrounded by shouting, taunting spectators who shake the fence. The old-timer inmates bet "smokes" on the new 'horses' and who will break first - Floyd (Brian Libby) bets on "that little sack of s--t...eighth from the front, he'll be first." Heywood (Bill Sadler) chooses "that chubby fat-ass there, the fifth one from the front." Red votes for the fragile-looking Andy ("that tall drink of water with a silver spoon up his ass" - a veiled reference to Andy's upcoming rape) at the end of the line:

I must admit, I didn't think much of Andy first time I laid eyes on him. Looked like a stiff breeze would blow him over. That was my first impression of the man.

Andy glances up at the imposing walls above him - walls that will close in on his life during two consecutive life sentences - as he is marched in. In an admitting area, the prisoners meet Mr. Samuel Norton (Bob Gunton), the self-righteous, Bible-carrying Warden:

You are convicted felons. That's why they sent you to me. Rule Number One: No blasphemy. I'll not have the Lord's name taken in vain in my prison. The other rules you'll figure out as you go along.

Hadley cusses right into the face of a disrespectful prisoner who has asked: "When do we eat?" The guard inhumanely jabs his baton into the gut of the man ("you maggot-dick motherf--ker!"). The Warden finishes his short, pompous introduction - with another reference to anal rape!:

I believe in two things - discipline and the Bible. Here you'll receive both. Put your trust in the Lord. Your ass belongs to me. Welcome to Shawshank.

To remove all vestiges of their identity (or contamination) from the outer world, the new cons are made to undress, then hosed down in a steel cage with high pressure water spray, and deloused with scoops of white delousing powder. As part of their degrading processing, they are given prison clothes and a Bible, and marched exposed and naked to their individual cells, their new homes in the cellblock - a three-tiered structure of concrete and steel.

The first night's the toughest, no doubt about it. They march you in naked as the day you were born, skin burning and half blind from that delousing s--t they throw on you, and when they put you in that cell, when those bars slam home, that's when you know it's for real. Old life blown away in the blink of an eye. Nothing left but all the time in the world to think about it. Most new

fish come close to madness the first night. Somebody always breaks down crying. Happens every time. The only question is, who's it gonna be? It's as good a thing to bet on as any, I guess. I had my money on Andy Dufresne. I remember my first night. Seems like a long time ago.

As part of their entertaining betting game, the inmates taunt and 'bait' the "fishees" or first-timers - and "they don't quit till they reel someone in." The one nicknamed 'Fat-Ass' (Frank Medrano) is mercilessly teased by a leering Heywood: "This place ain't so bad. Tell ya what. I'll introduce ya around. Make you feel right at home. I know a couple of big ol' bull queers that'd just *love* to make your acquaintance, especially that big white mushy butt of yours." When the squeamish, hyperventilating victim wails and pleads despairingly: "Oh God! I don't belong here! I wanna go home," the prisoners chant: "Fresh fish!" The oppressed 'Fat-Ass' blubbers his unheard complaints to Hadley and is beaten with an unceasing rain of baton blows and kicked in the face until he lies still on the cold floor. The captain of the guard commands his lackeys: "Call the trustees. Take that tub of s--t down to the infirmary." Red loses his cigarette bet to Heywood:

His first night in the joint, Andy Dufresne cost me two packs of cigarettes. He never made a sound.

The next morning after a head-count in front of their individual cells in the cellblock, the prisoners are marched to the mess hall for breakfast. As Andy moves through the room, one of the 'bull queer' inmates named Bogs Diamond (Mark Rolston) gives him a salacious glance. As he begins eating a scoop of oatmeal on his metal tray, Andy picks out a squirming white maggot with his fingers. A neighboring, elderly inmate Brooks Hatlen (James Whitmore) inquires: "Are-are you going to eat that?" With everyone expecting that Brooks will eat the wiggling creature, he instead offers the "nice and ripe" maggot to a baby crow (named Jake) nestled in the inside pocket of his droopy blue sweater - he is its caretaker (in its prison cage) until it matures and flies away to freedom: "Fell out of his nest over by the plate shop. I'm gonna look after him until he's big enough to fly." [Brooks with his pet crow brings to mind the film: *The Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962).]

Heywood gleefully gloats about winning the bet and collects cigarettes as payment from everyone: "I want 'em all lined up just like a pretty little chorus line." But his victory is won with a deadly toll and price for 'Fat-Ass' - "Dead. Hadley busted his head up pretty good. Doc had already gone home for the night. Poor bastard laid there till this morning. By then, hell, there was nothing we could do." In the communal shower room, Bogs - one of the prison's notorious Sisters (the prison's resident rapists), expresses a liking for Andy and asks him a leading question:

Hey, anybody come at you yet? Anybody get to you yet? Hey, we all need friends in here. I could be a friend to you. (Andy breaks away without responding) Hey, hard to get. I like that.

Andy's assigned job is to work in the prison laundry room, where he "kept pretty much to himself at first. I guess he had a lot on his mind, trying to adapt to life on the inside. It wasn't until a month went by that he finally opened his mouth to say more than two words to somebody." While Red plays catch in the prison yard, Andy (joking that he's "the wife-killing banker") ambles over to break the month-long silence:

Red: Why'd you do it?

Andy: I didn't, since you ask.

Red: (chuckling) You're gonna fit right in. Everybody in (here) is innocent. Didn't you know that?...Rumor has it you're a real cold fish. You think your s--t smells sweeter than most. Is that right?

Andy: What do you think?

Red: I'll tell ya the truth. I haven't made up my mind.

Having learned that Red "knows how to get things," Andy officially meets Red when he makes a simple request for a rock-hammer - to resume his geologic "rock-hound" hobby from his "old life," although Red questions whether the tool will be used instead for self-protection against Bogs or for tunneling out of the prison:

Red: I'm known to locate certain things from time to time.

Andy: I wonder if you might get me a rock-hammer.

Red: ...What is it and why?

Andy: What do you care?

Red: What if it was a toothbrush? I wouldn't ask questions. I'd just quote a price. But then, a toothbrush is a non-lethal object, isn't it?

Andy: Fair enough. A rock-hammer is about six or seven inches long. Looks like a miniature pick-axe.

Red: Pick-axe?

Andy: For rocks.

Red: Rocks. (Andy flips him a sample rock) Quartz?

Andy: (squatting down and inspecting the ground) Quartz. Here's some mica, shale, limestone.

Red: So?

Andy: So I'm a rock-hound. At least I was, in my old life. I'd like to be again, on a limited basis.

Red: Or maybe you'd like to sink your toy into somebody's skull.

Andy: No, sir. I have no enemies here.

Red: No? Wait a while. Word gets around. The Sisters have taken quite a likin' to you, especially Bogs. (Bogs watches Andy from afar)

Andy: I don't suppose it would help any if I explained to them I'm not homosexual.

Red: Neither are they. You have to be human first. They don't qualify. Bull queers take by force. That's all they want or understand. If I were you, I'd grow eyes in the back of my head.

Andy: Thanks for the advice.

Red: That's free. You understand my concern.

Andy: Well, if there's any trouble, I won't use the rock-hammer. OK?

Red: Then I guess you wanna escape. Tunnel under the wall, maybe? (Andy laughs) Did I miss something here? What's funny?

Andy: You'll understand when you see the rock-hammer.

They decide on a price of \$10 (which includes Red's normal mark-up percentage of twenty percent) for the "specialty item," and Andy assures Red that if he is caught with it during a surprise inspection, he won't mention his procurer's name. Red explains the rules of his business ("You mention my name, we'll never do business again, not for shoelaces or a stick of gum") and the origin of his nickname 'Red': "Maybe it's because I'm Irish." [This is a deliberate gag - delivered to the film audience! After African-American Morgan Freeman was cast to play the role of a white Irishman, this line was written to 'explain' Red's origins.] As Andy strolls away, Red remarks on his carefree, shielded attitude (with an "invisible coat" or Christ-like halo), while admitting his own growing affection for Andy:

I could see why some of the boys took him for snobby. He had a quiet way about him, a walk and a talk that just wasn't normal around here. He strolled, like a man in a park without a care or a worry in the world. Like he had on an invisible coat that would shield him from this place. Yeah, I think it would be fair to say I liked Andy from the start.

Andy's request is smuggled into the prison through a load of laundry at the loading dock, passed to Red in his new stack of clean sheets and blankets, and then distributed to Andy through Brooks, the prison librarian delivering books to each cell. Red is convinced that the rock-hammer would be useless in tunneling out: "It would take a man about six hundred years to tunnel under the wall with one of these." In the prison laundry room during a typical day, Andy is summoned to fetch some hexlite from the stock area. There in the stockroom, he is assaulted by Bogs Diamond and two other predatory men (the Sisters) who taunt him and beat him senseless: "That's it. You fight. It's better that way." According to Red, "prison is no fairy-tale world" and the vulnerable

newcomer is repeatedly subjugated and victimized (and gang-raped?) during his first two years - dramatized in a short montage:

Things went on like that for a while. Prison life consists of routine, and then more routine. Every so often, Andy would show up with fresh bruises. The Sisters kept at him. Sometimes he was able to fight 'em off, sometimes not. And that's how it went for Andy. That was his routine.

Then in the spring of 1949, after two years of imprisonment (the worst in Red's memory for Andy due to continual rapes from the Sisters), Red and Andy are selected from volunteers to begin a week's work ("outdoor detail") to resurface the roof of the license-plate factory. Red orchestrates, through his black market dealings in packs of cigarettes, their selection. In the fresh air of the outdoors - without walls, fences, or bars - while the cons pour and spread bubbling tar on the roof, Captain Hadley complains bitterly about exorbitant government inheritance taxes that he will owe after receiving money from his rich brother's estate. Out of a million bucks, Hadley will only see \$35,000 and most of that will be taxed: "Uncle Sam, he puts his hand in your shirt and squeezes your tit till it's purple."

After overhearing the bitching, Andy boldly saunters over to the Captain and inquires: "Mr. Hadley, do you trust your wife?" Furious with his audacity, Hadley grabs Andy and jerks him toward the edge of the roof to throw him off, dangling him there precariously, with Andy's arms outstretched in a Christ-like pose. The ex-banker proposes a solution that would require some legal paperwork - that he could complete, of course:

Because if you do trust her, there's no reason you can't keep that thirty-five thousand...If you want to keep all that money, give it to your wife. The IRS allows a one-time only gift to your spouse for up to sixty thousand dollars...tax-free...you do need someone to set up the tax-free gift for ya, and it'll cost ya, a lawyer for example...I suppose I could set it up for ya. That would save you some money. You get the forms, I'll prepare them for ya, nearly free of charge.

For his part of the bargain in the uplifting scene [often interpreted as a Biblical Last Supper with Jesus and his dozen disciples], Andy victoriously requests "three beers apiece for each of my co-workers...I think a man workin' outdoors feels more like a man if he can have a bottle of suds. That's only my opinion." The walls dissolve for the men as they sit in the sun and drink cold bottles of beer from iced buckets - feeling like free men again, and appreciating one of the simple pleasures of life - for a short while. Andy doesn't partake of the alcohol, but sits on the side with a beatific smile on his face:

And that's how it came to pass, that on the second-to-last day of the job, the convict crew that tarred the plate factory roof in the spring of '49 wound up sitting in a row at ten o'clock in the morning, drinking icy cold Bohemia-style beer, courtesy of the hardest screw that ever walked a turn at Shawshank State Prison...The colossal prick even managed to sound magnanimous. We sat and drank with the sun on our shoulders and felt like free men. Hell, we could have been tarring the roof of one of our own houses. We were the Lords of all Creation. As for Andy, he spent that break hunkered in the shade, a strange little smile on his face, watching us drink his beer...You could argue he'd done it to curry favor with the guards, or maybe make a few friends among us cons. Me? I think he did it just to feel normal again, if only for a short while.

While playing checkers with his 'friend,' Andy asks Red to help acquire alabaster and soapstone rocks from outside the prison yard to be carved into chess pieces: "The years I got. What I don't have are the rocks." In his bunk later that night, Andy carves a chessman for his new chess set - the piece is a noble-looking knight. [Andy relishes chess and considers it a "civilized, strategic" game but Red hates it.] With one end of his rock-hammer, he carefully scratches his name into the concrete wall, adding his mark to the other names there. The wall crumbles as the first letter of his name, "A", is imprinted there. [An important plot point is missing from this sequence in the film - shown later.]

In an abrupt scene change, the film *Gilda (1946)* is being projected - within a bright shaft of light - for the entranced prisoners in the prison's auditorium/chapel, who are transported out of their prison surroundings into the world of cinema. The film clip begins when casino owner Ballin Mundson (George Macready) shows off his singing "canary" - his new 'caged' wife named Gilda (Rita Hayworth) to his right-hand man Johnny Farrell (Glenn Ford). One of Red's earlier flashbacks/recollections was that Andy had asked for "Rita Hayworth" (a wall poster of the pin-up Hollywood star) in 1949. [The choice of this film seems entirely appropriate, given that the film was based on Stephen King's 1982 novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*.] In an anxious tone during the screening, Andy makes his request: "Can you get her?" Distracted by Rita flinging back her red mane of hair ("when she does that s--t with her hair"), Red exclaims, smiling: "God, I love it." Soon after, he replies that he can work his 'magic': "It would take a few weeks...I don't have her stuffed down the front of my pants right now, I'm sorry to say. But I'll get her. Relax."

On his way out of the auditorium, Andy is again ambushed by the Sisters and dragged into the projectionist's booth [a symbolic place to confront his evil enemies]. The film's dialogue, faintly heard in the background, is cleverly juxtaposed with Bogs' leering taunts toward Andy, who fights back valiantly and breaks Rooster's (Gary Lee Davis) nose with a heavy 35mm film reel:

(Gilda) What are you supposed to say to the bride?

Bogs: (To Andy) Ain't you gonna scream?

(Gilda) Good luck...

Andy: Let's get this over with.

(Gilda) My husband tells me you're a great believer...

Then, Andy is threatened with a sharp steel spike in his ear if he doesn't perform oral sex for them. Bogs demands: "I'm gonna open my fly and you're gonna swallow what I give you to swallow." Using his wits to save his dignity, Andy counters with a description of a strong bite reflex that would result from a sudden, serious brain injury: "Anything you put in my mouth you're gonna lose." Instead of being sexually brutalized - an apparent victory over them, "they did...beat him within an inch of his life. Andy spent a month in the infirmary. Bogs spent a week in the hole." When Bogs returns to his cell after a week in solitary confinement and suddenly flips his light on, Captain Hadley is there to protect his legal advisor - and to pummel the defenseless predator and turn him into a crippled vegetable: "Two things never happened again after that. The Sisters never laid a finger on Andy again. And Bogs never walked again..."

As a "nice welcome back" for Andy when he returns from the infirmary, the cons gather chesspiece-sized rocks for their now-respected hero: "By the week Andy was due back, we had enough rocks saved up to keep him busy till Rapture. Also got a big shipment in that week. Cigarettes, chewing gum, sippin' whiskey, playing cards with naked ladies on 'em, you name it, and, of course, the most important item..." - wrapped in a long, circular cardboard tube - "Rita Hayworth herself." Andy finds the wall-sized poster/pin-up of the 1940s love goddess in the tube on his bed with a small note: "No charge. Welcome back."

During a surprise inspection (termed "tossin' cells") of Andy's room by the imperious Warden - with his Rita Hayworth poster exhibited on one wall, Andy's cell is torn upside down in a futile search for contraband - the only thing slightly illegal is his rock carvings. The hypocritical Warden takes Andy's Bible out of his hand and expresses support for the prisoner's devotion to Scripture. They both exchange their favorite Biblical passages, in a game of one-ups-manship. Andy's favorite passage in the good book is slyly shared with the 'master' Warden:

Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh. (Mark 13:35)

The Warden prefers to be Andy's 'light' and savior:

I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John 8:12)

The Warden, after noticing that Andy is "good with numbers" (because he identifies the Warden's scriptural selection), strolls over to the poster and mildly disapproves "...but I suppose exceptions can be made." The Warden fails to notice that the word 'MOTHER' is scratched above the poster - a hint that the wall can be weakened. As he walks off, he almost forgets to return Andy's Bible. At the last moment, he remembers, and hands it back with a *extremely* meaningful, smugly-delivered phrase: "Salvation lies within." [This entire scene, in particular, contains details which - only in retrospect - are extremely significant and hold many layers of meaning.]

Shortly thereafter, Andy (#37937) is summoned to the office of the Warden, where his wife's framed, needle-point sampler is prominently displayed on the wall, reading: "His Judgement Cometh and that Right Soon..." To better use his education (but more to exploit Andy's accounting skills), Andy is transferred from the laundry area and "reassigned" to Brooks - the prison's librarian for over 37 years. The broken-down prison library is stocked with cast-off reading material: "National Geographics, Reader's Digest Condensed Books, Louis L'Amours, Look Magazine, Erle Stanley Gardners." Another guard named Dekins (Brian Delate) requests financial help - "settin' up some kinda trust fund for my kids' educations." Later, Brooks regales the other cons with Andy's re-birth as a respected financial planner who has regained some of his former status in life:

All Andy needed was a suit and a tie and a little jiggly hula gal on his desk, he would've been Mister Dufresne, if you please.

Now as the library's curator, Andy has unrealistic hopes about expanding the library's book acquisitions when he considers asking the Warden for funds. Norton is reluctant to "spend the taxpayer's hard-earned when it comes to prisons." Usually, additional prison funding is only approved for "more walls, more bars, more guards." Although not directly supportive, the Warden promises to mail persistent Andy's weekly letters to the State Senate. Now valuable as a financial accountant, he is allowed to set up an office in the library where he "did tax returns for half the guards at Shawshank. Year after that, he did them all, including the warden's. The year after that, they rescheduled the start of the intramural season to coincide with tax season. The guards on the opposing teams all remembered to bring their W-2's." At tax time during the month of April, Andy uses Red as an assistant tax preparer.

Then one day in the year 1954, Brooks goes beserk when his parole comes through - he holds a knife at Heywood's throat so he'll be judged crazy and not be released into the frightening real world: "It's what they've done. I got-I got no choice...It's the only, it's the only way they'd let me stay."

He's just institutionalized...The man's been in here fifty years, Heywood, fifty years. This is all he knows. In here, he's an important man, he's an educated man. Outside he's nothin' - just a used-up con with arthritis in both hands. Probably couldn't get a library card if he tried...these walls are funny. First you hate 'em, then you get used to 'em. Enough time passes, it gets so you depend on 'em. That's 'institutionalized'...They send you here for life and that's exactly what they take, the part that counts anyway.

Just before he departs the prison the next dawn, Brooks also releases his full-grown pet crow/raven Jake at the library window: "I can't take care of you no more, Jake. You go on now. You're free." The old con steps cautiously through the main gate of Shawshank, clutches the bar on the bus seat in front of him as he is transported to Portland where it is even terrifying to cross the street. The outside world presents itself as a new 'prison':

(voice-over) *Dear Fellas: I can't believe how fast things move on the outside. I saw an automobile once when I was a kid but now they're everywhere. The world went and got itself in a big damn hurry.*

A montage follows Brooks through his new life on the outside. He is placed in a half-way flop house called the Brewer, and is employed as a grocery-bagger at the Foodway Market. Lonely, afraid, melancholy, and disoriented in the outside world, he has difficulty sleeping. He worries about the fate of Jake as he feeds pigeons in the park. He even contemplates shooting the Foodway manager (to force a return to Shawshank), but he's even too old for that. As he packs his few belongings into a bag, he narrates, in voiceover, that he plans on leaving: "I don't like it here. I'm tired of being afraid all the time. I've decided not to stay." He climbs up onto a chair and then onto a table and carves a message into the wall with his pocketknife: "BROOKS WAS HERE." And then he kicks out the table from under his weight and hangs himself - his feet dangling. The end of Brooks' 'Dear Fellas' note is read outloud by Andy in the prison yard following his death. [Everything about Brooks' departure from Shawshank will later be mirrored in Red's own exit.]

To Andy's amazement after six years of request letters, boxes of books ("a charitable donation") are delivered to the Supervisor's office accompanied by a check for two hundred dollars from the State Comptroller's Office. One of the guards, Wiley (Don McManus) grins and congratulates him: "Good for you, Andy." When the guards leave momentarily, Andy savors his victory - he leafs through a stack of used record albums in a wooden crate and finds a boxed set of Mozart's opera "The Marriage of Figaro" - *Le Nozze de Figaro*. [Symbolically, *The Marriage of Figaro* was about a valet/servant Figaro who outwitted his master Count Almaviva.] In another redemptive act similar to the one on the rooftop, he places the record *Duetto: Sull'Aria* on a phonograph player in the office, locks the doors and broadcasts the opera on the P.A. system throughout the entire prison to share a moment of freedom and make the prison walls dissolve.

Guards in a bunkhouse and prisoners on the open yard are stunned and hypnotized in place by the music as it floats from the loudspeakers over them and breaks the routine of prison life. The music transcends the day-to-day numbness - Andy reclines back in his chair, with his arms on the back of his head and a sublime smile on his face (resembling the look on his face on the tarred roof earlier), ecstatically experiencing the gift of music to the other inmates, while dreaming of freedom:

I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singin' about. Truth is, I don't want to know. Some things are best left unsaid. I like to think they were singin' about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words and makes your heart ache because of it. I tell you, those voices soared, higher and farther than anybody in a gray place dares to dream. It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away. And for the briefest of moments, every last man at Shawshank felt free.

The Warden is incensed ("pissed...off") by Andy's disobedience - Andy's response is to *increase* the volume rather than turning it off. The Warden punishes Andy with "two weeks in the hole for that little stunt." Andy is unphased by the harsh consequences since Mozart's music freed his soul, but Red is fearful of Andy (now nicknamed "Maestro") becoming too hopeful:

Andy: I had Mr. Mozart to keep me company...(He points and taps his head) It was in here. (And he gestures over his heart) And in here. That's the beauty of music. They can't get that from you. Haven't you ever felt that way about music?...Here's where it makes the most sense. You need it so we don't forget...that there are places in the world that aren't made out of stone, that there's, there's somethin' inside that they can't get to, that they can't touch. It's yours.

Red: What are you talkin' about?

Andy: Hope.

Red: Hope? Let me tell you something, my friend. Hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a

*man insane. It's got no use on the inside. You'd better get used to that idea.
Andy: Like Brooks did?*

In 1957, Red is brought before the parole board for his annual review after thirty years as an inmate serving a life sentence - and again is rejected - in a scene that is a virtual re-run of a previous one. A red stamp marks his file REJECTED. Andy has also served ten years of his own sentence: "You wonder where it went. I wonder where ten years went." Andy presents Red with a "parole-rejection present" - a harmonica - something Red played as a younger man but then lost interest for in prison. To mark the passage of time through various poster-girls, Andy also receives "a new girl" for his ten-year anniversary - Marilyn Monroe astride a subway grating with her dress blowing up - from [The Seven Year Itch \(1955\)](#). In the dark anonymity of his cell at lights out, Red holds the harmonica briefly to his mouth and only dares to blow into it once - he reacts by gripping it inside his clenched hand, frightened by the thought of music that frees the soul.

When a work crew knocks through a wall during the library expansion and creates a huge gaping hole through which light shines [a significant foreshadowing of a future escape], Red narrates how the State Appropriations Committee voted an annual payment of five hundred dollars to Andy on account of his persistent letter-writing campaign to improve prison life:

And you'd be amazed how far Andy could stretch it. He made deals with book clubs, charity groups. He bought remaindered books by the pound.

The convicts sort through the books for the new, 'resurrected' library to be named in Brooks' honor: Brooks Hatlen Memorial Library. Heywood mispronounces: "The Count of Monte Crisco...by Alexandree Dumb-Ass" - a book that Andy reminds is "about a prison break." [The parallels between the plot of the film and the Dumas novel are many: the literary classic was about a wrongly-accused and falsely-imprisoned Frenchman who daringly escaped from prison through an escape tunnel, then acquired 'treasure' learned about in prison, and plotted revenge on those who wronged him.]

By 1964, "Andy had transformed a storage room smelling of rat turds and turpentine into the best prison library in New England, complete with a fine selection of Hank Williams" - Heywood's favorite singer. Due to Andy's efforts in improving the prison and freeing the minds of the inmates, Warden Norton sanctimoniously takes all the credit for his "famous Inside-Out program" with the media, in a public speech delivered in front of the walls of the prison:

...no free ride, but rather a genuine, progressive advance in corrections and rehabilitation. Our inmates, properly supervised, will be put to work outside these walls performing all manner of public service. These men can learn the value of an honest day's labor while providing a valuable service to the community - and at a bare minimum of expense to Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Taxpayer!

The "valuable community service" program is a scam for the devious Warden - the real criminal - who skims money off the top from different building projects, and accepts bribes and kickbacks for *not* using his "slave labor" to "underbid any contractor in town." Andy becomes a valuable asset as he keeps the laundered, financial records for the rich, power-broking Warden: "And behind every shady deal, behind every dollar earned, there was Andy, keeping the books." Manila envelopes with money are stashed in the Warden's wall-safe - hidden behind the religious slogan sewn in the needle-point sampler with the apt saying: "His Judgement Cometh and that Right Soon." [Both Andy and the Warden conceal things behind a covering or picture!] Andy's function is to camouflage the "river" of corrupt, ill-gotten money:

What you hear isn't half of it. He's got scams you haven't even dreamed of. Kickbacks on his kickbacks. There's a river of dirty money running through this place...I channel it, filter it,

funnel it - Stocks, securities, tax-free municipals - I send that money out into the real world and when it comes back...by the time Norton retires, I will have made him a millionaire.

To avoid the inevitable paper trail that would lead the FBI and IRS to Andy or the Warden, the smart ex-banker/convict creates a guilty and "silent, silent partner" named Randall Stephens - a phantom person only on paper:

He's a phantom, an apparition, second cousin to Harvey the rabbit. [Another reference to a classic film: Harvey (1950).] I conjured him out of thin air. He doesn't exist, except on paper...Mr. Stephens has a birth certificate, driver's license, social security number...The funny thing is, on the outside, I was an honest man, straight as an arrow. I had to come to prison to be a crook.

When the sirens sound and a new busload of prisoners are brought in with a new generation of modern-day prisoners (in a scene reminiscent of Andy's arrival), one of them is black side-burned Tommy Williams (Gil Bellows) who "came to Shawshank in 1965 on a two-year stretch for B and E. That's breakin' and enterin' to you. Cops caught him sneakin' TV sets out the back door of a JC Penney. Young punk, Mr. Rock 'n' Roll. Cocky as hell." At a meal, Andy - now one of the paternal old-timers - suggests that Tommy find "a new profession" since his thieving career hasn't been very successful. With a "young wife and new baby girl," Tommy seeks Andy for help in fulfilling "a high school equivalency" education. Andy, who doesn't "waste time on losers," rejects Tommy's call for rehabilitative help until he promises "one-hundred percent - nothing half-assed." To pass the "slow-time" of the prison, Andy adopts Tommy as his "new project" or disciple. As his mentor, he teaches him the alphabet to restore his hopes and dreams through education - it was "a thrill to help a youngster crawl off the s--theap...In prison, a man'll do most anything to keep his mind occupied."

In a slow pan around Andy's cell, marking the passage of almost twenty years of incarceration, all of the rock chess pieces on his chessboard are almost entirely carved, and a new, colorful poster-girl ("fantasy girlies") adorns the wall - Raquel Welch as a fur-bikini'd cavewoman from the film *One Million Years, B.C. (1966)*.

But Tommy has a short fuse when he fears he has failed the equivalency exam in the same year. During a conversation with Red in which he is told the reasons for Andy's imprisonment, Tommy divulges that in Thomaston prison four years earlier, a high-strung, mad cellmate named Elmo Blatch (Bill Bolender) admitted murdering a golf pro and his lover:

Big twitchy f--ker. Kind of roomie you pray you don't get. You know what I'm sayin'? 6 to 12 for armed burglary. Said he pulled hundreds of jobs...So one night like a joke, I say to him, I say, 'Yeah, Elmo? Who'd you kill?' So he says: 'I got me this job one time busin' tables at a country club. So I could case all these big rich pricks that come in. So I pick out this guy, go in one night and do his place. He wakes up and gives me s--t. So I killed him. Him and this tasty bitch he was with. (He laughs insanely.) That's the best part. She's f--kin' this prick, see, this golf pro, but she's married to some other guy! Some hotshot banker. And he's the one they pinned it on.

The Warden cannot believe this "most amazing story" when told - he believes that Williams fabricated the revelatory tale to "cheer" Andy up. "With Tommy's testimony," Andy knows that he could get a new trial, but the Warden isn't convinced. [The warden doesn't want to believe Tommy's story, probably because if he did, the result would be that he would lose his invaluable money launderer-accountant.]

Exasperated and awe-struck, Andy calls the stonewalling Warden "obtuse" but also assures the corrupt prison head: "Sir, if I were ever to get out, I would never mention what goes on in here. I'd be just as indictable as you for laundering that money." For his insolence and fearing that Andy will be paroled if his conviction is dismissed, the warden places Andy in solitary for a month - the

"longest damn stretch" most of the cons had ever known - especially for an innocent convict "going on nineteen years."

Williams passes his Board of Education test with a "C+ average" - a brief glimmer of a smile crosses Andy's face as he is told the news while huddling in solitary. When Williams is summoned to speak to the warden in an outside, gated area, Norton offers him a cigarette and then begins: "We've got a situation here. I think you can appreciate that...I have to know if what you told Dufresne was the truth...Would you be willing to swear before a judge and jury, having placed your hand on the Good Book and taken an oath before Almighty God Himself?" Norton crushes his cigarette with his heel after Tommy vows that everything he said was true, and then betrays him like Judas did Jesus. He casually signals a sniper from a rooftop to blast four bullets into Tommy's chest - an overhead shot of the young convict's murdered body lying face-down fades to the interior of Andy's solitary cell where he is told, under a blinding light, that Williams died trying to escape.

After the Warden has set up Tommy to be murdered, Andy refuses to run any more of the warden's corrupt scams: "I'm done. Everything stops. Get someone else to run your scams." With rage in his eyes, Norton refuses to be intimidated and beats the insolence of Andy down further with another month in solitary:

Nothing stops! Nothing! Or you will do the hardest time there is. No more protection from the guards. I'll pull you out of that one-bunk Hilton and cast you down with the sodomites. You'll think you got f--ked by a train. And the library? Gone! Sealed off brick by brick! We'll have us a little book-barbecue in the yard. They'll see the flames for miles. We'll dance around it like wild Injuns. Do you understand me? Are you catching my drift? Or am I being obtuse?

As the door slams shut, darkness surrounds him.

After being banished for two months, Andy contritely and despairingly 'confesses' his sin and guilt - taking responsibility for driving his wife away into the arms of another lover, even though he is technically innocent of the murder and is serving a sentence in someone else's place. Red absolves him of the crime as the two lifer friends sit slumped against the yard wall:

Andy: My wife used to say I'm a hard man to know. Like a closed book. Complained about it all the time. She was beautiful. God, I loved her. I just didn't know how to show it, that's all. I killed her, Red. I didn't pull the trigger, but I drove her away and that's why she died - because of me, the way I am.

Red: That don't make you a murderer. Bad husband, maybe. Feel bad about it if you want to, but you didn't pull the trigger.

Andy: No, I didn't. Somebody else did and I wound up in here. Bad luck, I guess.

In the wrong place at the wrong time - "in the path of the tornado" in his own transcendental words, Andy is inspired by a dream of going to the town of Zihuatanejo in Mexico after getting out of prison ("the storm") and opening up a Pacific Ocean coastal beach hotel with a charter fishing boat. It would be a forgiving, guiltless place with "no memory" of the past, with the ocean water washing away all previous 'sins':

It's a little place on the Pacific Ocean. You know what the Mexicans say about the Pacific? They say it has no memory. That's where I want to live the rest of my life. A warm place with no memory. Open up a little hotel right on the beach. Buy some worthless old boat and fix it up new. Take my guests out charter fishing...You know, in a place like that, I could use a man that knows how to get things.

Red, however, has no faith in his ability to "make it on the outside" since he's become an "institutional man" like Brooks. Besides, everyone has the Yellow Pages and he's scared to death of the expansive Pacific Ocean - so unlike the rigid routine of prison life. Red scolds Andy for building up his hopes too much, but Andy yearns for freedom and is determined to fulfill his impossible dreams through his hopes:

Red: I don't think you ought to be doing this to yourself, Andy. This is just s--tty pipedreams. I mean, Mexico is way the hell down there and you're in here, and that's the way it is.

Andy: Yeah, right. That's the way it is. It's down there and I'm in here. I guess it comes down to a simple choice, really. Get busy livin' or get busy dyin'.

[Isn't it ironic that Andy's dream of freedom is ultimately found by escape through a movie poster, and then rebirth through a s--tty drain-pipe!?] Andy offers his friend one more thing to remember to do when he is eventually released - something buried in a hayfield in Buxton [is it his gun? - or something else?]:

There's a big hayfield up near Buxton...One in particular. It's got a long rock wall, a big oak tree at the north end. It's like something out of a Robert Frost poem. It's where I asked my wife to marry me. We went there for a picnic and made love under that oak and I asked and she said yes. Promise me, Red. If you ever get out, find that spot. In the base of that wall, you'll find a rock that has no earthly business in a Maine hayfield. A piece of black, volcanic glass. There's something buried under it I want you to have.

[Again, many plot points seem insignificant here, but they will soon take on heightened meaning.] Fearing that his friend is "talkin' funny," is suicidal and at the "breaking point," Red is even more distressed by his pal's psychological condition when he learns that Andy asked Heywood for a six foot length of rope. Late that evening in the warden's office, he finishes his work with the black ledger and files that document the illegal funneling of payoff funds, places them in the wall safe behind the needle-point sampler, and carries out his expected routine duties for the Warden. He takes Norton's clothes to the laundry and shines his black shoes. As Andy shuffles back to his cell and the lights are extinguished (although lights flash from an approaching lightning storm), Red is terribly worried and wonders whether his friend will survive the long night without killing himself.

During the morning's headcount, Andy doesn't emerge from his cell, and the chief bull guard Haig (Dion Anderson) is glaringly angry - thinking that Andy may have committed suicide: "You'd better be sick or dead in there, I s--t you not. Do you hear me?" The scene cuts away as he exclaims: "Oh, my Holy God" at the entrance to the cell. At the same time, the warden opens up his shoe box to pull out his shiny black shoes - and instead finds Andy's worn work boots. Sirens sound. The warden can't believe Haig's words: "He just wasn't here." Astounded and enraged by the inmate's disappearance, Norton mocks what a religious evangelist might say about a disappearing phantom:

Lord! It's a miracle! Man up and vanished like a fart in the wind. Nothin' left but some damn rocks on the window sill and that cupcake on the wall. (He gestures toward the poster of Raquel Welch hanging on the cell wall.) Let's ask her. Maybe she knows. What say there, fuzzy-britches. Feel like talkin'? Oh, guess not. Why should she be any different? (He holds up some of Andy's carved rock/chess pieces and hurls them indiscriminately at everyone.) This is a conspiracy. That's what this is. It's one big damn conspiracy. And everyone's in on it. Including her!
[Ironically, Norton is right - 'she' is in on it by hiding his escape route.]

The chess piece reveals Andy's miracle - the rock punctures a small hole in the poster - disappearing into the supposedly solid wall where Andy escaped. The warden pushes his finger - and then his whole hand and arm into the torn side of the Raquel poster. He rips off the poster.

From the perspective of inside the chiseled tunnel, the camera pulls back to reveal the passageway through which Andy escaped.

In 1966, Andy Dufresne escaped from Shawshank Prison," nineteen years after being incarcerated.

All they found of him was a muddy set of prison clothes, a bar of soap, and an old rock-hammer damn near worn down to the nub. I remember thinking it would take a man six hundred years to tunnel through a wall with it. Old Andy did it in less than twenty.

At this juncture, the film provides a flashback to reveal how Andy accomplished the amazing feat. When he first carved his name into the concrete wall in 1949, a chunk of the concrete fell to his feet - and stimulated him to patiently and meticulously carve a way out, and deposit the bits of rock debris in the prison's exercise yard:

Geology is the study of pressure and time. That's all it takes, really. Pressure and time. That and the big god-damn poster. Like I said, in prison, a man'll do most anything to keep his mind occupied. It turns out Andy's favorite hobby was totin' his wall out into the exercise yard a handful at a time.

That last night in 1966 in the warden's office, while Norton was dialing the combination to open the wall safe, Andy concealed the real black ledger and files in the back of his pants and stuck replicas into the safe. He wore Norton's black, shiny shoes back to his cell, and his prison clothes covered over Norton's shirt and tie underneath.

As part of his well-executed plan, he placed the incriminating accountant records and his completed chess pieces (and the warden's clothes) into a large, sealed plastic bag, tied the bag to his ankle with the six foot rope, and squeezed into the tight tunnel shaft. When he emerged through the wall, he timed lightning bolts flashing with deafening thunder [on a night reminiscent of the life-giving lightning strikes in the classic horror film [Frankenstein \(1931\)](#)], to break holes in a sewer conduit, and then inched his way head-first through the raw sewage passage:

Andy crawled to freedom through five hundred yards of s--t-smelling foulness I can't even imagine. Or maybe I just don't want to. Five hundred yards. That's the length of five football fields, just shy of half a mile.

He is reborn as he emerges from the dark excremental tube (at the beginning of his journey was the primitive 'mother figure' Raquel Welch) and lands, like feces in a toilet, in the waist-deep creek filled with cleansing water. [His emergence out of the prison, from its rectum - literally, is the last reminder of his nightmarish anal rapes.]

In the film's most familiar image, Andy strips off his prison shirt and T-shirt in the middle of the creek and extends his arms up from his half-naked body to the sky - victorious and liberated, in a Christ-like crucifix pose. The camera pulls back from overhead as the showery rain washes down on him in droplets. [The image combines both rebirth and baptismal references.]

The next morning while his escape is being discovered, the camera follows an anonymous man's shiny black shoes as he enters the Maine National Bank in Portland: "Until that moment, he didn't exist - except on paper." He had "all the proper ID" - identified as the 'phantom' Randall Stephens - when he withdrew and closed all his accounts and accepted a cashier's check, purportedly to live abroad. A final request is made to add a package to the bank's outgoing mail.

Mr. Stephens visited nearly a dozen banks in the Portland area that morning. All told, he blew town with better than 370 thousand dollars of Warden Norton's money. Severance pay for nineteen years.

The package is delivered to the offices of the *Portland Daily Bugle*. The day's newspaper - which figuratively and literally blows the bugle of vengeful judgment on the warden - is tossed down on Norton's desk as he reads it - with the scandalous headlines:

Corruption, Murder at Shawshank - D.A. Has Ledger - Indictments Expected.

Police sirens sound in the distance as they approach the prison. Norton glances at the needle-point - now read as prophetic: "His Judgement Cometh and That Right Soon...", and opens the safe, finding Andy's black-covered Bible instead of the black ledger with evidence of evil-doing. The inside cover is inscribed with Andy's handwriting:

*Dear Warden,
You were right.
Salvation lay within.
Andy Dufresne*

The leather-bound Bible is, coincidentally, opened to the first page of the Book of Exodus. From there, the pages are hollowed out in the shape of a rock-hammer to conceal his wall-chipping tool. Andy's 'Exodus' was hastened and abetted by the Warden's gift of a Bible. Outside the prison, the D.A. arrests a dumb-founded Captain Hadley who "started sobbing like a little girl when they took him away."

Looking down on the scene, the Warden opens his desk drawer where a handgun sits, loads it with bullets, places it under his chin, and blasts a hole through his head - off camera. The glass window behind his desk shatters into pieces that are speckled with blood, and the gun falls to the floor. Red provides an afterthought about the suicide:

I like to think the last thing that went through his head - other than that bullet - was to wonder how the hell Andy Dufresne ever got the best of him.

During mail call a few days later, Red receives a blank postcard picturing a Texas round-up cowpoke on the back of a giant jackrabbit with the exaggerated caption: "Cattle Punching on a Jack Rabbit" - it's postmarked from Fort Hancock, Texas: "Right on the border. That's where Andy crossed," to fulfill his Mexico dream of freedom. Redeemed, Andy is at the wheel of a red 1969 Pontiac convertible (although it's 1966) on a winding road next to the coast. His legend becomes larger than life for the inmates left behind, who recollect his escapades, while Red is saddened by his friend's escape:

Andy Dufresne, who crawled through a river of s--t and came out clean on the other side. Andy Dufresne, headed for the Pacific. Those of us who knew him best talk about him often. I swear the stuff he pulled. Sometimes it makes me sad, though, Andy being gone. I have to remind myself that some birds aren't meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright and when they fly away, the part of you that knows it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice, but still, the place you live in is that much more drab and empty that they're gone. I guess I just miss my friend.

For the third time in the film, Red attends another parole hearing after serving forty years of his life sentence. Times have changed now that it is 1967 - there are four men and one woman on the board. Wiser and more open about his rehabilitation, he answers them straightforwardly with regret for a crime he committed in a past era. He admits and accepts his atoning guilt, confesses his own unworthiness - and is ultimately saved from Shawshank:

Rehabilitated? Well now, let me see. You know, I don't have any idea what that means...I know what you think it means. To me, it's just a made-up word, a politician's word so that young fellas like yourself can wear a suit and a tie and have a job. What do you really want to know? Am I sorry for what I did?...There's not a day goes by I don't feel regret. And not because I'm in here or because you think I should. I look back on the way I was then. A young, stupid kid who committed that terrible crime. I want to talk to him. I want to try and talk some sense to him. Tell him the way things are. But I can't. That kid's long gone. This old man is all that's left. I gotta live with that. 'Rehabilitated?' That's just a bulls--t word. So you go on and stamp your forms, sonny, and stop wasting my time. Because to tell you the truth, I don't give a s--t.

Red is approved for parole when an automatic stamp marks his papers APPROVED in red ink. Like Brooks (and Andy) before him, the old inmate is released and walks out of the prison gates, rides the bus to Portland, and is led to the same room in the hotel where Brooks had committed suicide. He notices the epitaph scrawled high up on the wall near the ceiling. It is a difficult adjustment to have a job bagging groceries in the Foodway with the freedom to "take a piss" whenever he needs to: "Forty years, I've been asking permission to piss. I can't squeeze a drop without say-so. There's a harsh truth to face. No way I'm gonna make it on the outside." Will he follow in Brooks' fatal footsteps?

He pauses at the window of a pawn shop and notices two different, symbolically-contrasting objects - the camera pans across a row of handguns (echoing what Brooks ultimately chose) and ends the shot focusing on a compass:

All I do anymore is think of ways to break my parole so maybe they'd send me back. Terrible thing to live in fear. Brooks Hatlen knew it. Knew it all too well. All I want is to be back where things make sense. Where I won't have to be afraid all the time. Only one thing stops me. A promise I made to Andy.

Having decided to purchase the compass, Red hitches a ride in the open bed of a red pickup truck [contrasted with Andy's own ride to 'freedom' in an open red convertible] to the country town of Buxton. He walks into a hayfield, navigates with compass in hand to a long rock wall and the big oak tree, and locates a large piece of gleaming black volcanic glass. Under a rock pile is a tin lunch box with an oceanliner on its front - a foreshadowing of the film's final scene. Paranoid, he looks around, sits up against the rock wall, and opens the box. Inside is a plastic bag with money in an envelope (a thousand dollars) and a letter directing him to "come a little further" - to share freedom at Zihuatanejo:

*Dear Red,
If you're reading this, you've gotten out. And if you've come this far, maybe you're willing to come a little further. You remember the name of the town, don't you? I could use a good man to help me get my project on wheels. I'll keep an eye out for you and the chessboard ready. Remember, Red. Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things and no good thing ever dies. I will be hoping that this letter finds you, and finds you well.
Your friend,
Andy*

With his coat slung over his shoulder, Red walks back through the field - grasshoppers spring into the air all around, symbolic of the new-found liberation he is soon to experience. Before leaving the hotel to join Andy, Red carves his name with a penknife next to Brooks' signature: "Brooks Was Here" - "So was Red." He has internalized Andy's words:

Get busy livin', or get busy dyin'. That's god-damn right. For the second time in my life, I am guilty of committing a crime. Parole violation. Of course, I doubt they'll toss up any roadblocks for that. Not for an old crook like me.

He purchases a Trailways bus ticket for Fort Hancock, Texas (the location where Andy crossed into Mexico) and expectantly looks out the window toward the sun at the start of his Thru-liner journey through the golden New England countryside toward Texas:

I find I am so excited I can barely sit still or hold a thought in my head. I think it's the excitement only a free man can feel, a free man at the start of a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain. I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope.

The camera skims across the blue Pacific [a scene filmed in the US Virgin Islands], and then dissolves to a wide shot of a bright, warm, sunlit beach, where Red walks bare-footed on the sand toward an old wreck of a boat. With simple hand tools (a hammer rests on the boat!), Andy is patiently and meticulously sanding the old paint from the boat's ancient surface. He slowly turns and sees his friend approaching - and jumps off to greet him. The camera pulls back, revealing the wide, distant horizon of the blue Pacific with no end in sight. No longer are the prison-mates to be confined by walls, iron bars, supervisory guards, and limits on their lives. Both are redeemed, reconnected and re-united, with the precious possession of freedom.